



**RE-HOUSING THE URBAN POOR IN  
IRISH COUNTRY TOWNS, 1880-1947:  
A CASE STUDY OF SLIGO**

**by**

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## Abbreviations

CMO	County medical officer
CPO	Compulsory purchase order
DLGPH	Department of Local Government and Public Health
DLG	Department of Local Government (from 1947)
HC	House of Commons
IAA	Irish Architectural Archives
IPP	Irish Parliamentary Party
IHTA	Irish Historic Town Atlas
LGB	Local Government Board
MP	Member of Parliament
MU	Maynooth University, NUI.
NLI	National Library of Ireland
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
SLHC	Sligo County Library local history collection
TNA	The National Archives (United Kingdom)
TD	Teachta Dála – member of Irish parliament
UCD	University College Dublin

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## INTRODUCTION

The housing of the people of Ireland has been a subject of comment for over two centuries. The focus of much of this comment has been on the wretched quality of accommodation occupied by the poor and the low-waged labouring class. Their plight, in conjunction with the fear of social upheaval, had by the last decade of the nineteenth century spurred politicians at national and local level to legislate for interventionist housing policies, albeit at a modest scale. Agitation for better housing began in the wake of the great famine, and gained in pace after 1880. The aspirations for housing the working class however, were not to be advanced until the major public housing schemes under a native Irish government began in the 1930s. Consequently, Ireland's housing history is somewhat different, and developed in tandem with the peculiar characteristics of Irish politics and society from the 1840s to the 1930s.

There are two distinct strands in Irish housing studies, the rural and the urban. Unusually in a European context, the former initially took precedence over the latter.<sup>1</sup> In the late nineteenth century, due to the agitation of the Irish Home Rule party who held a substantial number of seats in Westminster, the United Kingdom government was compelled to advance the process of the breaking-up of large landed estates with a series of land acts.<sup>2</sup> This created a class of rural tenant-proprietors; subsequent political agitation resulted in the construction of a large number of cottages for them, financed from the British Treasury.<sup>3</sup> The separate question of urban or municipal housing developed later, in the 1880s, in the wake of innumerable reports, commissions and philanthropic activism, which had their origins in the 1850s. Reform of the municipal corporations in the 1840s led local government to take some tentative steps around housing, mainly as a reaction to health and sanitary crises. However, a cohesive state-financed housing policy was not to emerge until about 1908 and the passing of the Irish Housing Act.<sup>4</sup>

After the hiatus of the Great War, the trauma of independence and the subsequent civil war, the scandal of poor housing came to the fore in the 1930s. Public campaigning for

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<sup>1</sup> F.H.A. Aalen, 'Public housing in Ireland, 1880-1922' in *Planning Perspectives*, ii, no. 2 (1987), p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Terence Dooley, *'The land for the people': The land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Murray Fraser, *John Bull's other homes: state housing and British policy in Ireland 1883-1922* (Liverpool, 1996), p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

an end to the intractable problem of slum housing, mostly focused on Dublin's appalling problems, led to a change in the political will and substantial funding for major state-founded housing projects.<sup>5</sup> As a measure of the success of this housing policy, by 1940 over 40 per cent of the housing stock in the Republic had been constructed by the state, the major part of this in urban areas.<sup>6</sup> These extensive housing estates, still characteristic of so many Irish country towns, were to greatly improve the lives of generations of Irish citizens, and be a visible sign of the progressive social policies of the infant Irish state.

However, the aspiration to adequate housing for the urban poor and working classes was not just a feature of Irish or British social progress. On the continent, recognition of the need to provide housing for the poorer classes increased as the population of Europe rapidly urbanised during the nineteenth century. Problems associated with dense concentrations of people in low-quality city housing became more evident as the century wore on. These difficulties manifested themselves in widespread disease, high mortality rates, impaired economic efficiency and, in many places, social unrest, or the fear thereof.<sup>7</sup> How these evils were to be solved led to many different opinions and approaches, with a variety of outcomes. Most governments were fundamentally supporters of the private market and the political philosophy of *laissez faire*, prepared to intervene with public help only in extreme circumstances, and therefore the response to the shocking conditions in urban areas was only partial and sporadic. This approach began to change in the 1880s, when experimentation in urban planning and housing paved the way for the more comprehensive schemes of the interwar period.<sup>8</sup> Housing and planning became intimately connected, particularly in Britain, as it became obvious that private enterprise alone would not alleviate the problem of unimaginably severe housing failure.<sup>9</sup>

### **Sligo as a case study**

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<sup>5</sup> Mary E. Daly, *The buffer state; the historical roots of the Department of the Environment* (Dublin, 1997), p. 214.

<sup>6</sup> Padraic Kenna, *Housing law, rights and policy* (Dublin, 2011), p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Edith Gaudie, *Cruel habitations: A history of working-class housing 1780-1918* (London, 1974), p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> Colin G. Pooley, 'Housing strategies in Europe, 1880-1930, towards a comparative prospective' in Colin G. Pooley (ed.), *Housing strategies in Europe 1880-1930* (Leicester, 1992), p. 328.

<sup>9</sup> Cathal O'Connell, *The state and housing in Ireland; Ideology, policy and practice* (New York, 2007), p. 11.

Slum conditions were a notable feature of all Ireland's cities and towns from the 1850s onwards, with however significant distinctions between the major cities and the smaller country towns. In larger cities such as Dublin, Cork and Limerick, the flight of wealthier city-dwellers to newly-built suburbs led to the decay of the urban fabric in the city centres.<sup>10</sup> However, in the smaller towns, less variance in wealth led to a different housing pattern: the town centre, with its merchants' shops and businesses, prospered, while in contrast just a street or two away, and in the back courts and alleyways, the huddled houses and cabins of the poor proliferated and endured until well into the mid-twentieth century. Inaction and indifference in the face of such visible poverty is to be found across all Irish towns, despite the best efforts of philanthropists, officials and charitable persons.

The larger cities – Belfast,<sup>11</sup> Dublin,<sup>12</sup> Cork,<sup>13</sup> and Limerick<sup>14</sup> – have all been the subject of important housing and slum studies. The mid-ranking or second tier of Irish towns, as identified in chapter three of this thesis, has not yet received anything like the same scholarly attention. Their invisibility in research to date is one good reason for the proposed focus of this research. However, it is argued in this thesis that the issue of slum housing and the process of housing reform is in fact far more important to the smaller country towns than it is to any of the larger cities. In the second half of the

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Daly 'A tale of two cities', in Art Cosgrove (ed.) *Dublin through the ages* (Dublin, 1988) p. 118; F.H.A. Aalen, 'Health and housing in Dublin, c.1850-1921' in F.H.A. Aalen, and Kevin Whelan, (eds.), *Dublin city and county: from prehistory to present* (Dublin, 1992), pp 279-304; F.H.A. Aalen, 'The working-class housing movement in Dublin, 1850-1920' in M. J. Bannon (ed.), *The emergence of Irish planning 1880-1920* (Dublin, 1985), pp 131-188; Ruth McManus, 'Suburban and urban housing in the twentieth century' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. 111C (Dublin, 2011) pp 253-286.

<sup>11</sup> Raymond Gillespie and Stephen A. Royle, *Belfast, part I, to 1840*, IHTA, No. 12 (Dublin, 2003); Stephen Royle, *Belfast part II, 1840 to 1900*, IHTA No. 17, (Dublin, 2007); Stephen C. Moore, 'The development of working class housing in Ireland, 1840-1912: a study of housing conditions, built form and policy' (D.Phil. thesis, University of Ulster, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin slums, 1800-1925, a study in urban geography* (Dublin, 1998); Mary E. Daly, 'Housing conditions and the genesis of housing reform in Dublin 1880-1920' in M. J. Bannon (ed.), *The emergence of Irish planning 1880-1920* (Dublin, 1985), pp 77-130; Mary E. Daly, *Dublin the deposed capital: a social and economic history 1860-1914* (Cork, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> Kevin Hourihan, 'The evolution and influence of town planning in Cork' in P. O'Flanagan and C. G. Buttimer (eds.), *Cork history and society* (Dublin, 1993), pp 941-61; John O'Brien, 'Population, politics and society in Cork, 1780-1900' in P. O'Flanagan and C. G. Buttimer (eds), *Cork history and society* (Dublin, 1993), pp 699-720; Michael A. Dwyer, 'Housing conditions of the working classes in Cork city in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century' in Margaret Lantry (ed.), *Journal of Cork Historical and Archaeological society* (Cork, 2012), pp 91-99; Maura Murphy, 'The economic and social structure of nineteenth century Cork', in David Harkness and Mary O'Dowd (eds.), *The Irish town* (Dublin, 1981), pp 26-51.

<sup>14</sup> John Logan, 'Frugal comfort: housing Limerick's labourers and artisans, 1841-1946' in Liam Irwin and G. Ó Tuathaigh (eds.), *Limerick history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county*, (Dublin, 2009), pp 557-82; Ruth Guiry, 'Public health and housing in Limerick city 1850-1935: a geographical analysis.' (M.A Historical Geography, University of Limerick, 2013).

nineteenth century, the dreadfulness of small-town, lower-class housing was the match of anything that could be found in the large cities. The proportion of residents suffering such accommodation was often higher, and few of these smaller slums, no matter how bad, were publicised by philanthropic campaigners or newspaper editors. Housing reform in these smaller country towns runs several decades behind the movements in the larger cities, and is closely allied to the reform of local government and above all to the powers conferred on local authorities by legislation passed between 1850 and 1900. Hence, the thesis will fill a gap in the current historiography. This study will attempt to illustrate the massive sociological and physical change brought about by the ambitious programme of re-housing, which although it had its roots in the mid-nineteenth century, did not come to full fruition until the 1940s.

Sligo is a small country town, without special patronage, in the mid-ranking or second tier of Irish towns, which had populations of between 10,000 and 25,000, and were relatively consistent over the period between 1850 and 1950. Sligo's population places it about midway within this tier, and it had a modest industrial basis that was typical of that class of town. It also suffered from an intractable and very visible slum problem from the mid nineteenth century, (if not earlier), and its problems persisted well into the middle of the twentieth century. Between 1922 and 1947 almost 1,000 publicly funded houses were constructed in Sligo. In the short period between 1932 and 1947, in the region of 5,000 people were re-housed within the Borough. Within half a generation, a substantial percentage of Sligo's urban population went from living in small, unsanitary rows of thatched cottages and cabins, to substantially larger, modern accommodation, with indoor toilets, running water and, in many cases, electricity. This utterly transformed the lives of many families, bringing major public health benefits, and resulted in enormous topographic and social change for the town. The broad study period chosen, 1880-1947, spans the first interventionist housing policies of the British government, the birth of the Irish state, and the large public housing schemes of the 1930s and 1940s, which continued on despite the difficulties of 'The Emergency', as World War II was known in Ireland. The bookend of the period, 1947, marked the end of this frenetic phase of public house building, along with the political and economic transitions of the post-war period.

### **Thesis aims and structure**

This thesis seeks to examine the dwelling conditions of the urban poor and working classes in the smaller Irish country towns, and the decades-long struggle to re-house them, in the period between 1880-1947. At the thesis core will be a case study of Sligo town, which has been chosen due to its particular size and high percentage of public housing.

This case study will be set in the national context of slum clearances, and housing reform, with the emphasis on the period from 1880 onwards. It is also proposed to scrutinise issues such as health, and the role of the local authorities, particularly in relation to health and sanitary conditions. The question of infant death rates and death rates in general, and the effect that poor housing conditions had on all these issues will be assessed. The thesis will inspect the development and layout of the new housing schemes, and the pivotal role played by Sligo corporation in progressing the housing programme. It will assess the method for assigning new houses to families, and the problems associated with this mass movement of people. In conclusion, the thesis will evaluate how Sligo fared in comparison with other towns of similar size and status, and the measurable impact that this new departure in housing strategy had on lifestyle, health, education and social improvement in the borough of Sligo.

What are the problems that arise when writing a thesis of this nature? On the surface, the narrative of the state re-housing of a large section of the population is one of continuous progress and improvement, and this is indeed the view of many authors on the subject. But this narrative can be overly optimistic. There were many negative aspects to re-housing the poorer classes, not the least of which was the breakup of long-established communities, the monotony of new estates, and the significant failure of many tenants of the 1930s and 1940s to regularly pay their subsidised rents. It must be asked if it is necessarily a good thing to improve housing? What the reasons behind it? Are they altruistic or just simply sporadic attempts to keep a large segment of the voting public happy? What were the feelings of the poor towards their own situation? While much of the focus of re-housing appears to concentrate on the 'slum' nature of existing housing stock, many houses that were demolished in the 1930s were clean, neat, and relatively spacious in the nature of contemporary vernacular housing. There was much opposition by the residents in many towns to the clearance of older houses, but this does not seem to have been the case in Sligo. Moreover, the compulsory nature of the schemes of the 1930s and 1940s must be pointed out. Once a clearance area was

declared, what followed was in effect, the forced eviction and re-housing of thousands of citizen in the ostensible interest of public health. Slum housing was often seen as ‘stain’ on the moral character of the new Free State, and the erection of new housing was deemed as ‘essential for the moral and physical-well being of the people’.<sup>15</sup> But it is important to view the housing programme as contemporaries saw it; few regretted the clearance of the old dilapidated houses that much of the population lived in, and the housing schemes of the period should not be seen as an attempt by the state to control or corral its citizens.

From another perspective, this study of Sligo can be seen as a study of a certain people over a certain period of time; in other words the origin, growth, decline and development of a local community.<sup>16</sup> Categorising the ‘labouring poor’ into a discrete group is one way of conducting this study, but ignores the lot of the substantial body of fellow townspeople who were rather better off. While the story of rehousing the poor in Sligo is central to this thesis, it is acknowledged that there is another narrative; one which encompasses those who were of a more mercantile class, financially more secure, and who invested in private housing from the 1850s onwards, when a post-famine ‘shop-scape’ became to replace the small eighteenth century dwellings. This class did prosper, and frequently became middle-men lessors and speculators in private housing.

It would be easy to chart the story of re-housing the working class in Sligo – and in other provincial towns – as a story of unbroken progress, and assume that every improvement was for the better. In reality the narrative of the great housing schemes, and local authority housing in general, is much more nuanced than just a ‘bricks, mortar and money’ tale. Throwing money at the housing problem was not always the answer to the questions of poverty and irregular work. The building of new houses from 1932, did not, for example, have a measurable effect on the rates of overcrowding, the high infant mortality rate, or on the rates of infectious diseases until after 1950, as is discussed in the thesis. The new housing made no difference to nutritional health, a vital indicator of poverty, as rationing during World War II meant that an already meagre diet simply became worse.<sup>17</sup> The clearing of the slums was regularly presented in a moral framework; many commentators believed that the provision of modern housing would

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<sup>15</sup> J.E. Canavan, ‘Slum clearance in Dublin’, in *Journal of Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, Vol. xvi, no. 1, 1937/38, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> As discussed in Raymond Gillespie and Myrtle Hill, (eds), *Doing local history; pursuit and practice* (Belfast, 1998), p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Moira J. Maguire, *Precarious childhood in post-independence Ireland* (Manchester, 2009), pp 27-29.

make better citizens of the new Irish State, and that the slums were a relic of British colonial exploitation.

The dominative narrative of the public housing schemes of the 1930s, especially in Sligo, hides to a degree the extent of private house building that was occurring contemporarily with government financed schemes. Indeed, as will be seen, private housing, assisted in many cases by government grants, was frequently better funded than public schemes. A more detailed reading of the sources also shows that many owners of condemned properties were in effect owners of several small houses in the immediate vicinities, from which they drew a small rent.

This thesis is presented in two parts: Section A, chapters one to three will examine the European and British context to the urban housing crises from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, in the form of a literature review of key publications in English of this extensive field. The Irish socio-economic context and developments in legislation from 1838 onwards will also be examined. The thesis aims to firmly anchor the re-housing of Sligo's working classes in the context of the great national debate on housing conditions, which became ever more strident after 1922. Section B of the thesis will focus on the case study of Sligo, the core of the thesis. A survey of the demographics and housing conditions in Sligo town will set the background for the clearing of the slums and the emergence of the new housing schemes of the 1930s and 1940s. Sligo's experience in comparison to other towns of a similar status will be analysed, and key findings assessed.

The problem of urban slum housing in the early twentieth century, though pressing in the Irish context, was not a uniquely Irish problem, but an international one.<sup>18</sup> Chapter one will examine the existing literature on housing in the European and British context, illustrating the emergence of a housing crisis amongst the labouring classes in the wake of industrialization and enormous social and political change in Europe throughout much of the 1800s. In Britain, the unprecedented and explosive growth of cities in the first forty years of the nineteenth century quickly overtook existing social structures for urban living.<sup>19</sup> The cumulative pressure of increasing population caused a 'material breakdown' of urban society, which was reflected in the abject state of public health,

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<sup>18</sup> Pooley (ed.), *Housing strategies in Europe*, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Rodgers, *Housing in urban Britain, 1780-1914* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 1.

the contamination of water supplies, and the subsequent upsurge of deadly diseases.<sup>20</sup> The social transformation of British cities in the wake of industrialisation alarmed the middle and upper classes, and engendered numerous reports aimed at tackling the inter-related interests of sanitation, housing and employment.<sup>21</sup> Within the British Isles the housing debate was closely tied into the development of local government, the pursuit of Irish Home Rule and the extension of voting rights to a larger portion of the population. Post 1922, housing became a major social concern of the new Irish Free State government; however the fiscal rectitude and financial austerity pursued by the new administration, along with its socio-political commitment to mass land purchase,<sup>22</sup> was to cause the postponement of home provision for over a decade.<sup>23</sup> Section A closes with chapter three, setting out the rationale behind the eight provincial towns selected for comparative study, and setting Sligo in context in the Irish urban hierarchy.

Chapter four is an attempt to reconstruct the narrative of the poor and labouring class in Sligo from about 1730 to 1880, the theoretical start date of the core of this thesis. The rationale behind this chapter is to attempt to demonstrate that the roots of Sligo's poor urban housing originate from a series of historic circumstances which may or may not be applicable to other Irish provincial towns as well. The chapter examines the growth of Sligo's urban population from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, along with the economic factors which resulted in a sizable percentage of that population being low-skilled and poor. A demographic profile of the town at this pivotal period is gleaned from the Elphin census of 1749. The remainder of the chapter sets out the many of the origins and expressions of urban poverty, which played a significant part in the proliferation of the 'straggling lines of cabins' which were so commented on by contemporary travellers. It demonstrates why Sligo is a particularly good candidate for an urban study of poor housing in Irish provincial towns.

The geographical situation and extent of poor housing in the borough of Sligo between 1880 and 1932 is examined in chapter five, inspecting issues such as classification of housing, health, death rates, and overcrowding. It will utilise various reports outlining the nature of this housing, and examine the reasons behind its persistence. How did gradual change affect the housing conditions of the poor in Sligo? Where in the town

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<sup>20</sup> A. S. Wohl, *Endangered lives: public health in Victorian Britain* (London, 1983), p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Gaudie, *Cruel habitations*, p. 101

<sup>22</sup> Dooley, 'The land for the people' p. 58.

<sup>23</sup> O'Connell, *The state and housing in Ireland*, p. 11.



did they live? What exactly were the conditions of their homes? How many poor were there, and what percentage of the population did they form? This chapter will attempt to map the slum housing of Sligo borough, and place it in its geographical context.

Sligo had a persistent and entrenched slum problem by 1926, with almost a fifth of its population living in dwellings of just two rooms, accompanied by high levels of urban infant mortality, and frequent disease outbreaks in the slum areas. The sixth chapter gives an insight into how Sligo corporation went about the job of massive clearance and re-housing during the 1930s and 1940s. The political and financial backing for the extensive housing schemes are examined through the minutes of meetings of Sligo corporation and the newspaper reports of the day, along with the minutes and proceedings of the various committees set up to implement the process. The difficulties experienced by the corporation in dealing with compulsory purchases, clearance orders, rent collection and the problematic question of finance during the ‘Emergency’ are examined. Plans, layouts and construction difficulties are explored, as is the extent of petty corruption, and the tension between local authorities and the Department of Local Government. The annual reports on the state of public health in Sligo, compiled by the medical officer between 1936 and 1953, help portray the impact of this new public housing on public health. The contemporaneously important topics of a clean water supply, proper domestic sewage, refuse collection, and working-class housing are scrutinised.<sup>24</sup>

Chapter seven will examine how Sligo fared in contrast with the other provincial towns in the study. Insight into the progress and nature of the housing programme may be gleaned from the annual reports of the Department of Local Government and Public Health. This chapter will examine these reports, deriving statistics from them, and comparing the progress in Sligo with that of other provincial towns. The rapid decline in the number of one and two-roomed houses will be noted, as will the social implications of re-housing so many people in a short period of time. The conclusion to the case study presents a discussion of the key findings. These include the long-term benefits of modern housing, the improvements for individual residents, and the transformation of local society and Sligo’s urban morphology. The impetus provided by the supply of new and healthier housing in the 1930s and 1940s led to a profound

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<sup>24</sup> Dr Michael Kirby, county medical officer of health, ‘County Sligo, annual report on health and sanitary conditions, 1936’, (SLHC/ LGOV/800).

change in the way which the state and society viewed the provision of welfare services, with repercussions for the state for decades to come.

### **Historiography**

The re-housing of the poor is a topic that has generated numerous surveys, reports, commissions, case studies, and commentary from various people and bodies from the private, public, philanthropic and municipal spheres. While much official opinions and comment can be gleaned from the numerous reports and enquiries, it is only infrequently that we hear the voice of the poor themselves.<sup>25</sup> Some verbatim accounts exist in the royal commission reports, medical inspectors reports and, more rarely, in contemporary newspaper reports, but for the most part accounts are not subjective. Many of the pivotal studies on housing strategies will be referred to in this study, to set the background to the differing perspectives on the differing themes, experiences and consequences of housing and social reform.

The European stage is critically and comprehensively discussed in *Housing strategies in Europe, 1880-1930*, edited by Colin Pooley.<sup>26</sup> This collection of essays by various authors explores many common themes, such as urban migration, overcrowding, health and sanitation issues, and the unregulated nature of the private housing market. Case studies from a wide variety of European countries, including Scandinavia, Britain, the Mediterranean, and central Europe illustrate the different approaches to the evolution of social housing, and the development of a diversity of housing strategies. The leading role of Britain in the development of large-scale public housing is discussed, as is the ineffective short-term nature of much of the early interventionist housing strategies in all European countries. This work provides a solid historical background to the evolution of pre-war, post-war, and indeed modern public housing policies, and establishes the broad similarity of housing experiences across a wide spectrum of political and economic systems.

British housing history has been comprehensively examined since the 1970s, with Martin Daunton being its principal interpreter.<sup>27</sup> In comparison to the abundance of published research on housing history in Britain, Ireland has had relatively little

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<sup>25</sup> Prunty, *Dublin slums*, p. 336.

<sup>26</sup> Colin G. Pooley (ed.), *Housing strategies in Europe, 1880-1930* (Leicester, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> Martin J. Daunton, *House and home in the Victorian city: working class housing 1850-1914* (London, 1983).

research done on this aspect of urban and social history.<sup>28</sup> This discrepancy can be accredited partially to the greater number in Britain of larger industrial cities, and thus the greater visibility of slums and state housing. But it is also due to a greater academic interest into the development of the labouring class, the growth of cities, and the evolution of urban shape and form.

Academic interest in modern Irish urban morphology is a more recent development, as evidenced by the increase in the number papers and books on the subject of urbanism since the 1980s. Belfast urbanism has been extensively discussed, due to the rapid industrial development of the city after 1850, but other Irish cities have not received the same level of interdisciplinary attention.<sup>29</sup> The Irish Historic Towns Atlas programme series is the foremost, and longest-running research project in this Irish urban field, and each fascicle can be used as a springboard to further local and comparative research as well as a guide to source materials and publications.<sup>30</sup> The 2015 publication by Anngret Simms and Howard Clarke – both leading authorities in their respective fields, and long-time editors of the IHTA – *Lords and towns in Medieval Europe: the European historic towns atlas project*, shows how work on urban topography integrates the approaches of the historian, archaeologist and historical geographer. It offers an insight into the origins of urbanism in Europe generally, and the use of cadastral maps to plot the evolution of towns in particular. The methodological challenges of comparative urban history are discussed, as is the use of topographical analysis to evaluate individual elements of towns, in order to reconstruct a historic pattern or plan.

Numerous books and journal articles relating to aspects of urban poverty and housing in Ireland were examined during the research for this thesis. Cork, Limerick and Drogheda had academic examination of poor housing up to the late nineteenth century, (as had Dublin, which is outside the scope of this survey), but these were the exceptions.<sup>31</sup> For Sligo and the other provincial towns, the study had to rely largely on primary sources.

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<sup>28</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> Olwen Purdue (ed.), *Belfast: the emerging city, 1850-1914* (Sallins, 2013); Liam Kennedy and Phillip Ollerenshaw (eds), *An economic history of Ulster, 1820-1940* (Manchester, 1985); Sybil Gribbon, 'An Irish city: Belfast 1911', in David Harkness and Mary O'Dowd (eds.), *The town in Ireland* (Belfast, 1981); Gilbert Camblin, *The town in Ulster; an account of the origin and building of the towns of the province and the development of their rural setting* (Belfast, 1951); Brenda Collins, Phillip Ollerenshaw, Trevor Parkhill (eds.), *Industry, trade and people in Ireland 1650-1950* (Belfast, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> See the IHTA publications list on the Royal Irish Academy website for full details, <https://www.ria.ie/research-projects/irish-historic-towns-atlas> (accessed 12 January 2016).

<sup>31</sup> See, Ned McHugh, *Drogheda before the famine: urban poverty in the shadow of privilege, 1826-45* (Dublin, 1998); James Durney, *In the shadow of kings: social housing in Naas, 1898-1984* (Naas, 2007).

No attempt was made to conduct detailed primary research in the archives of the eight provincial towns selected for study; instead the printed records of the Department for Local Government, along with contemporary newspaper reports and articles were used to make general comparisons with Sligo, the case study.

An unpublished 1986 thesis by Stephen Moore examines Irish working class housing development.<sup>32</sup> Beginning prior to the Great Famine and ending on the eve of the Great War, it is written from a social science point of view, and provides an overview of legislation in relation to Irish social housing studies. Moore also analyses the framework in which housing development took place, starting with the commercial speculation, the early philanthropical and charitable works, and the gradual interventionist policies of municipal and central government. The study demonstrates that social policy and housing policy in this period progressed much further in Ireland than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Indeed, it uncovers Irish precedents for some British government housing policies, which were to transform working class conditions in England following the Great War. Moore's study deals with social and economic aspects of housing development and the different patterns of housing development in rural and urban areas. Slum clearance and renewal as an early municipal policy is discussed as is the important move from permissive to compulsory powers by the same authorities. Of interest in this thesis is the methodology for analysing patterns of change, and the social characteristics of housing the working class.

Murray Fraser's seminal work, *'John Bull's other homes': state housing and British policy in Ireland, 1883-1922* (Liverpool, 1996), is clearly the most significant work on Irish housing studies up to Independence. Concentrating on the socio-political efforts to re-house the working classes, from the fledgling artisan housing schemes of the 1880s, through to the election of the first native government in 1922, it is an integrated historical account of early state housing in Ireland, and draws on much original source material. In particular, the role of the Irish parliamentary party in the debate is examined, and the part it played in forcing the ground-breaking subsidy programme which provided almost 50,000 rural labourers cottages up to 1914. Fraser provides some useful statistics in relation to the low urbanisation of Ireland as compared to

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<sup>32</sup> Stephen C. Moore, 'The development of working class housing in Ireland, 1840-1912: a study of housing conditions, built form and policy' (D.Phil. thesis, University of Ulster, 1986).

Britain, but the focus is largely on Dublin and the major urban centres, and has little treatment of the development of housing in the country towns.

Frederick H. Aalen is a pioneer of Irish housing studies, whose publications include the story of the semi-philanthropical housing companies in nineteenth-century Dublin, and local authority housing before the Great War.<sup>33</sup> However, some criticism has been levelled at Aalen's work, notably by Fraser, who argues that he does not explore the historical reasoning behind the development of Irish state housing, and that his work is 'descriptive and fragmentary'.<sup>34</sup>

The provision of working- and lower-middle-class housing in late nineteenth-century urban Ireland is addressed by Frank Cullen in his paper for the Royal Irish Academy. It illustrates the fledgling nature of the Irish housing programme, when he concludes that most building activity occurred during the second half of that century, and that it 'embraced private, semi-philanthropic, industrial, and in the final decades of the century, municipal housing schemes'.<sup>35</sup> Cathal O'Connell's *The State and housing in Ireland; ideology, policy and practice* (New York, 2007), looks in particular at the Irish preference for private-ownership in the housing sector. Much of his work is on the period after 1948, and thus is outside the scope of this study; nonetheless, his conclusion might be taken to indicate that in the future, 'with the preferential treatment the state has conferred on private property ownership...[it leaves]...a legacy of deepening deprivation and segregation of those who occupy the dwindling stock of social housing'.<sup>36</sup>

Social historian Mary E. Daly is the author of numerous papers and books on the urban history of nineteenth and twentieth-century Ireland.<sup>37</sup> Her 1985 study of housing

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<sup>33</sup> Aalen, 'Public housing in Ireland, 1880-1921, pp 175-193; 'Health and housing in Dublin, c.1850-1921', in F.H.A Aalen and Kevin Whelan (eds.), *Dublin city and county: from prehistory to present* (Dublin, 1992), pp 279-304; 'The working-class housing movement in Dublin, 1850-1920' in M. J. Bannon (ed.), *The emergence of Irish planning, 1880-1920* (Dublin, 1985), pp 131-88.

<sup>34</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> Frank Cullen, *The provision of working- and lower-middle-class housing in late nineteenth-century urban Ireland* in Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, vol. iii C (2011), pp 217-251.

<sup>36</sup> O'Connell, *The state and housing in Ireland*, xix.

<sup>37</sup> Mary E. Daly, *A social and economic history of Ireland, since 1880* (Dublin, 1981); 'Social structure of the Dublin working class 1871-1911' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 23, no. 90 (1982), pp 121-133; 'Housing conditions and the genesis of housing reform in Dublin 1880-1920' in M. J. Bannon (ed.) *The emergence of Irish planning, 1880-1920* (Dublin, 1985), pp 77-130; 'Irish urban history: a survey', in *Urban History Yearbook* (Leicester, 1986); *The buffer state; the historical roots of the Department of the Environment* (Dublin, 1997); Editor, *County and town, one hundred years of local government in Ireland*, (Dublin, 2001).

conditions in Dublin gives a succinct overview of the state of the poor in the capital up to the time of independence. Her major treatise on the political and social development of local government in the Free State, as laid out in *The buffer state: a history of the Department of the Environment*, based on the archival records between 1921 and 1980s, gives us an insight into the difficulties faced by local authorities in the face of much opposition from the Dublin-centric government departments, with their fear of corruption at local political level. This work provides the backdrop to much of the political manoeuvring that occurred during the fledgling years of the Irish Free State, and the emerging relationship between local government and the centralised government, which continued in many ways the policies of the Westminster government in pre-independence Ireland.

The award-winning study in urban geography, concentrating on Dublin's slums from 1800-1925 by Jacinta Prunty,<sup>38</sup> is a major reference and guiding work, although its focus is on a different type of slum peculiar to Dublin, the subdivided or family house, the tenement building. There is a particular emphasis in the study on the national background to the housing crises and the role of national slum surveys, and local housing committees in agitating for reform. Prunty's work provides an excellent guide to several different methodologies in mapping the progression and types of slums, and highlighting different characteristics which contributed to their proliferation.

The works of Joseph Brady and Ruth McManus, which relate predominantly to Dublin, are exceptional in their geographical and spatial approach to urban history and morphological form. Brady has edited the *Making of Dublin* series, guided by his geographical background.<sup>39</sup> McManus is prolific in her works on Irish urbanism and on the Dublin housing problem in particular.<sup>40</sup> She has examined the importance of

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<sup>38</sup> Prunty, *Dublin slums*.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Brady and Anngret Simms (eds.) Ruth McManus, *Dublin 1910-1940: shaping the city and suburbs* (Dublin, 2002); Joseph Brady, 'Constructing Dublin city centre in the 1920s' in Howard B. Clarke, Jacinta Prunty, Mark Hennessy (eds), *Surveying Ireland's past: multidisciplinary essays in honour of Anngret Simms* (Dublin, 2004), pp 639-64.

<sup>40</sup> Ruth McManus, 'Suburban dreams? Housing the people in early twentieth century Dublin, in *Báile, University College Geography Society Annual Journal*, (Dublin, 1996), pp 34-41; 'Public utility societies, Dublin corporation and the development of Dublin, 1920-1940' in *Irish Geography* (Dublin, 1996), S.I., v. 29, n. 1, p. 27-37; *Dublin, 1910-1940: shaping the city and suburbs* (Dublin, 2002); 'Blue Collars, "Red Forts" and Green Fields: Working class housing in Ireland in the twentieth century' in *International Labor and Working-class History*, no.64, (2003), pp 38-54; 'The role of public utility societies in Ireland, 1919-1940' in Clarke, Prunty, and Hennessy (eds.), *Surveying Ireland's past*, pp 613-638; 'Not so private!: Public utility societies and semi-private developers', in Brady and Simms (eds.), *Dublin, 1910-1940, shaping the city and suburbs* (Dublin, 2002), pp 235 -304; 'Suburban and urban housing in the twentieth century', in Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, *Domestic life in Ireland* (2011), vol. iii C. pp 253-86.

government subsidies in private housing during the 1920s and 1930s, and the key role played by public utility societies in the Dublin area in the building of houses for the secure-waged middle class.<sup>41</sup> Her most recent study of corporation housing in Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, allowed a limited comparison with similar schemes in Sligo.<sup>42</sup>

The IHTA town atlas for Sligo was an essential source in mapping much of the research data.<sup>43</sup> It provides topographical details and base and developmental maps for the earlier part of the study period. The essay section of the atlas offers a fuller topographical discourse on the urban development of Sligo town.<sup>44</sup> It is used here to set the scene, showing Sligo's urban growth over a period of five centuries, and the demographic pull the town exerted on the county at large. The study of maps in local history engages us in a pictorial form, in the ideas and patterns generated by data. They 'facilitate a spatial understanding of things, concepts, conditions, processes and events' in any given area. Maps can illuminate a point or a pattern more clearly than simple text, and can assist the process of questioning and critical thought.<sup>45</sup>

The 1913 housing report for Dublin (published in 1914), contains a short appendix on other provincial towns, of which Sligo corporation submitted the most complete report.<sup>46</sup> The several stark pictures of the town's poor housing contained within the report offer a visual image clearer than all the report and commissions. These photos were the initial motivation for this research into the topic of re-housing Sligo's poor. The 1914 report sets out the abysmal condition of much of the housing in Irish provincial towns, and in particular the lack of effort and political impetus in clearing slums up to that date. It is interesting to ask why did Sligo Corporation submit such a detailed report compared to the other towns? It may have been linked to the political composition of the body at that time; nine of the 24 members were Labour supporters, and had run on a trade-union ticket. One, John Lynch, was a dock-stevedore, and leader of the 1913 Sligo dock strike. The remainder were all members of the United Irish League, with the exception of one Unionist, but locally very popular, councillor, the

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<sup>41</sup> McManus, 'The role of public utility societies in Ireland, 1919-1940' pp 613-38.

<sup>42</sup> Ruth McManus 'A new town in miniature: Inter-war suburban housing in an Irish provincial town', in *2ha Magazine*, no.8, *Suburbia and Modernism* (Dublin 2015), pp 1-3.

<sup>43</sup> Fióna Gallagher and Marie-Louise Legg, *Sligo*, Irish Historic Town Atlas, no. 24, Royal Irish Academy, (Dublin, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Jacinta Prunty, *Maps and map-making in local history* (Dublin, 2004), p. 18.

<sup>46</sup> *Appendix to the report of the departmental committee appointed by the Local Government Board for Ireland to inquire into the housing conditions of the working classes in the city of Dublin. (Minutes of evidence, with appendices.)* HC 1914 [Cd. 7317], appendix xxxvii, p. 382-393. [494-505].

journalist Robert Smylie.<sup>47</sup> By January 1914, the trade union representation on Sligo Corporation had increased to 13 – more than half of the body.<sup>48</sup> This was bound to have had an influence on their submission to the commissioner’s report.

### **Primary Sources**

The primary sources used for this thesis are multifaceted. A list of them, arranged by repository, follows at the end of this thesis. There is a large body of evidence relating to the housing of the working classes. The various reports and their data, all have elements of bias in them, depending on their creators and immediate purpose for their existence and survival. Thus it is vital to assess the nature of the records, analyse and evaluate this evidence, and place it in a context. The credibility of the source is important, and while the local government records and parliamentary reports are official, this does not mean that these are uncoloured by local political, social or religious bias, or that the figures they record are to be accepted without question.

The source materials for this thesis are spread over a number of locations. Several previously un-used and largely un-catalogued collections have been identified, particularly in relation to Sligo town itself. A chance conversation with a retired county engineer, led to the discovery that many of the original documents relating to the clearance of insanitary areas, and the planning of the new schemes in Sligo, were to be found in the McDonnell Dixon archive, which had been donated to the Irish Architectural Archive in 2014. For Sligo these comprise at least ten substantial rolls of site layouts, house sections and elevations, bills of quantities, tenders, and superseded site layouts. Mr. Colum O’Riordan, general manager, granted permission to have some of these un-catalogued archives opened under supervision, and examined. Many of the drawings are reproduced here, and there is still much to be gained from this invaluable archive. Due to the fragile nature of many of the plans and tracings, it proved impossible to open all of the rolls, most of which are in need of conservation. The predominance of McDonnell Dixon in designing so many of the housing schemes in Ireland during the study period, make this an especially rich archive, of a differing type than the usual written record.

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<sup>47</sup> Padraig Deignan, *The protestant community in Sligo, 1914-1949* (Dublin, 2010), p. 53.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.



The main repository used was the local studies archive of Sligo County Library, which holds one of the largest collections of Local Government records in the country, dating back to the 1830s. Access was granted to these for the purposes of this research, as noted in the acknowledgements at the start of this thesis. Crucial to the case study are the extensive minutes of Sligo Corporation between 1930 and 1947. These minutes have to be examined in the light of the momentous changes which were occurring in Sligo at the time of their writing, and the corporation's own pivotal role in this process. In extracting details from the minute books of Sligo Corporation, five expansive volumes were consulted, spanning the period between 1920 and 1948. These were made available to me, out of warehouse storage, at the county library in Sligo, where I was allowed to take digital photos of many of the entries. This made it easier to browse through them later at ease, and extract pertinent information.

The corporation records for the study period focus almost exclusively on the housing projects then underway, but they contain a significant level of bias. Sligo Corporation had an overwhelming working-class membership in the 1930s, and this is reflected in the priority given to the housing drive. Many of the more controversial decisions of the councillors in relation to housing allocation and compulsory purchases are not recorded in the minutes. A glaring omission is the lack of any reference to the allocation 'scandal' which rocked the corporation in 1934, forcing the intervention of the Minister for Local Government, and the holding of an official inquiry. This demonstrates that official records must never be looked at in isolation. To balance the prejudices of the corporation minutes, the contemporary newspapers were referenced, and even with these, the journalistic coverage of the housing question differed greatly between the populist and nationalist *Sligo Champion*, and the more conservative organ of the *Sligo Independent*, which catered more to the mercantile and Protestant populace. National papers, such as the *Irish Press* were much more scathing in their opinion of the Corporation's behaviour than were the local newspapers.<sup>49</sup>

Evidence for the health issues relating to poor housing in Sligo town was sought from a variety of sources, including the general registrar's reports, the reports of the Sligo county medical officer, and the county Sligo Board of Health records, all which covered the study period. The county medical officer's reports for Sligo – Dr. Michael Kirby was the medical officer for both county and borough – were printed annually between

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<sup>49</sup> *Irish Press*, 28 May 1934.

1936 and 1961. The only surviving copies that have come to light, are also held in the Sligo Library Archives, and appeared not to have been opened since they were first printed. They contain important contemporary reports and interpretations by the medical officer of such diverse items as public health, infant mortality, the scope and progress of the housing schemes, and the degree of overcrowding in the newly built houses after 1936. The extent of information in this primary source is of such a degree that several further comprehensive articles could be based on it. Unfortunately, the medical officer's report book of the Sligo town dispensary (1926-1972) – which I had first accessed about a decade ago – is now missing, and despite a thorough search by the library staff, was not found. This is an inevitable result of the movement of archival records between three different premises in Sligo over the last ten years, in itself a symptom of the poor funding for archival services countrywide.

The thirty-six volumes of records for the Sligo Board of Health, covering the period from 1923 to 1942 provide a unique insight into the workings of the nascent public health system of the period, and contain much material on public health, dispensaries, the vaccination campaign of the 1930s, outbreaks of infectious diseases and the workings of the Sligo surgical and medical hospitals. These boards of health and public assistance were founded in 1923, and took over some of the functions of the abolished Boards of Guardians and Rural District Councils. Their responsibilities included water and sewerage, home assistance and the school medical service amongst others. Their records give us an overview of policy, finance and administration, as well as health, social and economic conditions and the application of the system to the populace. Only a small portion of the information contained in the volumes was applicable to this thesis, but nevertheless they were an important indicator of the state of health of the populace throughout the period under study.

One of the complications of using both the Sligo Corporation minute books, and the Board of Health Records is that some material is covered by the data protection acts, particularly in the case of the Board of Health. As there are many individuals named in the records, (some of whom may still be alive), Sligo Co. Library granted access to these records based on my doctoral student status, and with the proviso that the terms of the data protection acts were observed. No names were recorded during my research, and any pertinent cases were couched in a general terms. Name of tenants that appear in

this thesis were sourced from the printed newspaper reports of council meetings, and are as such outside the scope of the data protection act.

Various records of government, and all its attendant bodies and subcommittees, along with the various reports and commissions contained in the British parliamentary papers have provided insight into the plight of the poor, and how public opinion towards them changed over the nineteenth century. The audience for much of these reports was a civil service and government, and this is reflected in their official nature and tone. Commissions generally took evidence from witnesses and the reports were subsequently published. This has ensured their survival, when other manuscript sources may not.

Some problems are presented when using these reports, not least the problem of objectivity. Primary sources are not simply an open book, they have to be interpreted, and no more so than government reports. The royal commissions generally heard witnesses, as seen in the Poor Law Inquiry, so we hear the voices of the poor themselves, and not simply their plight as interpreted by well-off and frequently judgemental officials. The plethora of reports and commissions on Ireland's poor throughout the nineteenth century are to be seen not just as testimonies of events, but part of an evolving process, both administrative and policy-making, a process which this thesis examines. As mentioned above it was the photographs of Sligo's abysmal houses as published in 1914, which motivated me to write this thesis. This is indicative of the power of historical material even a century after its publication. But the evidence as found in that particular report, if taken alone, gave the impression that the entire town of Sligo was poverty stricken in 1913, when in fact, I knew that was not the case. This then prompted further investigation and questions, not least the questioning of the sources themselves. The bias inherent in some of these official reports both reflected the attitudes of the day, and frequently a genuine desire to improve conditions. The claims to objectivity of the great Victorian enquirers into the 'social problems' of their day must now be seen with some scepticism. Their selection of evidence was often 'distorted to fit middle-class stereotypes about the poor, and to promote the implementation of pet remedies'.<sup>50</sup>

An attempt was made to examine the Department of Local Government records deposited in the National Archives, but they were un-catalogued, and access was

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<sup>50</sup> John Tosh, *The pursuit of history* (Harlow, 2010), p. 130.

severely restricted.<sup>51</sup> I instead concentrated on the local government records available in Sligo, and the documents in the Irish Architectural Archive. There were plentiful details available on clearance areas and clearance orders in these and other archives to give a clear picture of the progress of the housing drive in Sligo. The printed annual reports of the Department of Local Government and Public Health were used extensively in an analysis of the other study towns, during the period 1932-1947. The accessibility of these records improved drastically in 2014, when they were digitised and made freely available to the public online, through the Oireachtas library website.<sup>52</sup> Statistical in their nature, they provide excellent information on clearance orders, loans, houses completed and rents collected. All of this information is tabulated annually, by county borough, corporation towns and the smaller urban district councils. A brief description of all annual housing progress throughout the state is given, as is the total of private and private-assisted houses completed.

There are several gaps in the evidence used for this thesis. The inability to fully access the material in the National Archives as discussed above is one, although this was compensated for elsewhere. More obvious was the deliberate lack of reference to the Sligo Housing Inquiry in the official records of the Corporation, despite the scandal making national headlines. However, it is possible to fill in many gaps by utilising ancillary contemporary sources, such as local papers. It would have been interesting to marry information from the Sligo Corporation minutes with correspondence from the Department of Local Government, but again this proved problematic due to access issues.

Oral recollections of the 'move to the new houses' were quite an influence on this author, particularly growing up. Unfortunately, no verifiable way of recording these impressions can be used for this work, as most of the generation who moved as young married parents are now dead, and the recollections of those who were children at the time, (now in their eighties and nineties), are subjective, but earnest and colourful. Memories tend to focus on the brightness of the new homes, the presence of running

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<sup>51</sup> Many of the DLGPH records had been recently transferred from the Department of Environment, and were stored in boxes, in no cohesive order, other than perhaps year. Time limitations, and location logistics combined with very restricted access to the archive-storage areas where these records were held, mitigated against any meaningful use of them. However, I would hope to look at them in more detail again.

<sup>52</sup> <http://opac.oireachtas.ie/liberty/libraryHome.do>

water and flush toilets, and the large number of children in the neighbourhood. A few anecdotal impressions have been used in the narrative.

Historians have recently recognized that photographs are an important primary source, in their own right. It is often assumed that little early Irish photography exists, particularly of the poor, or of provincial areas. This is not so: while the amount may be small, it can often be significant, and much is held in private and un-catalogued collections.<sup>53</sup> Authenticity is an important question: the issues of who took the photo and for what reason are also pertinent. There are several photographic images showing poor-quality housing in Sligo over the period 1890-1913. Some sources are incidental, showing the housing as part of a bigger, 'scenic' view of the town. Others are more focused, deliberately taken to show the deprivation suffered by the working and poorer classes, and to highlight their plight, such as the Sligo images in the appendix of the Dublin Housing Inquiry, 1914.<sup>54</sup> Images from the Lawrence collection throw an unexpected light on some of the slum housing of Sligo. So good is the resolution of the glass negative, that modern scans allow the user to magnify incidental detail previously unseen. These extracts show all too clearly the rundown nature of the homes of the poor on the periphery of the town.

County Sligo is fortunate in having the Elphin Census of 1749 at its disposal, which allows a detailed analysis of the Sligo town area, as well as its important hinterland to the immediate east and west. This 1749 census was conducted by Bishop Edward Synge (1691-1742), for the diocese of Elphin, which covers the eastern portion of Co. Sligo, as well as most of Co. Roscommon.<sup>55</sup> A superb primary source for social history, it includes details on households, occupations, religious denominations, and family size, and gives us an estimate of the mid-eighteenth century population of Sligo town, which was the largest urban area in the diocese, with 675 householders.<sup>56</sup> An invaluable source for calculating the population of Sligo town in the last quarter of the eighteenth

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<sup>53</sup> Liam Kelly, *Photographs and photography in Irish local history*, Maynooth Research Guides, no. 13, (Dublin, 2008), pp 52-84.

<sup>54</sup> Several photographs, in *Appendix to the report of the departmental committee appointed by the Local Government Board for Ireland to inquire into the housing conditions of the working classes in the city of Dublin*. (Minutes of evidence, with appendices.) HC 1914 [Cd. 7317], appendix xxxvii, p. 382-393. [494-505].

<sup>55</sup> Marie-Louise Legg (ed.), *The census of Elphin 1749* (Dublin 2004).

<sup>56</sup> Brian Gurrin, 'An examination of the 1749 census of the diocese of Elphin', in Marie-Louise Legg (ed.), *The census of Elphin 1749* (Dublin 2004), xxviii.

century, are the St. John's parish cess-books covering the period 1772 to 1795.<sup>57</sup> The official state censuses of population from 1841 onwards were vital analytical tools for this thesis, particularly the sections focusing on housing conditions between 1901 and 1946. The work of E. Margaret Crawford was helpful in this regard, providing guidance as to the nuanced information hidden in the dry statistics of the enumerations.<sup>58</sup> Population data was extracted and tabulated from the various censuses, covering areas such as population density and overcrowding, allowing comparisons to be drawn before and after the housing programmes of the 1930s.

Much of the commentaries of travel writers in the nineteenth century were often pre-occupied with the state of Irish housing, both rural and urban. But this fixation was not confined to Ireland, and there are also many accounts of English towns and villages, which describe the similar insanitary conditions to Ireland, complete with hovels and cabins.<sup>59</sup> However, some critics have argued that the contrast in the criticism of conditions in England and Ireland by these contemporary writers, was frequently coloured by the colonist perception of the Irish labouring class as being lazy, dirty and uncivilized. Thus, many traveller accounts of the cabins-built suburbs of Irish towns should be examined for bias, and given firm contextual bedding, including the background and perspective of the writer. Such prejudiced views often constitute a 'consistent distortion of the culture of so-called 'native peoples' by traveller-commentators in the nineteenth century'.<sup>60</sup> Fidelma Mullane argues that using this context, the 'vernacular houses was used to demonstrate back-wardness, generating an extensive literature on hovels, huts, cabins, filth, pigs, dunghills, and dirty or ugly old women'.<sup>61</sup> It is important to search for descriptions which may be more correct, putting in proper context the prevailing social and economic conditions, and avoiding the prejudicial perspectives of the casual, upper-class observer. C.J. Woods' guide to travellers' accounts of Ireland, is an excellent guide to primary source material of this type.<sup>62</sup>

The pamphlet was frequently employed in the nineteenth century to put forward strongly-held opinions and to generate debate on a variety of topics. Pamphlets,

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<sup>57</sup> *St. John's parish cess book*, Vestry of St. John's cathedral, Sligo, (in private ownership).

<sup>58</sup> E. Margaret Crawford, *Counting the people: a survey of the Irish censuses, 1813-1911* (Dublin, 2003).

<sup>59</sup> Gauldie, *Cruel habitations*, p. 25.

<sup>60</sup> Fidelma Mullane, 'Distorted views of the people and their houses in the Claddagh in the nineteenth century', in *Journal of the Galway Archeological and Historical Society*, vol. 61 (2009), p. 183.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> C.J. Woods, *Travellers' accounts as source material for Irish historians* (Dublin, 2009).

predominantly those from the nineteenth century have proven useful for the slum question in general for the big cities, but are weak on provincial towns. Pamphlet literature does however offer an insight into contemporary attitudes towards the poor and increasing awareness of the need for intervention. Use was made of the extensive pamphlet collection in the Royal Irish Academy, although information was mostly of a contextual nature.

## **Methodologies**

The standard historical research methods are employed in this thesis. In order to fully analyse the housing situation nationally, it was important to critically select which towns to study, and how to compare these with Sligo. The methodology for this was modelled on a study by Stephen A. Royle,<sup>63</sup> as explained in chapter three, which outlines the various characteristics defining a ‘country’ or provincial town of the second tier, and identifies eight study towns. The slum areas of Sligo are mapped and geographically defined in relation to the whole. The various state censuses are consulted, particularly the detailed returns of the 1901 and 1911 censuses, and used along with local government health and medical reports. Ordnance Survey maps were examined and compared, and documents, topographical surveys and local rate books checked against each other to verify data. The manuscript maps of the primary valuation of tenements, popularly known as Griffith’s Valuation, the cancellation books, and local valuation books are used to establish the slum conditions in town at the start of the 1860s. This gives a benchmark from which to measure the level of poverty at the start of the twentieth century, in so far as house valuations can be used as a proxy for living conditions.

## **Key definitions**

Defining who or what constitutes ‘the poor’ is important to this work. The phrase can be contentious in the modern sense, and is by its nature an imprecise term. It is frequently used interchangeably in this thesis with the words ‘labouring’ or ‘working classes’. These are terms that have had many diverse interpretations over the years, and

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<sup>63</sup> Stephen A. Royle, ‘Small towns in Ireland, 1841-1951’, in Clarke, Prunty and Hennessy, (eds), *Surveying Ireland’s past*, pp 535-64.

mean somewhat different things to different people.<sup>64</sup> A distinction must be made between absolute poverty (often referred to as ‘primary poverty’), and relative poverty, which tends to be our modern understating of the term. A sociological definition of ‘poor’ may be stated as: ‘a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services’. This is the modern definition used by the United Nations.<sup>65</sup>

For this thesis, the ‘poor’ can be broadly defined as the low-income, low-skilled, working-class populace, whose housing conditions fell well below a contemporary standard, judged acceptable by the benchmarks of the time. In the context of this study the poor are to be seen as the same as the ‘working and labouring classes’, and can be further expanded to include all those people for whom the ‘provision of a decent house by their own efforts was impossible, or so difficult as to be obtained only with exceptional energy and initiative’.<sup>66</sup> This lack of access to a ‘decent’ home was a profound constraint on peoples’ health and life-span. The term ‘working class’ also includes those who were consistently working, and whose skills and regular wages, even if small, allowed them to rent reasonable premises, and avail of specially-constructed workers houses. These people are also part of the re-housing story.

‘Decent housing’ must also be defined. In recent times, a house without a bathroom would have been considered ‘not decent’; however, in the mid-nineteenth century a decent house may have been simply one which was no more than weather-proof, with a floor and ceiling, and with a nearby source of potable water. The number of rooms was irrelevant, with some rural cabins even housing cattle and people in the same space. By the late 1880s the definition of ‘decent’ had changed, due in part to advances in the understanding of the mechanisms of disease and infection. A regular water supply and proper sewage disposal were considered desirable. Victorian social mores dictated that unmarried grown-up family members should have separate sleeping spaces. Indoor flush toilets were not to become standard in working-class homes until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>67</sup> ‘Overcrowding’ is a term much used in the studies and reports

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<sup>64</sup> B.S. Rowntree, *Poverty: a study of town life* (London, 1901); Peter Townsend, *Sociology and social policy* (London, 1975).

<sup>65</sup> Paul Spicker, ‘Definitions of poverty: twelve clusters of meaning’ in Paul Spicker, Sonia Alvarez Leguizamon, David Gordon (eds), *Poverty: an international glossary* (London, 2007), p. 232.

<sup>66</sup> Definitions after Gauldie, in *Cruel habitations*, p.15.

<sup>67</sup> Gauldie, in *Cruel habitations*, p.15.



from the 1850s to the 1930s. This was defined in Irish censuses as the number of persons-per-room in each house. More than two persons per room was considered overcrowded by the 1900. This is the benchmark definition used for this thesis.

‘Housing strategies’ can be defined as ‘the responses of individuals, families, organisations, institutions, and governments to their perceptions of and interest in the housing market’.<sup>68</sup> Many differing strategies were pursued by government over the study period. Some were successful, others not; more pertinently a separate strategy was pursued by those private individuals with more secure incomes. The significant growth in private housing and grant-assisted housing from the 1920s onwards is testimony to this approach.

There are many indicators of poverty, including overcrowding, housing density, availability of water, light, and air, sanitary amenities, room-sizes, number of occupants and so forth. The correlation between insanitary housing and low life-expectancy eventually changed social attitudes toward the serious housing deficiencies that existed in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The industrial revolution had the effect of concentrating the ‘social evils’ of poverty, disease, malnutrition, and filth – which had existed in a widely dispersed rural society for centuries – into large confined cities which were the product of a rapid nineteenth-century industrialisation particularly in Britain.<sup>69</sup> The sudden explosion of all these problems, highlighted the effects they had on society especially in the field of health, and this in turn led to the great surveys and subsequent sanitary legislation of the Victorian age. For much of the nineteenth century, urban life was considered by definition to be less healthy than rural or suburban life, a claim that was backed up by substantial evidence.<sup>70</sup> Disease, which would have dissipated in the low-density settlement pattern of the countryside, spread as contagion in the densely packed and insanitary city slums. The issue of proper housing for the poor needs therefore to be viewed in the context of public health issues; the eliminating of one particular evil could only be effective if the other evils were eliminated at the same time. Eradication and containment of disease required a multi-pronged approach: street cleaning, dispersal of contaminated human waste, laying of sewers, supplying of fresh and clean water, controlling the gross over-crowding in dwellings and isolating infectious and epidemic diseases. The expansion of the role of the state through

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<sup>68</sup> Pooley, *Housing strategies in Europe*, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>70</sup> Prunty, *Dublin slums*, p. 62

enacting public health legislation and the subsequent acquisition of a multitude of statutory powers by the municipal authorities, led to a major change in the way Irish and British towns were governed over the course of the nineteenth century, all of which had a profound effect on the emergence of a modern civil society. This thesis sets out to explore these overlapping processes and how this happened at the spatial level of a small provincial Irish town, namely Sligo.

## CHAPTER 1

### **Rehousing the urban poor: European and British perspectives from the literature**

You've got a different sort of regard for a home and family if you've built your own home, and wouldn't move out for the world, than if you lived in some cramped and insanitary flat from which you can be turned out any day of the week, and where the rent can rocket beyond your means.<sup>1</sup>

Gustaf Möller, Swedish minister for social affairs, 1925.

The problem of urban slum housing in the early twentieth century, though pressing in the Irish context, was not just an Irish problem, but one which was of great concern in Britain and throughout Europe.<sup>2</sup> From the 1880s to the 1930s all European countries developed large industrial cities and towns, which produced severe and notable housing problems. The varying responses to these social and sanitary challenges would lead to emergent state welfare policies by 1930, and the borrowing of strategies from one country to another with differing degrees of success. This chapter will ask if the processes that led to urban housing crises among the labouring classes were similar in several European countries. It will examine the strategies used to tackle the divergent problems of individual states, and the relative success or failure of these strategies.

While a full analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis, nevertheless a review based on the published literature (in English), relating to continental Europe and to Britain, provides perspectives on the handling of the problem elsewhere. There is a considerable body of literature on the many facets of social housing of this period across Europe. An examination of this literature allows the differing responses to the labouring class housing crisis in various countries to be compared. This review will offer greater context for Irish housing issues, and place the difficulties in a wider frame of discussion. Scotland is taken as perhaps the closest comparative situation to the Irish urban situation, given the similarities between the social and cultural circumstances in both countries, even if there was far greater industrial development along the Clyde. Despite the great differences in the social and economic make-up of European countries during the period between 1850 and 1930, most were to experience the problems of

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Thord Strömberg, 'Sweden' in Colin Pooley (ed.), *Housing strategies in Europe, 1880-1930* (Leicester, 1992), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Colin G. Pooley, 'Introduction to housing strategies in Europe' in *Housing strategies in Europe*, p. 6.

extensive urban poverty, poor housing, overcrowding and the spread of infectious disease. What were the causes that led to such rapid urbanisation, and why did housing and urban infrastructures fail to keep pace with this development? Many common themes can be identified in the discussion around the problem of housing the urban poor in European cities. These include public health problems, the politicisation of the labour-force, the power of the private housing market, and the responsibility of providing adequate shelter for the citizens of the state. There are two major strands of European housing studies; the British experience and that of the continent itself. While there are many similarities, Britain led the way in terms of social and sanitary reforms, due to its comprehensive, early and rapid industrialisation, and its experience will be examined separately.

Colin G. Pooley, a leading researcher in social geography, housing and health, is the editor of the key collection of works on European social housing, *Housing strategies in Europe, 1880-1930*. Several European authors contributed to this work, focusing especially on their own country. But one glaring failure of this work is its scant contextual information on the real physical and social conditions of the poor. The chapter on France, for example makes almost no reference to the filth and stench of Paris in the era before Haussmann, and the essay on German housing deals mostly with dry, statistical and economic detail.

Richard Rodger, a noted economic historian, has published widely on the economic, business and urban history of Britain and Scotland, and his authoritative guide to housing in urban Britain was used extensively in this review.<sup>3</sup> Enid Gauldie's broad work on working-class housing in Britain, from 1780 to 1918, aptly titled *Cruel habitations*, first published in 1974, deals primarily with the social origins and implications of poor housing, and the failure of national and local government to address the problem until the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> However, this work has been criticised as being largely descriptive, and overly reliant on official reports and the writings of contemporary reformers.<sup>5</sup> The book lacks the empirical detail available in census and case studies, which tends to support the contention that housing conditions improved through the century. Nevertheless, it provides much contextual material on the emergence of industrial housing in Britain and standards in public health, as well as

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Rodger, *Housing in urban Britain, 1780-1914* (Cambridge 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Enid Gauldie, *Cruel habitations: a history of working class housing 1780-1918* (London, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> Review by Anthony Sutcliffe in *Social History*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Oct. 1976), pp 383-85.

the housing legislation after 1851. John Burnett's *A social history of housing, 1815-1985* provides useful evidence on the social complexities of housing poor urban workers in the emerging English industrial cities, notably the Irish immigrant labourer in Liverpool and Manchester.<sup>6</sup> Martin J. Daunton, a specialist in social and economic policies, and editor of *The Cambridge urban history of Britain, 1840-1950*, also offers an editorial synopsis of accommodating workers, in *Housing the workers, 1850-1914*.<sup>7</sup> This is a detailed, comparative perspective on the experience of the larger European capitals, from the viewpoint of different authors. From these useful studies and others, it is possible to consider the response to the Irish housing question within a larger, international framework.

### 1.1 Why was poor housing such a pressing concern for Europe?

The notion of a home is central to the human psyche; it provides shelter and security, and it is this basic need that drives the housing market in its most elemental form. 'Men need houses in which they may rest, shelter and rear their families, and pass their leisure, in a moral and healthy way'.<sup>8</sup> The issue of housing is strongly allied to the social, economic and political fabric of almost every European country and society. The characteristics of each national housing strategy reflects individual social, economic and political circumstances. Housing crises could often 'promote political and economic change', but many social issues, such as health, welfare, and labour must be constantly examined through the lens of providing adequate shelter for the citizens of the state.<sup>9</sup> Housing strategies can be defined as, the 'responses of individuals, families, organisations, institutions, and governments to their perceptions of, and interest in the housing market'.<sup>10</sup> Philanthropic interest and initiatives for the provision of housing for the poor, particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, must be viewed not only in light of true social compassion, but also the pragmatic desire to stifle social unrest, which it was feared could arise from the distress of the poor and lower-working classes.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John Burnett, *A social history of housing 1815-1985* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cambridge, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Michael J. Daunton (ed.), *Housing the workers 1850-1914: a comparative perspective* (Leicester, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> *Report on the slum clearance in Dublin, 1938*, Citizens Housing Council, (Dublin, 1938), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Pooley, 'Introduction to housing strategies in Europe', p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Strömberg, 'Sweden', p 15.

From 1800 onwards, and more insistently after 1880, most European countries developed industrial economies, requiring increased manpower, resulting in an expanded urban population with accompanying housing problems. The pace and nature of urbanisation and industrialisation in European countries ‘provides the essential framework in which any study of working-class housing must be set’.<sup>12</sup> Both state and society struggled to adapt to an unprecedented influx of people to the cities. The rise of heavy industry resulted in people crowding into towns, putting pressure on the existing housing supply, and triggering the proliferation of low quality, high-density slum areas. The initial phase of industrialisation, and the great migration to towns happened in specific core areas of north-central Europe, centred around the iron-ore and coalfields of northern France and Belgium, and around the Ruhr in the western German states. In Britain a similar pattern of industrialization happened near the coalfields of the midlands, the north-east and along the Clyde river in Scotland.<sup>13</sup> European industrialisation was uneven, with northern and central countries developing more than southern or more peripheral ones, which were resource-poor. Transport and trade links were critical factors in the development of industry and these were to become more important after 1880. The lack of industrialisation in southern countries and peripheral regions led to differing housing pressures in these areas. France, for example, despite its heavy industry in the northern regions, still had a substantial and widely dispersed rural population in 1880. Even by 1931 it had only 50 per cent of its population living in urban areas of more than 2,000 people. Portugal in the 1930s had just 18 per cent of its population living in similar-sized urban areas.<sup>14</sup> Germany, on the other hand, had rapid urban growth after 1860. In 1871 only 4.8 per cent of Germany’s population lived in cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants; by 1910 that proportion was over 21 per cent. Crucially, by 1901, in excess of 60 per cent of German subjects lived in urban centres with more than 2,000 inhabitants.<sup>15</sup> German housing policies were thus amongst the first to emerge in response to this pattern of rapid urbanisation. By the 1850s, the great majority of Berliners, irrespective of class, were living in apartments or tenement buildings.<sup>16</sup> After 1918, the effect of several wars and social upheavals must be taken into account, particularly in the case of Belgium, Germany and France, following the

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<sup>12</sup> Pooley, ‘Introduction to housing strategies in Europe’, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Rodger, ‘Scotland’ in Pooley (ed.), *Housing strategies in Europe*, p. 105

<sup>14</sup> Pooley, *Housing strategies in Europe*, p 3.

<sup>15</sup> Hans J. Teutenberg and Clements Wischermann, ‘Germany’ in Pooley (ed.). *Housing strategies in Europe*, pp 240-1.

<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Bullock, ‘Berlin’ in Daunton (ed.), *Housing the workers*, p. 184.

destruction of towns, and the great physical loss of young men in the wake of World War I.

Property is also a commodity, and in the early nineteenth century in most European societies, housing and land became commodified, following the rise of capitalism and the *laissez-faire* economic policies of the day.<sup>17</sup> This resulted in a price being placed on housing and land, subject to the economic instabilities of supply and demand. In a period of increased and rapid urbanisation, housing became not just a shelter that you constructed with your own hands, (or paid some-one else to build), but a marketable item. It was the ‘commodification of housing which elevates the issue of price to such a dominant position’.<sup>18</sup> In a rural society of self-builders, homelessness was unlikely to be a problem; in an urban, cash-based society it would become a desperate issue, with the greatest impact on the lowest tier of society.

## 1.2 The British housing question, 1880-1930

Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, Britain was transformed from being one of the least urbanised areas of Europe, to being the most industrialised country in the world.<sup>19</sup> This happened much more rapidly, and more comprehensively than anywhere else in Europe. The population increased from 11.9 million in 1811 to almost 41 million by 1911, transforming the island into an urban society, characterised by several large industrial cities with areas of dense population, extreme poverty and squalor. By 1850, the entire economic, political, and social landscape of Great Britain had changed.<sup>20</sup>

Britain led the way in early European housing reform, mostly due to the enormity of its urban problems. The development of housing policies in Britain in the latter part of the nineteenth century was a direct response to the economic and social legacy of the industrial revolution. Change was slow however, and state intervention was primarily in the areas of sanitation and public health, which had only an indirect effect on the dwellings of the poor.<sup>21</sup> What were the distinct characteristics of the British housing question? How did the government react to the housing question, and why? Were

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<sup>17</sup> Padraic Kenna, *Housing law, rights and policy* (Dublin, 2011), p. 59.

<sup>18</sup> P. Malpass, P and A. Murie, *Housing policy and practice* (London, 1994), p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Clarke, ‘Small towns in England 1550-1850: national and regional population trends’ in Peter Clarke (ed.), *Small towns in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 90.

<sup>20</sup> Burnett, *A social history of housing*, p. 56.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Balchin and Maureen Rhoden (eds.), *Housing: the essential foundations* (London, 1998), p. 2.

British housing policies any different than those in continental Europe, and were they more or less successful?

The widespread existence of ‘defective housing’ in all major British cities was acknowledged by the 1840s, and ‘slums’ had become the term of disdain to describe them.<sup>22</sup> Mass industrialization and its attendant poverty were focused in certain areas of England and Wales. London was the natural centre for much expansion, and it had always been a magnet for the poor; its slums were notorious by Victorian times. Other English cities, notably Manchester and Birmingham, developed rapidly after 1830 and became industrial powerhouses of the British Empire. Liverpool, the great western *entrepôt* for all goods from the colonies, had an intractable slum problem until the mid-twentieth century, much of it fuelled by the immigration of poor Irish labourers. In England and Wales in 1851, over one-half of the population lived in towns. Thirty years later, this figure was almost 68 per cent, or 17.6 million people.<sup>23</sup> The cumulative and explosive in-migration of so many labourers to unprepared towns, coupled with little planning or foresight, resulted in ‘wholly inadequate conditions for urban living’. Richard Rodger, a social and economic historian, considers that this ‘cumulative pressure of numbers’ prompted a material breakdown of a new urban society.<sup>24</sup> Middle- and upper-class Victorians in Britain lived in fear of the ‘mob’, shunning contact with the slum dweller, ‘anticipating riot and violence’ from the fast-multiplying throngs of the urban poor.<sup>25</sup> As a burgeoning middle-class started to emerge in British society, a sense of urgency arose as to how these ‘unsafe’ people could be ‘gentled into docility’.<sup>26</sup>

The outbreak of highly infectious diseases in densely-populated urban areas sufficiently alarmed middle- and upper-class Victorian society by the 1840s, to the point that a multitude of social studies were initiated into the nature of urban poverty. These studies clearly identified the three key and inter-related issues of sanitation, housing and unemployment, as being at the root of the problem of the slums. With significantly higher levels of mortality, morbidity, infectious disease and infant mortality amongst the poor, Victorian society had to ‘face the fact that conditions in their towns were bad

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<sup>22</sup> Rodger, *Housing in urban Britain*, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Pooley, ‘England and Wales’, p. 73

<sup>24</sup> Rodger, *Housing in urban Britain*, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Gauldie, *Cruel habitations*, p. 149.

<sup>26</sup> Select Committee on Working of 1868 and 1874 Acts, interim reports. *Minutes of evidence*, 119-53, Final Report, *Minutes of Evidence*, 5,625-5,626. Quoted in Gauldie, *Cruel habitations*, p. 286.



enough to kill'.<sup>27</sup> Increasing numbers of middle-class families quit town centre living, and moved to newly-expanding suburbs, adding to segregation and urban decay. By 1850, British cities had become socially and residentially segregated between rich and poor, and in many cases between the immigrant Irish labourer and the English urban worker.<sup>28</sup>

The housing conditions of the urban poor were clearly apparent in the industrial cities outside of London. Manchester and Liverpool each supported about 60,000 immigrant Irish labourers in 1835, a decade before the mass immigration caused by the potato famine. Appalling housing problems were apparent in Manchester by 1851; surveys noted that in some parts of the city there were only two toilets to every 250 people. Infant mortality was very high, with only forty per cent of children in the poorer areas reaching their fifth year. Many houses were multi-occupancy, and the very poor lived in 'hot stinking and unhealthy cellars'.<sup>29</sup>

Birmingham, with a population of over 630,000 by 1890, was the second largest population centre in Britain.<sup>30</sup> There was substantial immigration of poor Irish labourers to the city after 1845, and many residents lived in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. This period saw the speculative construction of thousands of back-to-back red-brick houses, built to shelter the growing population; their poor quality, and bad drainage, resulted in the development of large areas of slums. In 1849, it was estimated that about 30,000 of Birmingham's poorest people lived in about 2,000 close-built, ill-drained and 'unwholesome courts', as notorious as Liverpool's.<sup>31</sup> But the city was considered better than Manchester by contemporary observers, with many houses occupied by just one family, and the quality of street cleansing and drainage was superior to that in many other industrial towns.<sup>32</sup>

From the 1840s onwards public health worries in England and Wales resulted in multiple pieces of legislation dealing with insanitary and poor housing. The intimate connection between uncleanliness and disease was underscored by the filth and smell of

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<sup>27</sup> Gauldie, *Cruel habitations*, p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> Rodger, *Housing in urban Britain*, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Dennis, *English industrial cities of the nineteenth century: a social geography* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> Eric Hopkins, *Birmingham: The first manufacturing town in the world, 1760–1840* (London, 1989), p. 246.

<sup>31</sup> Dennis, *English industrial cities*, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

the slums, where years of accumulated rubbish and lack of running water, drains, sewers or paving, created a sense of horror amongst officials sent to inspect these areas.<sup>33</sup> No wonder then that the first attempts to deal with poor housing came about through the avenue of public health.

The first act to deal with slum clearances in England and Wales was the Torrens Act of 1868, official known as the Artizans' and Labourers' Dwellings Act, which allowed for the closure of dwellings judged 'unfit for human habitation'. This legislation proved ineffective as local government had neither the powers nor the legal responsibility to re-house those who were left homeless as a result of closures.

Some cities did provide municipal housing; Liverpool corporation built its first block of dwelling, St Martin's Cottages, in 1868, and by 1918 the corporation had provided almost 3,000 flats in the city. But its main focus continued to be clearance of the worst slums and improving sanitary conditions. Such clearances in Liverpool actually removed five times more houses than were provided by the corporation, leaving a housing deficit.<sup>34</sup> Birmingham was unique amongst British cities in that it had a very strong, and effective, local government, particularly in terms of prioritizing housing and sanitary projects. The progressive corporation erected gas lighting in the streets by 1818, and installed a fresh water supply in 1828 for those who could pay. As early as 1851, a network of sewers was built under the city, discharging into a local river. In contrast to other British cities, Birmingham fully embraced its civic responsibility, and the corporation introduced one of the most ambitious improvement schemes outside of London in the 1870s. Between 1873 and 1876 some of Birmingham's worst slums were cleared, and these improvements were to prove the blueprint for municipal schemes elsewhere.

A more progressive British act of 1875, (the Cross Act), provided for slum clearance in unhealthy areas and re-building on the cleared sites. However, there was no obligation to re-house the displaced occupiers, and frequently they couldn't afford the increased rents. The high cost of land and construction also put a large burden on municipal ratepayers, and many councils were reluctant to borrow money. By the mid-1880s it was accepted that 'without adequate provision of the re-housing', slum clearance

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<sup>33</sup> John English, Ruth Madigan and Peter Norman, *Slum clearance; the social and administrative context in England and Wales* (London, 1976), p. 17.

<sup>34</sup> Pooley, 'England and Wales', p. 88.

schemes only resulted in increased overcrowding in surrounding areas.<sup>35</sup> Progress in re-housing the labourers under the various acts was slow and sporadic, and while London county council initiated 22 housing schemes up to 1888, other cities were not so inclined. Between 1890 and 1914, only improvement 32 schemes were completed throughout England and Wales.<sup>36</sup> This was primarily due to the high cost to be borne by local government.

Before 1919, all British intervention in housing was based on sanitary principles; the state would only intervene in the market where there were serious public health problems.<sup>37</sup> The politicisation of the workers' housing question during the First World War led to direct government intervention in 1919, with the passing of a series of housing acts, and the expansion of building societies in the 1920s led to an increase in home ownership, which in itself came to be seen as a mark of respectability and an investment in the future.<sup>38</sup>

The first United Kingdom Exchequer subsidies for local authority house construction were granted under the Housing Act of 1919. This allowed the start of many large-scale schemes, and eased the financial constraints for local government, but they catered mostly for the better-waged skilled labourers.<sup>39</sup> Escalating cuts in public expenditure over the next number of years greatly retarded this programme. The hoped-for processes of 'filtering-up' – where lower-waged workers would find affordable accommodation in houses vacated by those trading up – never happened, as the overall supply of houses remained insufficient, and rents remained out of reach. During the 1920s over 1.25 million new houses were built in England and Wales, of which about 500,000 were local-authority funded.<sup>40</sup> But little was achieved in clearing the worst slums, or re-housing the very poorest. In 1929, over 60,000 houses were built by the local authorities in England and Wales, in contrast to the 141,000 that were constructed for private owners.<sup>41</sup> Homes constructed during the inter-war period were aimed squarely at the middle-class and lower-middle class, and suburban layout was greatly influenced by the 'garden city movement'.

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<sup>35</sup> English, Madigan and Norman, *Slum clearance*, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Pooley, 'England and Wales', p. 89

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>39</sup> English, Madigan and Norman, *Slum clearance*, p. 19.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20

<sup>41</sup> Pooley, 'England and Wales', p. 82.

Finally, after the dreadful slum conditions had become a pertinent political issue in Britain in the 1920s, the needs of the poorest and worst housed were accepted. A large slum clearance programme was inaugurated under the Housing Act of 1930, to try and address the issue once and for all.<sup>42</sup> Following further amendments in 1933, financial subsidies were increased, and the legal process of clearances and compulsory purchase simplified. There was also new legislative pressure on local authorities from central government, to carry out their obligation to clear slums in their municipal area. Local authorities were urged to make an, ‘immediate start’ in effecting the clearances, and ensure all designated slum areas would be cleared no latter than 1938.<sup>43</sup> This was an ambitious start to a programme that was to be interrupted by the outbreak of war in 1939. Nevertheless, in England and Wales slum houses were being demolished at a rate of 90,000 units annually, and over 273,000 condemned houses were demolished throughout the 1930s. This policy however, only benefited the expanding middle classes. Rising expectations and a true recognition of the magnitude of the problem of sub-standard housing in the industrial cities meant that further clearance areas were designated for redevelopment by the end of the 1930s.<sup>44</sup> The supply of good-quality, low-rental homes would remain low, and slum conditions were to exist in parts of many British cities until 1950.<sup>45</sup> The devastation of many English cities during the Second World War, and the subsequent social upheavals, meant that when a housing programme resumed in 1949, its focus had changed utterly.

Britain’s housing policies started earlier than in other European states, as a direct response to the spread of disease in overcrowded industrial cities, particularly after the cholera epidemic of 1832. Influenced by scientific reports and a better understanding of disease, water and sewage infrastructure improved in British cities through the last half of the nineteenth century, directed by legislation from central government. Ian Adams has remarked that it was a ‘passion for sanitary purity, rather than ideological salvation, that set Britain upon the path to the socialist city’.<sup>46</sup> The expansion of terraced, red-brick housing, identical in its monotony, became characteristic of many English industrial towns, which by and large did not produce the multi-storey apartment buildings common in other European cities. Such housing, never of high quality to

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<sup>42</sup> English, Madigan and Norman, *Slum clearance*, p. 20

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> Pooley, ‘England and Wales’, p. 89.

<sup>46</sup> Ian H. Adams, *The making of urban Scotland* (London, 1978), p. 159.

begin with, became overcrowded, and deteriorated with time. While there was some provision of workers housing by philanthropic and charitable institutions, and indeed employers initiatives, until the 1890s, state intervention in the housing market was almost minimalist. Legislation passed from 1875 onwards gave small financial subsidies to municipal authorities to clear slum areas and erect sanitary labourers' dwellings. However, direct financial intervention would not come until the housing of the working class legislation of the 1890s. There emerged by this date a 'grudging acceptance' that the private market could not provide affordable accommodation for the very poor, and that the housing crisis of the previous half century was 'unacceptable within a civilised society', and posed a threat to the social, economic and political fabric of the nation.<sup>47</sup>

### **British philanthropists and social reformers**

The improvement of working class housing in Britain was heavily influenced by several of the social reformers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many of these reformers having been inspired by Enlightenment ideals. Their works and studies were to be extremely influential not only on British housing policy, but on the European policies as well.

Jeremy Bentham, (1748–1832), the influential and prolific British reformer, philosopher and jurist, was one of the first to debate the conditions and treatments of the poor, and champion poor law reform in late-eighteenth-century Britain.<sup>48</sup> His works were to find later support through his protégé, Edwin Chadwick (1800–1890), who became the leading expert of his day on social conditions in Britain, and an influential social reformer, particularly in the fields of public health and poor relief. Chadwick drafted the 1834 report recommending Poor Law reform, and his ground-breaking report, *The sanitary condition of the labouring population* (1842), was instrumental in convincing the public and parliament of the connection between disease, high mortality grossly inadequate sanitary provisions, and contaminated water supply. In 1848, the government finally established a national public health authority, the General Board of Health which was to have far reaching effects.<sup>49</sup> Octavia Hill (1838-1912), was a

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<sup>47</sup> Pooley, 'England and Wales', p. 79.

<sup>48</sup> F. Rosen, 'Bentham, Jeremy (1748–1832)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2153, accessed 1 Feb 2016]

<sup>49</sup> Peter Mandler, 'Chadwick, Sir Edwin (1800–1890) in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5013, accessed 1 Feb 2016].

pioneer of housing provision and management for the very poor.<sup>50</sup> Hill's 'method' focused on redeeming the character of the poorest poor, rather than concentrating on the more respectable artisan class who were the target of the municipal housing schemes of the time. Hill was greatly involved in social aspects of city living, engaging with the women, and campaigning for the importance of open spaces and playgrounds for children. By the late 1880s Octavia Hill had become a key figure in housing policy-making, but paradoxically, always fought against the municipal solution to the crisis in housing. She was judged 'visionary in her attempt to bring self-respect to those who had long since lost it', and her approach to the housing of the impoverished, revolutionary when it was espoused, resonates still today.<sup>51</sup>

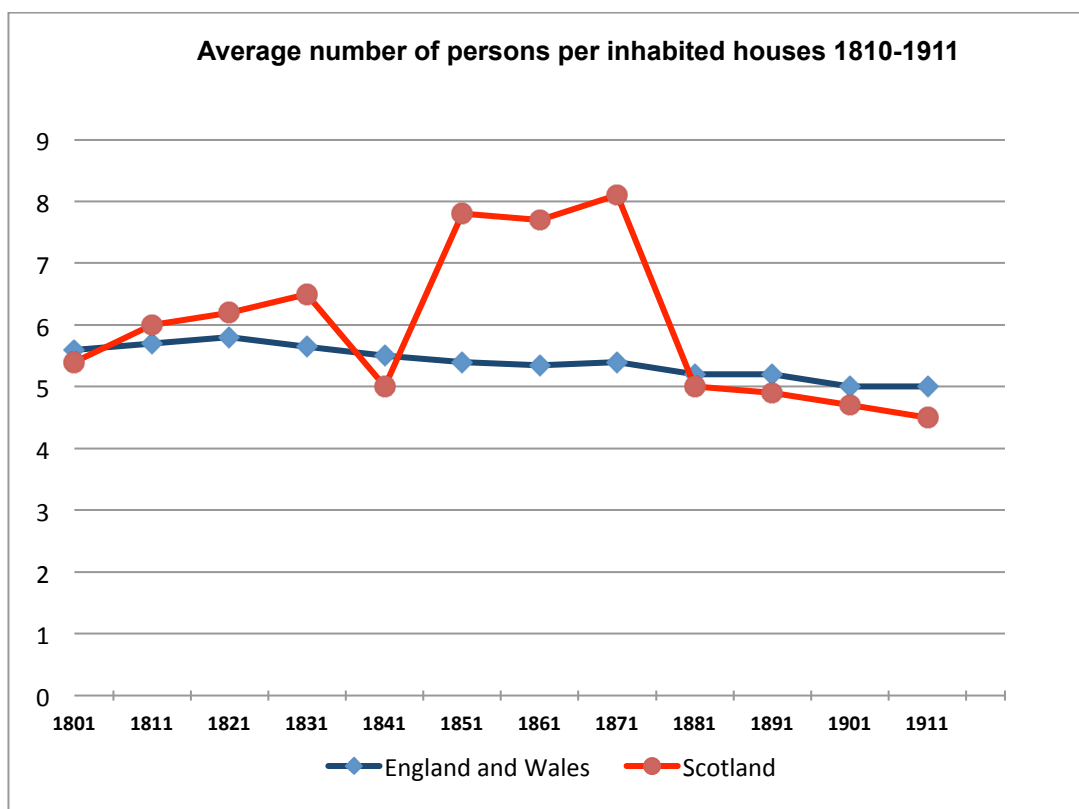


Figure 1.1. Average number of persons per inhabited house, England and Wales, 1801-1911. After Gaudie, in *Cruel Habitations* (London, 1974).

<sup>50</sup> Gillian Darley, 'Hill, Octavia (1838–1912)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33873>, accessed 23 Nov 2015].

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

### 1.3 Scotland – an examination of the problems and strategies

Scotland, – or at least a part of it – had a sudden and ‘spectacular’ industrialisation after 1820, which led to rapid urbanisation, second only to that of England in the greater European context.<sup>52</sup> Governed from Westminster, and with a dispersed rural population, Scotland had nonetheless a distinct urban housing problem. What made Scotland’s housing problems different from those in the remainder of Britain and Ireland? And were there any parallels in the policies and solutions to the housing question in both countries?

Scotland contrasted with the remainder of Britain in that its urban core was concentrated in a geographically narrow area spanning the agriculturally rich central lowlands along the river Clyde. In 1841 some 83 per cent of the entire Scottish urban population lived in this area, only about 50 miles in width.<sup>53</sup> As early as 1831, a quarter of Scotland’s population lived in towns of 2,000 inhabitants or greater; by 1901 this figure had mushroomed to 64 per cent.<sup>54</sup> Four distinct centres of dense population emerged by 1860: Glasgow and Edinburgh, situated on the central coalfields, and nearby Aberdeen and Dundee, both ports on the fertile north-east coast. Scotland’s pattern of industrialisation and urbanisation had more in common with England than with Ireland, but similarly to Ireland, its peripherality and great distance from the centres of government in London, led to hesitancy in addressing housing problems.

Two key factors influenced the poor quality of Scottish housing: firstly the pattern of weak and unpredictable incomes in the average Scottish town, and secondly the Scottish legal code, which was quite distinct from that of England, and underpinned the framework of the building industry. The seller of a plot of land could legally retain rights to an annual payment or tax on the plot in perpetuity, a charge with was called the *feu-duty*.<sup>55</sup> This exaggerated land prices, and encouraged an unusual construction pattern of high-rise, barrack-like tenement buildings, often of four or five storeys, which were more in keeping with the European pattern of urban residential development. The resulting intense congestion and lack of proper sanitation meant that these buildings

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<sup>52</sup> Rodger, ‘Scotland’, p 105.

<sup>53</sup> Ian H. Adams, ‘Scottish urbanisation’ in Thomas Martin Devine (ed.), *Exploring the Scottish past: themes in the history of Scottish society* (Edinburgh 1995), pp 114-131, at p. 121

<sup>54</sup> Rodger, ‘Scotland’, p. 105

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

were often an incubator for contagious diseases and respiratory illnesses.<sup>56</sup> The Westminster government only hesitantly tackled the Scottish housing problem, as property rights, hitherto sacrosanct, would have been violated. The housing question was central to the lives of urban Scots; while the Victorians romanticised rural, highland Scotland, the reality was vastly different for the multitude who endured the slums. Massive immigration of Irish workers to both Glasgow and Edinburgh before and after 1851 had a profound influence on Scottish urbanisation. Over eight per cent of Glasgow's population was Irish born in 1851; Edinburgh's share was 6.5 per cent.<sup>57</sup> This percentage of Irish immigrants and their families was to rise even higher after 1861, when the expansion of manufacturing led to a demand for cheap labour.

Edinburgh, a small overcrowded town at the start of the eighteenth century, was early characterised by tall tenement dwellings, many storeys high. Despite a planned 'new town' laid out between 1766 and 1830, the Old Town remained overcrowded. The squalor of life for the poor in the tenements of the older part of the city became more pronounced, with increasing outbreaks of disease such as cholera and typhoid.<sup>58</sup> Highland prices necessitated high building densities. Victorian-era Scottish tenement blocks generally comprised of four storeys, with each floor level containing four or more flats. A typical block could have up to twenty individual units, and perhaps 130 residents.<sup>59</sup> For all of these people there would be just one or two outside dry-toilets. These tall, insanitary, badly lit and poorly ventilated tenements had more severe problems than the English back-to-back terraced housing. By 1911, even the best housed Scottish city, Edinburgh, had a rate of overcrowding that exceeded that of the worst tenements of London's East End; Scottish overcrowding was measured at 45 per cent, five times greater than the rate in England, which was five per cent.<sup>60</sup>

Glasgow expanded as a major port from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. The population growth in the city was phenomenal: from 202,000 in 1831, it grew to 784,000 by 1911, an increase of 1,000 per cent.<sup>61</sup> Predictably, as early as the 1840s, official enquiries were aghast at the squalor of parts of Glasgow, especially the narrow

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p 105

<sup>57</sup> Adams, 'Scottish urbanisation', p. 125.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>59</sup> Rodger, *Housing in urban Britain*, p. 36.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Charles Withers, 'The demographics of the city, 1831-1911' in W. Hamish Fraser and Irene Maver (eds.), *Glasgow*, vol ii, 1830-1912 (Manchester, 1996), p. 112.



lanes known as ‘wynds’, and the square ‘closes’ or courtyards at the centre of tall tenements. One commentator stated that despite having travelled widely, he,

did not believe until I visited the wynds of Glasgow that so large an amount of filth, crime, misery and disease existed on one spot in any civilized country.... in the lower lodging houses ten, twelve, and sometimes twenty persons of both sexes and all ages sleep promiscuously on the floor in different degrees of nakedness.<sup>62</sup>

Glasgow corporation launched the biggest urban renewal scheme in nineteenth-century Scotland, in 1866, when it received a substantial land-bank which had been cleared of slum housing for the construction of a new railway terminus.<sup>63</sup> The Improvement Trust cleared almost 36 hectares, covered two filthy streams, laid out thirty new streets, and widened twenty-six more. But rents, and the ubiquitous *feu-duty*, were too high in the new houses, and the displaced poor simply crowded into nearby accommodation, driving standards lower. Glasgow corporation continued to drag its feet on the public housing issue. By 1897 it had constructed only 1,515 houses in a city of over 700,000 people. Most of these were let to selected corporation employees, shop-keepers, professionals, and ‘well-to-do’ labourers.<sup>64</sup>

One of the prime indicators of public health, infant mortality, was abysmally high by the 1880s. Figures for 1881 show Glasgow had the highest death rate in the United Kingdom, as well as the second highest infant mortality rate, the greatest number of persons per room, and the greatest proportion of one-roomed flats. One observer noted that the streets of the city were filled with ‘bandy legged’ children, underfed, and badly nourished.<sup>65</sup> The rate of infant and child mortality in Glasgow in 1911 was over 200 per thousand live births, in dwellings than consisted of one room.<sup>66</sup> In addition, the rate was around 170 per thousand even in dwellings with two rooms. In Edinburgh in 1912, the infant mortality rates in dwellings of one and two rooms was six times higher than it was in houses with four or more rooms.<sup>67</sup> The overall infant mortality rate in Glasgow remained stubbornly high until the twentieth century, and its association with overcrowding was undeniable.

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Adams, *The making of urban Scotland*, (London, 1978), p. 155.

<sup>63</sup> Adams, *The making of urban Scotland*, p. 160

<sup>64</sup> Adams, *The making of urban Scotland*, p. 161

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in A. Gibb, *Glasgow: the making of a city* (London 1983), p. 136

<sup>66</sup> R. A. Cage and John Foster, ‘Overcrowding and infant mortality: a tale of two cities’ in *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 49, no. 2 (2002), p. 135.

<sup>67</sup> Rodger, ‘Scotland’, p 108.

In 1881, over half the Scottish population was living in overcrowded conditions of more than two-persons per room; over 13 per cent of the population were living at a density of more than four persons per room. Conditions were slow to improve; Glasgow had erected just over 2,000 public houses by 1912; Edinburgh a mere 600. By 1900, both Glasgow and Edinburgh experienced severe housing problems because the supply of housing in both cities had not kept pace with demand. The problem for Glasgow was more intense, given its role as Scotland's major industrial centre and the preponderance of small houses in its housing stock. In 1901, 26.1 per cent of Glasgow's families lived in one room, with a further 43.6 per cent living in two rooms; the comparable figures for Edinburgh were 13.1 per cent and 37.3 per cent. The 1911 census revealed that 60 to 70 per cent of the inhabitants of fifteen Scottish boroughs were living in conditions where there were more than two persons per room.<sup>68</sup> Even in the best-housed city, Edinburgh, some 33 per cent of the population lived in such conditions. The 1911 census also revealed that 56.8 per cent of the Scottish urban housing stock had only one or two rooms. The contrast with England could not be greater. In 1914, fifty-three per cent of all Scottish housing was composed of one and two roomed dwellings; in England the figure was just seven per cent. It took a series of persistent confrontations from a number of bodies, including the Scottish medical officers, to bring the subject of unacceptable housing conditions into the consciousness of the Scottish public, and the government.

### **Scottish Housing strategies 1890-1912**

The issue of housing in Scottish cities was so bad by the start of the twentieth century, that it became a strategic battleground for pressure groups, and a central factor in the development of an urban labour movement and the emergence of a distinct urban working class.

Rents in Scottish burghs in 1905 were almost 13 per cent higher than rents in southern English towns, and security of tenure was a major factor in tenants' housing demands. So un-remitting were landlords to alter their stance on rent or leases even in times of unemployment, that in 1910 one in every ten dwellings was untenanted. A disproportionate burden of taxation was borne by owners of good quality housing, and fear of subsidization of the poorer classes caused much political debate, particularly amongst property owners and landlords. Over 70 per cent of Edinburgh's councillors

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

were landlords in 1905.<sup>69</sup> Some of the large industrial companies based on Clydeside, did build company houses to rent to their employees; the main focus behind these efforts appears to have been the provision of a stable and compliant workforce, as eviction was an efficient deterrent to poor attendance and low productivity. In addition, the excuse of rental arrears could be used to make redundancies and eliminate inefficient work practices.<sup>70</sup> Government policy up to the start of World War I was unequivocal; ‘private enterprise has always been and ... will continue to be the main source of the provision of houses for the working classes... building by local authorities will not be required except where private enterprise has failed to provide such houses’.<sup>71</sup>

The period after the Great War was to see pivotal change in the nature of Scottish urban housing. The growth of the Labour party was significant in Glasgow up to 1914, its popularity greatly helped by its policies on housing issues, and it effectively filled a void left by the failure of other philanthropic or civic efforts to provide solutions to the Scottish housing deficiencies.<sup>72</sup>

Concern over the housing conditions of Scottish miners was highlighted by a delegation of the miners themselves and crucially, their MPs during the First World War, when their labour was vital to the war industries. The increase in political and social pressure from all sides led the secretary of state for Scotland to appoint a wide-ranging royal commission into Scottish housing in 1917, which concluded that the situation in Scotland was far worse than the existing authorities would admit.<sup>73</sup> Chronic overcrowding remained obstinate in the cities of the central belt: in 1919, over 44 per cent of the entire Scottish housing stock – almost half a million dwellings – consisted of houses of one or two rooms; in England and Wales this figure stood at just 4.6 per cent.<sup>74</sup> It was belatedly accepted that the scale of the problem was beyond individual, charitable or commercial solution, and that only the state could provide the resources and finances to adequately house the people. The end result was the passing of the Housing and Town Planning (Scotland) Act of 1919, which gave the local authorities the power to plan, finance, build, and manage housing, and become the controllers and

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<sup>69</sup> B. Elliott, D. Crone, and V. Skelton, (1978), ‘Property and politics in Edinburgh 1875-1975’ in John Garrard (ed.), *The middle class in politics* (Dartmouth, 1978), pp 99-109.

<sup>70</sup> Rodger, ‘Scotland’, p. 122

<sup>71</sup> *Annual report of Local Government Board, 1912-13*, HC 1913 [Cmnd 6981], 31, 1913, p. xxxiv.

<sup>72</sup> Rodger, ‘Scotland’, p. 122.

<sup>73</sup> Adams, *The making of urban Scotland*, p. 170.

<sup>74</sup> Royal Commission report, (1917), Cd. 8731, 1917 p. 387. After Rodger, ‘Scotland’, p. 124.

wardens of the new standards for densities, overcrowding, sanitary facilities, and subdivisions of housing.<sup>75</sup>

In 1920, the Westminster government gave financial subsidies to the Scottish local councils to allow for the erection of workers' housing. A similar situation was to arise in Ireland with the 'Million Pound Scheme' in 1923. Private sector rents were also controlled forcefully, in order to reduce the gap between rents in England and Scotland, but nevertheless, an enormous disparity still existed between the two jurisdictions. Very real progress was made in Scotland in the 1920s and 1930s, and almost 350,000 dwellings were built between 1919 and 1941, for a population of almost 5 million. However this contrasted with 4.2 million dwellings constructed in England and Wales in the same period, for a population of 40 million. Of these totals, the local authorities funded 70 per cent of the dwellings constructed in Scotland, as compared to just below 30 per cent in England – a direct inverse. And even of those Scottish houses that were privately built, over 36.5 per cent were built with a subsidy, as opposed to just 14 per cent south of the border.<sup>76</sup>

By 1935, thanks to numerous municipal housing programmes, only 22 per cent of the Scottish housing stock consisted of dwellings of one or two rooms, but this figure still remained six times greater than the figure in the remainder of Britain.<sup>77</sup> Ian Adams argues that the policy of building housing estates on the outskirts of cities only led to the development of notorious housing estates.<sup>78</sup> After the Housing (Scotland) Acts of 1935 and 1936, a more interventionist stance towards housing strategy was reluctantly embraced. Special initiatives were introduced to deal with the defective character of Scottish housing, particularly in relation to the urban areas of the Clyde valley. A contemporary survey of housing in Edinburgh found that 18.4 per cent of the housing stock was overcrowded and that an estimated 13,594 new houses were needed immediately. However, the outbreak of the Second World War put all plans on hold, as energy and money was ploughed into the steelyards and shipyards along the Clyde. Slum housing would continue to be a problem in Glasgow and Edinburgh until the early 1960s. Today, over fifty-seven per cent of the population of Scotland live in state-

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<sup>75</sup> Adams, *The making of urban Scotland*, p. 170.

<sup>76</sup> Rodger, 'Scotland', p. 128.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Adams, *The making of urban Scotland*, p. 173.

financed housing.<sup>79</sup> One author has concluded that Scottish cities became ‘socialized, not from any political ideology’, but as a result of policies implemented in the 1930s to resolve ‘urban injustices created in the nineteenth century’.<sup>80</sup>

#### **1.4 Housing problems and strategies in Europe, 1880-1930**

How then can we accurately compare the housing question in Europe with the situation in the United Kingdom, and are there any similarities with the Irish situation? How did varying countries respond to acute housing poverty in their cities? Did the social and moral effects of bad housing result in the rise of the labour movements, and was there a political dimension to any of these housing policies, and if so what repercussions did this have?

There were several points of comparison across Europe in relation to the housing conditions of the poor and working classes up to 1930. Chief amongst these factors was the operation of a free housing market, the protection of vested landlord interests, and the reluctant but gradual intervention of the state in the housing question. In general, the development of housing policies was focused mainly on large cities, and often relied on the borrowing of ideas or policies from other countries. Housing crises often prompted political and economic change, but for the most part the changes that took place in the supply of proper housing reflected changes in the social and economic conditions of individual countries. In the fifty years between the heyday of Bismarck and the aftermath of the Great War, distinct state housing-policies emerged throughout Europe. These strategies mostly arose from a state welfare policy, with varying degrees of effectiveness. Government intervention ranged from the direct provision of housing by local authorities, backed by state loans, to the establishment of state housing banks or societies, which concentrated funds into large working-class projects.<sup>81</sup> Britain led the way in terms of directly funding municipal housing, a strategy which was found to some extent in all European countries, although building societies were predominant in

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<sup>79</sup> Colin Pooley, ‘Patterns on the ground: urban form, residential structure and the social construction of space, in Martin Daunt (ed.), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain, iii, 1840-1950* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 451.

<sup>80</sup> Adams, *The making of urban Scotland*, p. 155.

<sup>81</sup> Pooley, ‘Housing strategies in Europe 1880-1930: towards a comparative perspective, in Pooley, (ed.) *Housing Strategies in Europe*, p. 328.

Belgium and France. Later schemes used public money to stimulate the private sector, promoting home ownership by way of indirect subsidies and tax incentives.

Influenced by the social policies of Bismarck's united Germany, many social reformers and governments came to realise that the issues of housing, sanitation and overcrowding had to be addressed at national, legislative and financial levels. The innovative policy of *Staatssozialismus* or 'state socialism' pioneered by the German chancellor Bismarck in 1881 was an attempt to appeal to, and appease, the burgeoning working class of the new German Empire, and to undermine support for the emerging social democrats. Designed to ward off the revolutionary socialist ideals of Marx and Engels, these remarkable German policies pioneered social insurance programmes and legislation in the areas of health, labour, disability and pensions. But despite these initial steps towards a welfare state, founded on economic liberal principles, there was to be no state intervention in the German housing market until after WWI. The 'remarkable improvement of housing standards in German towns up until 1914', was primarily due to the efficiency of a market that 'remained within the hands of small private builders and entrepreneurs'.<sup>82</sup>

From the 1880s to the 1930s, the housing strategies of various continental European countries were often of a temporary nature. Few countries continued large-scale housing measures for more than a few years, as all governments were fairly consistent in their fundamental belief in the private housing market. Governments intervened in the housing markets only in times of crises.<sup>83</sup> One factor across Europe which consistently influenced the nature of housing policy, was the rise and fall of different political parties, and their social policies relating to housing, which formed part of their ideological stance. Pooley, writing comprehensively on the subject, argues that most governments viewed intervention as merely an attempt to remedy localised and short-term housing problems, and politicians were reacting to social pressure in order to gain political capital.<sup>84</sup>

Before World War I, state policies were limited. Britain was to the fore with early legislation on sanitation and building regulations, but few other countries had any meaningful strategies or housing policies. France had no direct intervention until after 1918, but the Dutch parliament passed a significant housing act in 1901, partly inspired

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<sup>82</sup> Teutenberg and Wischermann, 'Germany', p. 244.

<sup>83</sup> Pooley, 'Housing strategies in Europe: towards a comparative perspective, p. 328.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

by a long humanitarian and religious tradition in Dutch life, and under the influence of organised labour movements.<sup>85</sup> Belgium had a public debate on the provision of working class housing from the 1850s onwards, arising from the unrest of 1848, and the recognition of poor housing conditions in the industrialised coalfield areas. The state passed a significant housing act in 1889, which promoted a house-owning working class, via a building-society loans scheme. Between 1894 and 1914, this successful policy allowed 63,000 Belgian families to buy or build a house, but these were mostly for the better-paid workers.<sup>86</sup> Further state intervention came in 1919, when a new act expanded the position of state-backed building societies, in order to provide low-cost accommodation, following the great destruction of towns and cities during the bombardments of World War I.<sup>87</sup> But neither of these strategies had any meaningful benefits for low-waged Belgian labourers, who had no hope of saving money to apply for loans.

Some examples of the lack of state intervention housing can be seen from Portugal, where in the fifteen years after the 1910 revolution, the state constructed public housing for the first time. Only 1,145 dwellings were constructed, all of them in Oporto and Lisbon. This figure contrasts sharply with the 1,000 houses built in Sligo town between 1926 and 1948, also with state aid. The state housing strategy in post-revolution Portugal was singularly ineffective, concentrating on Oporto and Lisbon, with a combined population of 600,000 living in sub-standard housing. Policies also ignored the 5 million people who lived in the rural areas. Low cost housing in Portugal was supplied mainly by the private sector, which frequently constructed poor quality housing.<sup>88</sup> By the 1930s and 1940s sub-standard, informally-built accommodation was the norm for most Portuguese urban families, a situation which continued into the 1970s.<sup>89</sup>

In Sweden, the change in population patterns and urbanisation were especially marked in the period after 1890. The population of people living in the five largest towns increased to 15 per cent in 1880 and to 32.5 per cent in 1930.<sup>90</sup> The last decade of the nineteenth century saw a transition from a rural-based crafts and handicraft industry to a

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<sup>85</sup> Niels Prak & Hugo Priemus, 'The Netherlands' in Pooley (ed), *Housing Strategies in Europe*, p. 185.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>88</sup> Manuel C. Teixeira, 'Portugal', in Pooley (ed), *Housing Strategies in Europe*, pp 268-96.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 292-3.

<sup>90</sup> Strömberg, 'Sweden', pp 11-39.

modern manufacturing industry. The larger towns became home to substantial industries, with subsequent in-migration. The creation of parliamentary government in 1917 led to a 'sphere of common interest' between industry and the state. The labour movement also became more influential, chiefly in towns, but the pattern in the countryside was distinctly different. Massive emigration by Swedes, (mostly farmers), to the United States after 1860 was due to land reform which created larger, more economical farms. In Sweden's cities, as in Britain, the workers migrating to towns found high rents, a housing shortage, and poor conditions, a situation which persisted right through the 1920s.<sup>91</sup> After this date, a state-subsidised housing programme became a central policy of a new government, led by the Social Democrats. Economic recession in 1932 led Sweden's government to channel enormous amounts of state-aid into public house building, in the hope of generating employment and stimulating the national economy. The intervention of central and local government in the housing market became an important feature of the 'new active economic policy' after this date.<sup>92</sup> Many co-operative housing schemes were built in Swedish cities, a form of self-help aided by interventionist policies, that became a central tenet of the long tenure of the Swedish Social Democrats.

Germany is frequently touted as leading the way in European social policies after 1870, and Clemens Wischermann has indicated that 'the most profound influence on urban development in the nineteenth century came from the adherence to liberal economic principles', especially from the Prussian state.<sup>93</sup> However, this social policy did not always extend to the housing sphere, and initial urban expansion in German cities – notably Hamburg – up to the early 1860s, was mostly a spontaneous development, with no restrictions or regulations on building activity.<sup>94</sup> Restrictions, when they did come, were mostly intended as guidelines, rather than regulatory, and official regulations did not necessarily influence urban development. What Germany did have, however, was a long tradition of city-states and fortified towns, many of which experienced dense patterns of settlement and poor housing long before the industrial revolution. Multi-storied buildings were frequently heavily inhabited, and many German cities entered the

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<sup>91</sup> Strömberg, 'Sweden', p. 25.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Clemens Wischermann, 'Changes in population, development urban structures and living conditions in nineteenth-century Hamburg, in Richard Lawton and Robert Lee, (eds), *Population and society in European port cities, c. 1650-1939* (Liverpool, 2001), p. 299.

<sup>94</sup> Teuteberg and Wischermann, 'Germany' p. 242.



industrial age with a ‘heavier concentration of inhabitants than is generally assumed’.<sup>95</sup> Hamburg was one of these cities, with a long-standing dense settlement pattern in the *Altstadt* or old city, adjacent to the port. This was not to change until urban renewal and replacement in the central port areas after 1883.<sup>96</sup> Almost 24,000 people were forced to vacate their old dwellings and were thrown to the mercy of a private housing market, moving to newer areas of the city. Following a devastating cholera epidemic in 1892, Hamburg initiated the greatest housing clearance programme in Germany prior to the First World War, when 20,000 people were resettled, mostly in peripheral areas. Town planning measures ensured a higher quality of homes and flats than similar cities in Britain, and Wischermann has noted that there was no marked spatial segregation in the city between native Hamburgers and the great influx of rural in-migrants flooding to the municipal areas after 1860.<sup>97</sup> So prolific was the building of new houses and flats in Hamburg, that by 1895 there were 15,000 vacant flats in the city, a huge surplus. But there remained a shortage of small flats in other German cities right up to 1914, mostly due to the unpredictable demand, and construction lagged about three years behind requirement.<sup>98</sup> Housing shortages accelerated after the Great War, and by 1921, German cities had a shortfall of nearly 1.4 million flats. New housing regulations introduced after 1919 heralded increased control by the state of the housing sector.<sup>99</sup>

The Weimar Republic introduced public mortgage banks to direct public funds for house construction, and these institutions survive to the present day. For the first time the central German state ‘actively intervened in the housing market for socio-political motives’, taking over many of the aspects of the pre-war housing reform movement.<sup>100</sup> The great depression led to a collapse in house building, and a long period of rent control. But state housing policies only tackled the symptoms. The lack of affordable dwellings could only be addressed by an increase in building. In order to stimulate this, the government introduced the *Hauzinssteuer*, or house rent tax in 1924, which raised over 1.5 billion *reichsmarks* annually between 1924 and 1931, acting as a strong engine for the building industry.<sup>101</sup> The ideal of a single-family house failed to emerge in German cities, and the ‘modern self-contained flat’ became the main type of family

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<sup>95</sup> Wischermann, ‘Changes in population, ... in nineteenth-century Hamburg’, p. 271.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>98</sup> Teuteberg and Wischermann, ‘Germany’ p. 244.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

dwelling for the working class, both before and after the First World War. Overall, the policy of the German state in the provision of public housing can be seen as one of little interference before 1919, with increasing and deepening state involvement thereafter, a policy that continued up until at least 1960.<sup>102</sup>

France offers us another version of the European housing problem, with its slow rate and unequal spread of industrialisation, and late pattern of urbanisation.<sup>103</sup> Rural migration to French cities started in the 1850s, but was not to become pronounced until after 1880, and even then the pace of urban increase was steady rather than sudden. The dominant position of Paris in the French urban hierarchy, i.e the primate city, is reflected in the fact that one-fifth of the entire urban population of the state lived in the city by 1881. Paris's population had doubled between 1801 and 1851, and by that time the centre of the city was overcrowded, dark, dangerous, and unhealthy, with narrow winding streets, filled with waste, rife with epidemic outbreaks, and suffering from intense overcrowding in the inner *arrondissements*.<sup>104</sup> Social reformers referred to it as a 'workshop of putrefaction'. The transformation of Paris by Haussmann after 1850 resulted in cleared slums, improved sanitation and water supply, and public highways. But it also had the effect of decreasing the housing stock available to the poor, crowding them even tighter into the existing poor housing stock. Between 1850 and 1870, following the clearances, many of the displaced poor from the 'underbelly of Paris', moved to the suburbs on the northern and eastern sides of Paris, where they reproduced the 'grim conditions' of the old city. The rich moved westwards, and Paris became increasingly spatially segregated.

Some low-cost but adequate working class flats were erected in Paris by speculative builders up to 1880, but this supply came to an end with the economic crises of the late 1880s, when profits were not great enough to make the enterprise worthwhile. Subsequently, low-rent housing stock expanded little, but high-rent flats and housing grew rapidly.<sup>105</sup> Consequently, demand was high for low-rent dwellings as rural in-migration increased to Paris, and by 1900 there was an acute shortage of housing for the working class. With a move to the suburbs, and the down-grading of former town houses to tenement buildings, accommodation remained very bad in working class

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>103</sup> Michael Lescure, 'France' in Pooley (ed.), *Housing strategies in Europe*, p. 221.

<sup>104</sup> Anne-Louise Shapiro, 'Paris' in M. J. Daunton, (ed.), *Housing the workers*, p. 33.

<sup>105</sup> Lescure, 'France', p. 226.

central areas of the old city, a similar situation to that of Dublin.<sup>106</sup> In 1911 almost 43 per cent of Parisians were affected by bad housing conditions, and it was estimated that 62 per cent of the entire population of France lived in substandard housing in 1906.<sup>107</sup>

Similar to Ireland was the very late involvement of the state in French urban housing programmes, and the failure of liberals to find solutions to the housing problems. Landlords were powerful, and tenant rights were minimal. Fear of socialist agitation by 1882, and increasingly vocal working-class groups, triggered efforts by the national and municipal authorities to review the strategies for improving housing conditions in Paris.<sup>108</sup> However, the socialist threat faded a few years later, and so too did any attempt at housing reform. As late as 1913, despite being willing to entertain some active involvement in sanitary regulation, the French government declined to engage in slum clearances. No viable strategies for increasing the supply of working-class housing were devised by any of the reformers of the nineteenth century. Instead, they were paralysed by their acceptance of the ‘conceptual and structural constraints’ of adherence to the open market, and private enterprise.<sup>109</sup> However, the First World War, and the great destruction in northern France provided a ‘stimulus for change’. French policy makers and economists were conscious of the social and economic backwardness of the country following the upheavals of the period. They had learned much by the extensive state intervention in all matters economic and industrial during the four years of the conflict, and saw that economic modernisation and urban development were closely related. Selective state involvement in the French economy was encouraged, along with more enlightened social policies.<sup>110</sup> In the period between 1919 and 1931, over 300,000 low-cost dwellings were constructed in France, a low number in comparison to Britain’s 1.78 million dwellings. The total number of dwellings built during the inter-war period represented only 13 per cent of the housing stock in 1914, in direct contrast to the situation in Britain where it was 30 per cent, and the Netherlands where it was 60 per cent.<sup>111</sup> It was not until the 1950s that a comprehensive state policy for housing the very poor was formulated in the French Republic.

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>107</sup> Shapiro, ‘Paris’ p. 50

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Lescure, ‘France’, p. 232.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

In the inter-war period, Britain, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, France and Germany had substantial numbers of houses built by direct or indirect state intervention; however, these schemes housed no more than 15 per cent of families.<sup>112</sup> The outstanding exception was Scotland, where by 1941, almost 25 per cent of all housing was financed by the state, mostly in the large industrial areas of central Scotland. By 1930, most working-class families in Europe still had to meet their housing aspirations in the private rental market.

In southern Mediterranean countries, housing policies lagged far behind the rest of Europe. Greece during the period 1880 to 1930 was transformed by two major events: its territorial expansion after the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, and the Greek refugee crisis of the 1920s. Both of these events had repercussions on a society that had experienced no industrial revolution, and had no strategy for urban planning or expansion. Urbanisation in Greece was coastal, chiefly confined to Athens, Piraeus and Salonika, cities which attracted industry and the rural poor. These centres were home to some small public housing schemes, notably in Salonika's suburbs. But in Athens there were extensive custom-built suburban slums, where the poor were exploited by a combination of proportionally high rents and un-serviced jerry-built shacks. The private speculative market dominated the housing sphere, and there was to be no active government involvement in housing until after 1910.<sup>113</sup> A progressive period of social and political reforms in 1922 made little impact on the burgeoning slums, now flooded by ethnic Greeks fleeing the war in Turkey, and relative poverty increased as the refugees settled in the un-regulated ad-hoc suburbs ringing Athens. An informal situation arose, whereby a non-interventionist policy in regulating the slums, led to quasi-legal squatting and building on open land, and the piecemeal addition of more rooms to a quickly-built house, as the poor managed to channel small savings through small speculators and builders. These areas suffered however from a lack of basic infrastructure. Small-scale economic activities and co-operatives were encouraged by the government and by 1940 about three-quarters of the urban population lived in these irregular settlements. Their numbers were to increase greatly after the Second World War.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Pooley, *Housing strategies in Europe*, p 328.

<sup>113</sup> Lila Leontidou, 'Greece' in Pooley (ed.) *Housing Strategies in Europe*, p. 302.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

## Conclusion

This survey of the literature on European housing strategies has revealed many similarities in a selection of countries that grappled with the problem of extensive urban slums, arising out of the mass movement of people to the cities.

From the early nineteenth century industrialisation put enormous pressure on the social, economic and political fabric of towns and cities throughout continental Europe. Health, welfare and labour were key concerns; all of these concerns must be related back to the core issue of who was to provide the adequate shelter for the people, private enterprise, or the state? In Scandinavia, the Low Countries, Germany, France and Britain, the issue of housing the working classes was closely tied to political and social movements. In the last decades of the nineteenth century there were differing opinions as to the extent and nature of the housing problem, and this concern was to be found throughout Europe, albeit in varying degrees. Notwithstanding the great differences in the social and economic make-up of various states over this period, there exist many commonalities in both the nature of the housing problem, and in the methods used to confront it. Some of the recurring themes that are to be found throughout the Continent during this period, such as the speculative operation of the housing market, and the protection of a free market for vested interests, are not as obviously discernable in Ireland. However the issues of health, sanitary problems and housing ideologies and philanthropic concerns certainly were.

A sense of social responsibility was awoken during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; People of all classes came to accept that a modern civilized society must treat all its citizens as human beings, and give them the equal opportunity of satisfying their essential human needs.<sup>115</sup> Social reformers and governments alike focused energies on the reform and improvement of insanitary housing in which the vast mass of the poor lived.

An examination of the literature on European housing studies reveals five factors which explain the evolution of housing policies in the half century up to 1930. Initial housing strategies were 'rooted in poverty', which was both an urban and rural experience, but which was most evident in the large industrial cities. Commercial investment in low-

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<sup>115</sup> *Report on slum clearance in Dublin, 1938*, p. 3

cost housing was ‘unattractive’, in comparison with the financial rewards from the industrial and technological sectors of the economy. Intervention in the housing of the poor became a political issue only from about 1880 onwards, as labour movements grew, and wealthier citizens feared the consequences of infectious disease, sanitary evils and criminality, all associated with slum areas. The fear of rebellion and unrest posed a threat to the established social and political order.<sup>116</sup> These fears, as well as a growing sense of the benefits of regulating aspects of public life, led to the interventionist policies, which were implemented in most European countries after 1880. Housing strategies were set in a ‘popular and political ideology’, with the emphasis on private property, the single-family home and the principle of self-help. All these values were aimed at producing support for a ‘stable society and political consensus’.<sup>117</sup>

However, state intervention in housing was often seen as a limited, temporary situation, needed while the market conditions re-adjusted to the large volume of lower-paid workers, and lack of commercial investment in housing. Many countries, however, failed to realise that state intervention in the financing and supply of housing for the very poor would have to be a permanent state of affairs.<sup>118</sup> Pooley contends that short-term state involvement in housing actually did little to help those who were in most need.<sup>119</sup>

Tellingly, once the institutions and mechanisms of state intervention in public housing became established, it proved increasingly difficult to dismantle them.<sup>120</sup> Inter-war housing projects were the political grist to the mill of all European political parties during the 1920s and 1930s, although the great depression halted much of the work, particularly in Germany.<sup>121</sup> After the turmoil of the Second World War, state financed social support of the poor, unemployed and the sick were to be the new hallmarks of the modern state. Access to affordable public housing came to be seen as the yardstick of a democratic society.

In Ireland, the housing question was to take a different path than in continental Europe, or indeed Britain. The evolution of public housing in Ireland had a distinctly rural

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<sup>116</sup> Pooley, ‘Housing strategies in Europe: towards a comparative perspective’, p. 347.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346-7.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>121</sup> Teuteberg, and Wischermann, ‘Germany’, p. 246.

emphasis for most of the nineteenth century, and working-class housing policies became entangled in the complex political compromises that characterised Irish society until the start of World War One.

## Chapter 2

### Rehousing the urban poor in Ireland: the social, economic and legislative context 1881-1932

A government which wishes to promote national wealth, and increase the national resources should seriously grapple with the social condition of the labouring classes; their state should be its first care.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Any study of the nineteenth-century housing situation of the Irish poor, must take cognisance of the social, political and economic state of the country during that period. The fundamental changes which took place in Irish society during the first half of the nineteenth century were interrupted by the socio-demographical disaster of the Great Famine, and resulted in a transformation of Ireland's urban structure and form. The decades immediately following 1847 marked a clear departure from the pre-existing pattern of settlement, dominated by a large, dispersed rural populace, and instead seen an increase in the urban population, but with a very limited and localised development of an industrial base. Mass industrialisation was only responsible for a housing crisis in certain Ulster towns, such as Belfast. In other Irish cities and towns, with little or no industry, the poor continued to flock as they had done since before the famine, but with little hope of work or decent accommodation.

Ireland had its own distinctive, and varied version of housing reform. Uniquely, the first large public housing programmes took place, not in the urban areas, as in other British and European countries, but in the rural countryside, and commenced at a much earlier date.<sup>2</sup> This was the result of large-scale political land agitation from the 1850s, and is closely intertwined with the exceptional socio-economic conditions of the time. From the 1880s onwards, due to the powerful Irish Parliamentary Party's land reform agenda, the British Government was forced to intervene in rural Irish housing, and subsidise homes for the rural labourer.<sup>3</sup> A cohesive state-financed housing policy, impacting on urban areas, was not to emerge until about 1908, and the passing of the Irish Housing

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<sup>1</sup> William Hogan, *The dependence of national wealth on the social and sanitary conditions of the labouring classes; on the necessity for model lodging houses in Dublin, and the advantages they would confer on the community* (Dublin, 1849).

<sup>2</sup> F.H.A. Aalen, 'Public housing in Ireland, 1880-1922' in *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1987), p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> Murray Fraser, *John Bull's other homes: state housing and British policy in Ireland, 1883-1922* (Liverpool, 1996), p. 21.



Act, which officially gave a central financial subsidy to local authorities, enabling the erection of houses by the municipality.<sup>4</sup>

A limited public-housing policy originated with the new Free State government after 1922. However, building the ‘national home’ would remain a ‘decidedly rural affair’,<sup>5</sup> as the state focused on the policy of making owner-proprietors of the rural labouring class. Significantly, a new departure in Irish urban housing principles was enacted in 1931, with the passing of the Housing of the Working Class Act. Following a change of government in early 1932, the act was amended, and directed at those who endured the poorest housing conditions. The new De Valera government of Fianna Fáil then promulgated an innovative public housing policy through the 1930s and 1940s, which altered irrevocably the face of Irish provincial towns.

This chapter will briefly examine the social and economic situation of Irish urban housing, both before 1880 and after that date. The action or inaction of the municipal authorities will be looked at in the light of new legislation. An overview of the raft of public legislation relating to health, housing and municipal government in Ireland, will be given, particularly where it relates to housing. The distinctive Irish political situation of the period will be noted in view of its crucial role in changing the face of rural housing, and its failure to bring the same success to the urban realm, in the pre-independence period. The advent of the Irish Free State, and the housing strategies pursued by the new Irish government will be examined, and the financial incentives which led to the great housing projects of the 1930s and 1940s will be discussed. In conclusion it will be asked if the housing of the Irish working class was more competently addressed by a native government than a British one, or if the massive re-housing of the people was merely a reflection of contemporary social policies and expectations of state and society in the 1930s.

## **2.1 Ireland’s long history of bad housing and poor health**

The housing of the people of Ireland has been a constant and consistent subject of comment for over two centuries; the focus of nearly all of this comment has been on the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>5</sup> Cathal O’Connell, *The state and housing in Ireland: ideology, policy and practice* (New York, 2007), p. 19.

vast multitude of the poor, and later on the low-waged labouring class. The social conditions of the Irish labouring classes during the nineteenth century were abysmal at worst, scarcely tolerable at best. Travelling visitors of the period were horrified by the abject poverty of the masses, although their comments were mostly confined to rural dwellers.<sup>6</sup> At this time, most people's lives were marked by poverty; it was not unique to urban dwellers. Prior to the introduction of the Poor Law in 1838, Dublin in particular was often seen as a 'destination for the desperate,' which attracted the poor in search of work, and as contemporaries argued, due to the dozens of charities and welfare bodies that proliferated before the famine.<sup>7</sup>

In comparison with the smaller agricultural countries of western Europe, Ireland had a significant urban-rural divide in the early nineteenth century. Fourteen per cent of the Irish population lived in towns, compared to 20 per cent in Denmark, 10 per cent in Sweden, and just five per cent in mountainous Switzerland.<sup>8</sup> Similarly to these other countries, the urban population was very unevenly divided, both in terms of the distribution of urban settlements across the country, and also in the nature of the individual towns. There was a high percentage of quite small towns, with limited urban functions, but urban centres were almost absent from the western regions of Connacht and parts of Ulster, which were singled out as the 'extensive and densely populated parts of the country which were given over to subsistence agriculture'.<sup>9</sup> In the 1841 census, the counties of Cavan, Donegal, Fermanagh, Galway, Monaghan, and Mayo had no greater than five per cent of their total population residing in census-defined 'civic districts', or urban centres with a population over 2,000 inhabitants. Leitrim had no settlement exceeding that number. Jones Hughes labelled these areas as the 'the peasant refuge regions which had never known any form of urban living'.<sup>10</sup> This demographic imbalance was greatly exacerbated in the post-famine period of massive population decline. Economic development was held back mostly due to Ireland's peripheral location and lack of the type of natural resources such as coal and iron-ore, which fuelled the industrial revolution elsewhere in Europe.

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<sup>6</sup> Eoin Burke (ed.), *'Poor Green Erin': German travel writers' narratives on Ireland from before the 1798 Rising to after the great famine* (Frankfurt am Main, 2012). See also, Henry D. Inglis, *A journey through Ireland 1834* (London, 1836).

<sup>7</sup> Richard Lawton and Robert Lee, *Urban population development in Western Europe from late-eighteenth century to the early-twentieth century* (Liverpool, 1989), p. 185

<sup>8</sup> Tom Jones Hughes, 'The origin and growth of towns in Ireland' in *Irish University Review*, vol. 2, no. 7 (Autumn, 1961), pp 8-15, at p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

YEAR	Clonmel	Drogheda	Dundalk	Gabway	Kilkenny	Sligo	Tralee	Wexford	Total
1841	13,505	17,300	10,782	17,275	19,071	12,272	11,363	11,252	112,820
1851	15,204	16,847	9,842	23,787	19,975	11,047	13,759	12,819	123,280
1861	10,572	14,740	10,360	16,967	14,174	10,693	10,309	11,673	99,488
1871	10,112	13,510	11,327	15,597	12,710	10,670	9,506	12,077	95,509
1881	9,325	12,297	11,913	15,471	12,299	10,808	9,910	12,163	94,186
1891	8,477	11,873	12,499	13,800	11,048	10,274	9,318	11,545	88,834
1901	10,167	12,760	13,076	13,426	10,609	10,870	9,867	11,161	91,936
1911	10,209	12,501	13,128	13,255	10,514	11,163	10,300	11,531	92,601
1926	9,056	12,716	13,996	14,227	10,046	11,437	10,533	11,879	93,890
1936	9,391	14,495	14,686	18,285	10,237	12,247	10,285	12,247	101,873
1946	9,861	15,715	18,562	20,370	10,289	12,926	9,900	12,296	109,919

**Figure 2.1. Population of country towns selected for study, 1841-1946. Extracted from the various Censuses of Ireland, housing and population returns, 1841-1946. Figures refer to the municipal or civic districts of each borough only, and do not include the population of the rural portions of each boroughs.**

In contrast with Britain, Ireland had neither rapid industrialisation, nor an influx of population to urban centres; at heart it remained a rural country, its urban framework dominated by the two large cities of Dublin and a rapidly-industrialising Belfast. In 1841 the population of the island was in excess of 8 million, with the largest urban concentrations in Belfast and Dublin. Despite the tendency of the various urban councils to overlook the social condition of their poor, the problem became overwhelming as the century wore on. In 1854, a pamphlet read at the monthly meeting of the Royal Dublin Society broadly proclaimed that, ‘The amelioration of the working classes has been justly called the great economic question of the future, and is one which deserves of our increasing attention’.<sup>11</sup> The problem was indeed to receive attention from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, but despite the tranche of reports and commissions, the desire for reform was simply not matched by political will or financial incentives. Housing the urban poor or working classes was to become the greatest unlooked-for challenge for the city and town councils of the Victorian period. Despite an initial population increase in Irish urban centres during the famine, many Irish towns actually lost their varied social and economic base in the post-famine decade and experienced population decline or stagnation.<sup>12</sup> (See Figure 2.1). The small proportion of people living in the major towns outside of Dublin and Belfast is

<sup>11</sup> Cheyne Brady, *The practicability of improving the dwellings of the labouring classes, with remarks on the law of settlement, and removal of the poor* (London, 1854).

<sup>12</sup> Kevin Hourihan, ‘The cities and towns of Ireland, 1841-1851, in John Crowley, William .J. Smyth, and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the great Irish famine* (Cork, 2012), p. 254.

illustrated by the returns from the 1841 census, on the eve of the famine. The total population of the island was 8.17 million, and just over 592,000 people lived in urban centres of more than 10,000 people. Therefore just over seven per cent of the Irish population could be considered urban in 1841, but this percentage was to grow substantially in the aftermath of the famine. It is clear from many contemporary sources that efforts at improving the housing of the urban poor in the nineteenth century were concentrated almost exclusively on Dublin and Belfast, with a vast gulf in the rate of success.

<b>County Boroughs</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Towns</b>	<b>Population</b>
Dublin	232,796	Clonmel	13,505
Cork	80,720	Drogheda	17,300
Belfast	75,308	Dundalk	10,782
Limerick	48,391	Galway	17,275
Waterford	23,216	Kilkenny	19,071
<b>Total</b>	<b>460,431</b>	Sligo	12,272
		Tralee	11,363
		Wexford	11,252
		Derry	15,196
		Newry	11,972
		Armagh	10,245
		<b>Total</b>	<b>150,233</b>

Figure 2.2. Population of country towns selected for study, 1841, comparing figures with the larger cities or 'county boroughs', Extracted from Census of Ireland, Housing and population returns, 1841. Figures refer to the municipal or civic districts of each borough only, and do not include the population of the rural portions of each boroughs. This graph illustrates the proportion of the urban population that lived in the second tier of Irish provincial towns, which was still only about a third of the combined population of the five main cities. Waterford, though classed as a city, only had a population comparable to a larger provincial town.

One commentator on Ireland observed in 1861 that, 'the population for the most part was ill-housed', and that was certainly a fair reading of the census returns of that year.<sup>13</sup> (See chapter 3). In 1861, there were 993,233 inhabited dwellings in Ireland, and a total population of 5.76 million, with an average persons-per-house density of about 5.8 persons. Of course the reality was much starker, with the urban poor and low-waged crowded into tenement buildings in Dublin, and inhabiting the thatched cabins lining the approach roads and courtyards of the provincial towns.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas E. Jordan, quoted in 'A weighted index of quality of life for Irish children; 1841, 1851, and 1861' in *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1996), pp 47-73.

In the immediate post-famine decades, there was very little contribution towards housing the urban working classes made by private or voluntary bodies, although some philanthropic activism did take place. Notable amongst these were the efforts in the 1850s of Thomas Willis<sup>14</sup> and the clergyman, Thomas Jordan, who commenting primarily on Dublin, clearly identified poor housing as a major social problem, and advocated for improvement. Jordan, in particular, drew connections between housing squalor, destitution, and social improvement:

It is generally allowed that the dwelling or the house accommodation is closely connected with the improvement and elevation of the occupier. Let any one become acquainted with some of the poorer classes in the streets in which they generally live, and let him try to point out the duty of charity, the evil of drunkenness, or let him dwell on higher interests, ... he will find the most serious obstacles to his teaching in the state of things around him; that the wretchedness by which he is surrounded certainly does not open the poor man's mind to charity and love....<sup>15</sup>

Jordan also noted that the, ‘complaint with regard to house accommodation in Ireland is very old and very common. Indeed, few writers on the history or the state of our country have failed to mention the wretchedness of our dwellings’.<sup>16</sup> Municipal corruption, political manoeuvring and lack of a solid financial rate-base in Irish towns and cities also hindered good development. Frank Cullen notes that these limitations impacted strongly on the corporations in Dublin and Cork, particularly in the early nineteenth century, with few new building projects being commenced to replace the decaying housing stock.<sup>17</sup>

While there were several underlying reasons for the Irish housing crisis, the dominant political philosophy of laissez-faire led to inaction on the problem. The governing class ‘did not conceive it to be their responsibility to engage actively in house provision’, and conversely in many instances, actually benefited from the hardships of the poorer classes.<sup>18</sup> Numerous town and city councillors, like other successful middle-class businessmen, engaged in property speculation and development, and were frequently

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Willis, *Facts connected with the social and sanitary condition of the working classes in the City of Dublin, with tables of sickness, medical attendance, deaths, expectation of life, &c. together with some gleanings from the census returns of 1841* (Dublin, 1845).

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Jordan, ‘The present state of the dwellings of the poor’, in *Dublin Statistical Society*, ii, part viii (1857), pp 12-19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Frank Cullen, ‘The provision of working- and lower-middle-class housing in late nineteenth-century urban Ireland’ in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. 111C (2011), p. 243.

<sup>18</sup> Cullen, ‘The provision of working- and lower-middle-class housing’, p. 243.

the owners of sub-standard property and tenement buildings in the major towns and cities. Many middlemen were also involved in the business of property rental and acquisition. Hence, in Irish towns and cities, provision for the large-scale re-housing of the poor was slow to get underway.<sup>19</sup> The low-waged earning power of the mass of unskilled labourers precluded any attempts to rent quality dwellings, and ensured the perpetuation of the slums. Despite lip-service paid to the philanthropic societies which looked for ways to ease the plight of the poor, in many cases it was often large property-owners and ratepayers who blocked legislative and municipal attempt to clear slums, as they feared any diminution of their incomes. Ultimately, it was ‘political factors, rather than a perceived need for housing that were the critical drivers’ of urban housing reform in Ireland.<sup>20</sup>

### **‘Poor housing equals poor health’**

The link between poor housing and ill health had received widespread public and official recognition since 1842, when Edwin Chadwick, social reformer and poor law commissioner, undertook his study of the inhabitants of the worst types of dwellings in England.<sup>21</sup> Startlingly, he found that the average life expectancy of a person living in a basement in the Liverpool slums was calculated at just 15 years. The report of the results of his survey, *The sanitary conditions of the labouring class*, (1842), scientifically demonstrated the link between poor living conditions, disease and life expectancy. Chadwick unequivocally stated that the lack of public health was directly attributable to the living conditions endured by the poor, and he stressed the urgent need to improve them:

..Disease, wherever its attacks are frequent, is always found in connexion with the physical circumstance above specified, and that where those circumstance are removed by drainage, proper cleansing, better ventilation and other means of diminishing atmospheric impurity, the frequency and intensity of such disease is abated; and where the removal of such noxious agencies appears to be complete, such disease almost entirely disappears...The formation of all habits of cleanliness is obstructed by defective supplies of water...[and] the annual loss of life from filth and bad ventilation are greater than the loss from

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<sup>19</sup> Aalen, ‘Public housing in Ireland’, p. 175.

<sup>20</sup> Padraic Kenna, *Housing law, rights and policy* (Dublin, 2011), p. 53.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Mandler, ‘Chadwick, Sir Edwin (1800–1890)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5013] accessed 19 Oct 2012].

death or wounds in any wars in which this country has been engaged in modern times.<sup>22</sup>

The findings of the report were greeted with shock and incredulity in the House of Commons, but government was moved by Chadwick's argument that the labouring classes could not contribute efficiently to an expanding industrial economy due to their poverty and poor health. Therefore it was argued that the improved health of the poor would directly benefit the nation as a whole. The report highlighted the fact that disease, uncleanness, under-nourishment, and poverty that had existed benignly for centuries in a dispersed rural society, became concentrated in the sprawling industrial cities, leading to widespread contagion, and a higher rate of morbidity and mortality. Chadwick argued for the need to improve the living conditions of the labouring classes, which were directly linked to poor health, spread of disease and shorter life span. Nonetheless, the one glaring weakness in all the improvements suggested by Chadwick's report was the cost of this infrastructure, and more importantly, who would pay for it? The financing of public improvements would be a defining issue for public health right up to the end of the nineteenth century. In Ireland, with a lower-functioning economy and little political clout relative to the rest of the union, the question was a moot one until the 1880s.

Arising out of Chadwick's exposure of the slums the Public Health Act (1848) was passed, though it only applied only to England and Wales.<sup>23</sup> Sanitary provision was its principal end, but it also attempted to regulate housing and building. Issues dealt with included regulating new houses to ensure that drainage, water closets, privies and ash-pits sufficed for the number of houses being built. This act was the first to link sanitary control to health issues, and attempted to provide a means to control or prevent the new working-class houses from descending into slums.<sup>24</sup> Most importantly, it was recognized that treasury funds would be required to conduct this transformation of society, and that private enterprise alone could not, or would not be up to the task. The first attempt by the state to enforce minimum standards in the provision of housing was the *Common Lodging Houses Act* of 1851.<sup>25</sup> This act, promoted by Lord Shaftesbury,

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<sup>22</sup> *Report to Her Majesty's principal secretary of State for the Home department, from the Poor Law Commissioners, on an inquiry into the sanitary condition of the labouring population of Great Britain; with appendices*, H.C. 1842 (007), xxvii, 1, p. 369.

<sup>23</sup> *Public Health (Ireland) Act* 1848, (11 & 12 Vict., c. 63).

<sup>24</sup> Stephen C. Moore, 'The development of working class housing in Ireland, 1840-1912: a study of housing conditions, built form and policy' (D.Phil. thesis, Colrairie, University of Ulster, 1986), p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> 14 & 15 Vict., (1851), c. xxviii.

empowered municipal authorities to regulate large boarding houses and prescribe minimum sanitary arrangements in these notoriously overcrowded dwellings, home to migrant town labourers. However, this act and its subsequent amendments had little effect in Ireland, where the local authorities simply ignored them.

### **Local government and urban housing in Ireland**

Interconnected housing and sanitary legislation in Ireland went hand-in-hand with similar legislation in Britain. However, there were some developments that were particular to Ireland, including a replication of powers in overlapping local government bodies, and the comprehensive growth of the local government administration in Ireland after the famine.

The nineteenth century witnessed a raft of acts governing the development of urban areas (see figure 2.4). Notable were the *Lighting of Towns Act* (1828), the *Towns Improvement Act* (1828), the *Towns Improvement Act* (1854), the *Public Health Act* (1878), and most crucially, the *Local Government Act* (1898), which shaped the modern local authorities.<sup>26</sup> These successive acts combined to produce improvements: several city boroughs and town corporations were to pass by-laws on matters ranging from cleaning and lighting to the control of nuisances. Before 1845, towns had their own by-law power to control building or development within their boundaries; these mostly took the form of private parliamentary acts or local acts. Stringent by-laws were needed to control speculative poor-quality buildings. However, most towns and cities exercised only a modicum of control over house building, and town commissioners accepted varying degrees of responsibility, with attendant results. Cork and Dublin passed 15 and 20 local acts respectively, between 1840 and 1890 on a wide range of health and sanitary matters, such as sewerage, building regulations and rubbish disposal.<sup>27</sup> But these were the exceptions; most urban authorities exercised almost no control over the nature of their house building, and a limited amount of control over sanitary issues. The Municipal Reform Act of 1840 drastically changed the political make-up of the older corporations throughout Ireland, and abolished many of them. Powers relating to sanitary issues were retained, but corporation finances were reformed, with bodies being

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<sup>26</sup> Moore, 'The development of working class housing in Ireland, p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 29.



enabled to levy municipal rates for the first time.<sup>28</sup> The *Towns Improvement Act* (Ireland) 1854, was a significant piece of legislation, and by 1863, had been adopted by more than 80 towns and municipalities.<sup>29</sup> The act gave supplementary powers to the reformed corporations, allowed town commissioners to raise taxes and rates for sanitary improvements, and allowed for the abolition of overlapping local bodies. The act applied to any urban area over 1,500 in population, and to the borough corporations. The Sligo Improvement Act 1869 was a direct result of the Towns Improvement Act, and allowed the corporation to abolish the parallel body of town commissioners and subsume their powers into that of the corporation itself.

The *Public Health Act (Ireland)*, 1878, was the most important nineteenth-century act dealing with local government and public health issues in Ireland, and is still partially in force today. It legislated for sanitary powers and paid sanitary officers to be allocated to each 'sanitary authority'. All new houses had to have water closets, earth closets, or privies. 'Scavenging', or domestic refuse disposal was made the duty of the local authority. The act regulated the provision of pure water, proper sewers, the cleansing and clearing of streets and drains, the lighting of streets, and the regulation of marketplaces and slaughterhouses. The rise in the incidence of infectious disease and its disregard for class differences meant that the minimum provisions of this act were generally adopted and applied enthusiastically. The power to enact by-laws meant that local authorities now had the ability to inspect, remove, and demolish insanitary buildings in contravention of these laws. Both Irish and British legislation gradually moved away from being permissive in nature to prohibitive, (i.e., laws that explicitly prohibited poorer types of materials, dwellings, drainage, sub-dividing, etc.), and local authorities were empowered not only to clear slums and demolish insanitary dwellings, but to finance and construct municipal houses themselves. Significantly, towards the end of the nineteenth century, it became accepted that the municipal councils had a right – and sometimes a duty – to build housing and to be the manager and landlord of them. The rise of public responsibility led to a reform of the legislative framework, and central government gradually extended its role in sanitary and public health matters.

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<sup>28</sup> Virginia Crossman, *Local government in nineteenth century Ireland* (Belfast, 1994), pp 79-80.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

## 2.2 Irish urban housing issues, 1880 to 1926

At the start of the twentieth century, Ireland had about 1.3 million inhabitants living in urban areas. There were quite clear differences in the development of the urban form and therefore housing policies, between the industrialised north-east, and the remainder of the island. The two large cities of Dublin and Belfast in 1901, had populations of 305,000 and 350,000 respectively.<sup>30</sup> Cork, the third largest city on the island, had 76,000 people in 1901, with the ports of Limerick and Derry each holding about 40,000 people.<sup>31</sup> Waterford, the most important harbour on the southeast coast, was smaller, and home to around 24,500 inhabitants, making it more akin to a provincial town. These six cities accounted for over 65 per cent of the total urban population at the start of the twentieth century. The affluent suburbs of Dublin, physically near, but administered as separate townships, were also quite populous. Between them Pembroke, Kingstown, Rathmines and Rathgar had a total population of almost 84,000.<sup>32</sup> The large country towns of Galway, Kilkenny, Dundalk, Sligo and Clonmel, languished far behind, with populations ranging from 10,000 to 14,000.<sup>33</sup> In north-east Ulster, the industrial towns of Lurgan, Lisburn, Portadown, Ballymena, and Newtownards all had populations ranging between 10,000 and 11,000, and were firmly in the economic orbit of Belfast.<sup>34</sup> Armagh and Newry, at a far-enough remove from Belfast to still be considered 'provincial', had populations of 7,600 and 12,405 respectively. All of Ulster's towns had a higher quality of housing than the remainder of the country.

### Dublin

Dublin, the 'deposed capital' was by 1880 a very different place than it had been in 1801.<sup>35</sup> The splendour of eighteenth-century Dublin, with its Georgian terraces, tall town houses, large squares and fine public buildings, decayed sharply after the Act of Union. The flight of the resident Anglo-Irish aristocracy along with their money and social influence reduced Dublin to the status of a regional city rather than national

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<sup>30</sup> Extracted from the *Census of Ireland, 1901*, General Returns.

<sup>31</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1901*, vol. iii, p. 2; Municipal borough only figures.

<sup>32</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1901*, vol. i.

<sup>33</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1901*, vols. i and iv.

<sup>34</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1901*, vols. i and iv.

<sup>35</sup> Mary E. Daly, *Dublin, the deposed capital 1860-1914: a social and economic history* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cork, 1985).

capital.<sup>36</sup> The growth of the middle-class suburbs, particularly those to the south of the city, further accelerated the decay of Dublin by the end of the nineteenth century as the remaining gentry abandoned their town houses for the green and pleasant outlying areas such as Pembroke, Rathmines, Rathgar, Blackrock, Killiney and Kingstown. This move led to greater social and geographical segregation, and a loss of revenue to the city of Dublin, as the new suburbs remained resolutely outside the administrative and rate-paying boundaries of the city until the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup> Mary Daly argues that the nationalist Dublin corporation chamber became almost a substitute for an absent Irish parliament, acting as a forum for wider political concerns and neglecting the proper work of local government, that of housing, sanitary concerns, and water supply.<sup>38</sup>

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Dublin was considered comparatively worse than London in relation to the condition of the poorer classes. The worst parishes in London seemed like ‘a paradise compared to the worst areas of Dublin, for vice, filth and wretchedness’.<sup>39</sup> The poor of the city, always numerous, became the dominant demographic in the area between the canals. By 1891, the population of Dublin city between the canals was almost 245,000; however the suburbs housed over 100,000 people, an immense increase from 30,000 inhabitants sixty years previously.<sup>40</sup> Dublin also had the dubious honour of being the ‘place of last resort’ for many of the country’s poor. As the arrival of new migrants from the countryside to Dublin increased, the authorities struggled to cope with the growing demand for housing and improved sanitary requirements. Dublin was the only Irish county to experience a gain in population between 1841 and 1851.<sup>41</sup> Its putrid slums even drew the attention of Fredrick Engels, as being ‘among the ugliest and most revolting in the world’.<sup>42</sup> The city’s exceptionally high proportion of very poor people was encultured to ‘extremely

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<sup>36</sup> Jacinta Prunty, ‘Improving the urban environment. Public health and housing in nineteenth century Dublin’ in Joseph Brady and Anngret Simms (eds.), *Dublin through space and time* (Dublin, 2001), p. 166.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>38</sup> Mary Daly, ‘Late nineteenth and early twentieth century Dublin’ in Harkness and O’Dowd (eds), *The town in Ireland* (Belfast 1981), p. 229.

<sup>39</sup> Jacqueline Hill, *From patriots to unionists - Dublin civic politics and Irish protestant patriotism 1660-1840* (Oxford, 1997), p. 198.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Killeen, *Historical atlas of Dublin* (Dublin, 2009), p. 128.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 126-7. Also 1841-1851 census returns. This figure refers to the county of Dublin as a whole, rather than the County of a City of Dublin, that is, the urban area under the jurisdiction of the Corporation. The population of many of the rural areas of county Dublin fell drastically in the same period.

<sup>42</sup> As quoted in Murray Fraser, *John Bull’s other homes*, p. 64.

low standards of accommodation'.<sup>43</sup> It is easy to see then, why the plight of the poor - along with their attendant vices, poor health, bad housing, and meagre income - dominated much of the contemporary debate on public health. In Dublin slum housing often took the form of rented rooms in large sub-divided houses, the tenement building. By 1901 Dublin had the undesirable status of being the worst-housed and unhealthiest city in Britain or Ireland.<sup>44</sup> Belfast at the same period had an ample supply of self-contained, family dwellings, at a moderate rent, although the houses themselves were tightly-packed terraces, reminiscent of the industrial towns of northern England. In 1901, there was a vast disparity between the proportion of one-roomed tenements in Belfast and the corresponding proportion in Dublin. Almost 37 per cent of Dublin's 21,747 families were living in one room, as opposed to Belfast, which saw a mere one per cent or 697 families occupying just one room; and of this total almost half were families of one person.<sup>45</sup>

In Dublin, philanthropic organisations contributed a total of 5,271 dwellings, housing 24,561 people by 1914.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, Mary Daly has judged the contribution of Dublin corporation to the city's housing as 'not insignificant', and by 1914 it had housed 1,385 families, about 7,500 people, proportionately higher than the record of London County Council in the same year.<sup>47</sup> Despite this favourable record, the dwellings catered only for the more secure and prosperous tenants, who could afford the higher rents. By the time of the 1913 housing inquiry, it was estimated that Dublin still required between 14,000 and 20,000 new houses.<sup>48</sup> It was also recognised that the city's housing problem could never be cured, without 'exceptional state intervention', which the Westminster government declined to do, believing that responsibility for health and housing lay primarily with the local authorities. Ultimately, they feared setting a precedent.

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<sup>43</sup> F.H.A., Aalen, 'The working-class housing movement in Dublin, 1850-1920,' in M. J. Bannon (ed.), *The emergence of Irish planning, 1880-1920* (Dublin, 1985), pp 131-88.

<sup>44</sup> Aalen, 'Public housing in Ireland, 1880-1921', p. 186.

<sup>45</sup> R.E. Matheson, 'The housing of the people of Ireland during the period 1841-1901' in *Journal of the statistical and social inquiry society of Ireland*, xi, part lxxxiii (1902/1903), pp 208-9.

<sup>46</sup> Daly, 'Late nineteenth and early twentieth century Dublin', p. 242.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>48</sup> *Report of the departmental committee appointed to inquire into the housing conditions of the working classes in Dublin*, H.C.1914, [cmd 7272/7317], xix, p. 452.

## Belfast

Belfast had been a small port in the early 1800s prior to its industrialisation, when its population was about 20,000, but experienced rapid growth after that period, and had a population of 100,000 by 1851. Prior to 1860, the housing conditions of the poor in Belfast were no better than those in Dublin; Cullen notes that in many cases they were actually worse.<sup>49</sup> The rapid growth of the city and the bustle of business hid the filth, over-crowding and squalor which was part of everyday life:

upwards of 3,000 houses are without any yards of any description... The great majority of the poorer class of houses ...consist of four rooms...each of seven to ten foot square...in two storeys.... and not infrequently, so many as eighteen or even twenty persons sleeping [within them]..The great number of open ditch-sewers, the vast extent of damp, un-drained common, the repeated 'running up' of tenements...must at once attract the attention of even the most careless visitor....<sup>50</sup>

Prior to 1850, many new streets in Belfast were laid out by the mill and factory owners, in order to construct housing for their workers. Much of this housing stock was situated in the urban core.<sup>51</sup> By the 1840s, Belfast had already introduced a series of by-laws and improvement measures, to ensure that the prosperous and expanding city had a sanitary housing stock.<sup>52</sup> Crucially, at the start of the 1860s, Belfast was about to embark on a different urban journey than the rest of the towns on the island. The impact of rapid and massive industrialisation in the second half of the nineteenth century was to greatly exacerbate the differences between Dublin and Belfast. The city addressed the issues associated with the explosive growth of town housing by passing a local act in 1864, which put the responsibility for building repairs onto the landlord, in buildings of under £8 valuation.<sup>53</sup> With an overwhelmingly Protestant population, much of the financial capital of Belfast was in the hands of Unionist businessmen, who invested heavily in production, sustaining the industrial nature of the city.<sup>54</sup> Belfast far out-paced the rest of Ireland in machinery manufacturing, heavy industry and marine engineering by the 1890s.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Cullen, 'The provision of working- and lower-middle-class housing', p. 222.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in, Peter Froggatt, 'Industrialization and health in Belfast in the early nineteenth century' in Harkness and O'Dowd (eds.), *The town in Ireland* (Belfast, 1981), p. 156.

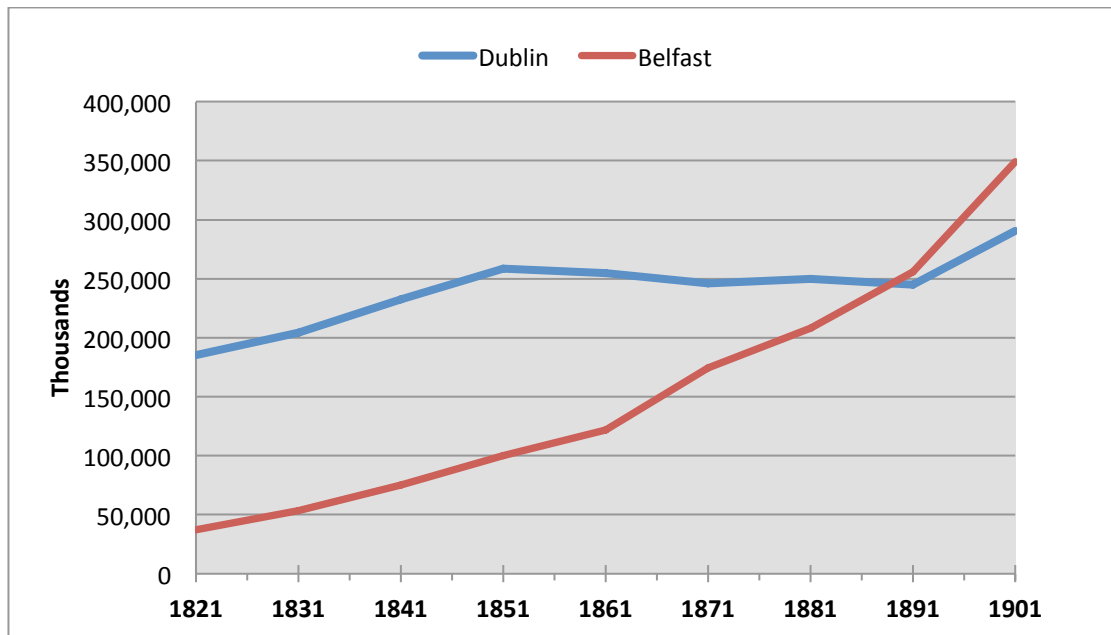
<sup>51</sup> Raymond Gillespie and Stephen A. Royle, *Belfast, part I, to 1840*, Irish Historic Towns Atlas, no. 12 (Dublin, 2003) p. 10; also, Royle, *Belfast part II, 1840 to 1900*, Irish Historic Towns Atlas, no. 17, (Dublin, 2007).

<sup>52</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 62.

<sup>53</sup> Moore, 'The development of working class housing in Ireland, 1840-1912', p. 32.

<sup>54</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 62.

<sup>55</sup> Ollerenshaw, 'Industry; 1820-1914', p. 83.



**Figure 2.3:** Population of Belfast and Dublin (as constituted under the 1898 Act), from 1821-1901. Source: *General Reports of the Census of Ireland, 1821-1901*.

The population of Belfast expanded rapidly throughout the nineteenth century. In 1807, only around 23,000 people lived in the town, which comprised about 3,500 houses;<sup>56</sup> by 1841, it had swollen to 70,000 inhabitants and 12,000 houses.<sup>57</sup> By 1911, the population had exploded to 385,000 people, an increase of ten per cent from a decade earlier.<sup>58</sup> The proportion of Ulster's population living in towns in 1911, (nine county province), was far in excess of the remainder of the country. Out of a total population of 1.6 million over 621,500 inhabited urban areas with populations of 2,000 or over, almost 40 per cent.<sup>59</sup> Harland and Wolff shipyards in Belfast port, alone employed 9,000 men by 1900. This growth in population had to be met with sufficient housing, and this was helped by the sale of the large Donegall estate at the Encumbered Estates courts in 1849.<sup>60</sup> Developers and builders quickly snapped up large blocks of land, constructing rows of new red-brick working-class housing outside the historic town core. Rents were also manageable, with houses 'graded in size at rents between 2s 6d and 5 shilling per week'.<sup>61</sup> This was a crucial factor in keeping slum conditions at bay. In the second half

<sup>56</sup> John Dubourdiue, *Statistical survey of the county of Antrim: with observations on the means of improvement; drawn up for the Royal Dublin Society*, i, (Dublin 1812) p. 506.

<sup>57</sup> Extracted from the *Census of Ireland for 1841*, General returns, p. 286.

<sup>58</sup> Gillespie and Royle, *Belfast, part I, to 1840*, IHTA, No. 12, p. 10; also, Royle, *Belfast part II, 1840 to 1900*, IHTA, no. 17, p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> *Census of Ireland 1911, General Report*, p. 2, table 4.

<sup>60</sup> Cullen, 'The provision of working- and lower-middle-class housing', p. 239.

<sup>61</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 63.

of the nineteenth century, over 2,000 new streets were laid out in Belfast, and almost 50,000 new houses were built between 1880 and 1900.<sup>62</sup>

The expanding workforce was employed in the port-based trade of empire: shipbuilding, engineering, tobacco processing, commerce and finance. At the close of the Victorian era, Belfast was, by a considerable margin, the largest city in Ireland, and the fastest growing urban area in the British Isles. The census of 1901 reveals that 83 per cent of the housing stock in Belfast was composed of first and second-class dwellings, a situation not experienced in any other Irish city.<sup>63</sup> Belfast had a strong reforming council from the 1870s, and enacted effective by-laws to cope with the great infrastructural problems caused by the rapid industrialisation of the town. It was also a wealthier city, with better access to loans, raising of rates, and speculative monies.<sup>64</sup> The differences in 'attitude, regulation and approach' along with the very real divergences in economics, resulted in the unbridgeable gulf between the housing situation in Dublin and Belfast by 1919.<sup>65</sup>

### **Other Irish cities**

In 1880, other Irish cities were politically and economically weak, and only in Ulster, in particular Belfast, was speculative building for the working classes commercially attractive. In Derry, 1,337 new artisans' houses, with direct water supply were constructed in the decade to 1884, and the 'scourge of the tenement house' was largely eliminated.<sup>66</sup> Cork and Limerick, the two largest cities in the south, also suffered from appalling housing and extensive slums. By the mid- nineteenth century in Cork, the low-lying inner city was home to unhealthy, crumbling overcrowded tenements, lacking adequate sewerage and water supply, and prone to flooding.<sup>67</sup> Low-waged families crowded into slum quarters, typified by accommodation in St. Peter's Ward, where there was an average density of 238 persons per acre in the 1850s.<sup>68</sup> The royal commission on housing reported that the tenements were a disgrace, and there had been 'scarcely any improvement' in the city's housing stock in the half-century between

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<sup>62</sup> Royle, *Belfast part II, 1840 to 1900*, IHTA, p. 17.

<sup>63</sup> Cullen, 'The provision of working- and lower-middle-class housing', p. 241.

<sup>64</sup> Aalen, 'Public Housing in Ireland, 1880-1921', p. 189.

<sup>65</sup> Moore, 'The development of working class housing in Ireland', p. 402.

<sup>66</sup> Cullen, 'The provision of working- and lower-middle-class housing', p. 243.

<sup>67</sup> Maura Cronin, 'From the "flat o' the city" to the top of the hill: Cork since 1700' in Howard B. Clarke (ed.), *Irish cities* (Cork, 1995), p. 61

<sup>68</sup> Cullen, 'The provision of working- and lower-middle-class housing', p. 241.

1835 and 1885. The corporation had ‘never built any houses, nor can they afford to’, and councillors requested that the government would lend them money at no more than two per cent interest in order to construct affordable municipal housing. Speculative builders were unable to build for a clientele that could only afford 1s 6d per week for rent. However, the corporation had managed to clear over 500 houses between 1882-85, under the Cross Act of 1875.<sup>69</sup>

In 1885, Cork had 1,732 tenement houses holding a population of 22,000 souls.<sup>70</sup> By 1892, the total number of houses provided by Cork Corporation was 346, principally single storey red-brick terraces. By the time of the 1908 Act, the corporation had erected 546 houses, adding to a small number of private schemes. By 1926, of the entire population of 80,000, some 18,645 lived in ‘unsatisfactory conditions’, with 8,675 inhabitants’ housed in 719 tenements, an average of 12.06 persons per house.<sup>71</sup> The worst areas of the city were near St. Finn Barr’s cathedral, and in the maze of insanitary lanes that made up the area known as the ‘Marsh’. It was said in the 1930s, that ‘God had abandoned the lanes of Cork city, and so had the corporation’.<sup>72</sup>

Limerick city was notorious for its slum housing; the biggest problem was the large numbers of people living in filthy and disease-ridden slums, without adequate sanitation or even the basic necessities of life. The city had the second worst housing problem in Ireland after Dublin, and its rates of disease, infection and infant mortality were high.<sup>73</sup> Social housing was introduced to Limerick in 1874, when Fr. Edward Thomas O’Dwyer founded the Limerick Labourer’s Dwellings Company, which constructed a scheme of fifty labourer’s houses in the Watergate area. A further seventy houses were constructed by the Thomond Artisan’s Dwellings Company, which he was also instrumental in founding.<sup>74</sup> At the hearing of the royal commission on housing in 1885, it was admitted that the city corporation had ‘little-used’ any sanitary or clearance powers given to it under existing legislation. Witnesses stated that most of the tenements were left as they

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<sup>69</sup> *Third report of Her Majesty’s commissioners for inquiring into the housing of the working Classes*, H.C. 1884-85 (Cd. 4547), xxxi, ff 185-202, p. viii.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, ff 185-202, p. viii.

<sup>71</sup> Michael A. Dwyer, ‘Housing conditions of the working classes in Cork city in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century’ in *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, vol. 17, (2012), p. 97.

<sup>72</sup> Frank O’Connor, *An only child* (London, 1961), as quoted in Dwyer, ‘Housing conditions of the working classes in Cork city’, p. 97.

<sup>73</sup> John Logan, ‘Frugal comfort: housing Limerick’s labourers and artisans, 1841-1946’ in Liam Irwin and G. Ó Tuathaigh, (eds.), *Limerick history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county*, (Dublin, 2009), p. 568.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Morrissey, *Bishop Edward Thomas O’Dwyer of Limerick, 1842-1911* (Dublin, 2003), pp 24-25.



were, ‘sheltering the city’s poor’ and this situation was largely due to the ownership of such tenements by members of the corporation.<sup>75</sup>

Limerick corporation did embark on public schemes in 1887, under the terms of the 1885 act, and over two decades later a total of 102 houses had been completed, at a cost of £13,500.<sup>76</sup> But the slum conditions persisted, and the *Irish Builder* noted in 1911 that there was nowhere in the country ‘with worse slum dwellings than Limerick, or where proper homes for the poor are more necessary’.<sup>77</sup> By 1913, twenty per cent of Limerick’s housing stock was comprised of 1,050 tenement houses and another 15 per cent was one-roomed houses or flats.<sup>78</sup> The corporation managed to construct only about 130 houses for the working class up to 1920.<sup>79</sup> Over 1,400 families still inhabited one-roomed accommodation in 1926, and in the 1929 housing survey, conducted by the Free State, Limerick had an estimated need for over 3,200 houses.<sup>80</sup> The post 1932 corporation was more pro-active in the public housing realm, spurred on by better financial terms, but as late as 1946 Limerick still had almost 8 per cent of its population living in one-roomed dwellings.<sup>81</sup>

### 2.3 Political agitation and legislation

Political agitation was slow to mobilise in support of the Irish urban poor. The crucial feature of housing policy in nineteenth-century Ireland was the contrast in the official response to urban and rural housing needs. For much of the nineteenth century, the political focus was on the land question, and the eternal question of Irish home rule. The Land League became a huge moral force advocating on behalf of the Irish tenant, with the aims of securing ownership for tenant farmers, and preventing unjust evictions. The ‘Land War’ of 1879-1882 un-nerved the Westminster government, which linked the growth of crime in Ireland with the growth of the Land League.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Third report of Her Majesty’s commissioners for inquiring into the housing of the working classes*, H.C. 1884-85 [Cd. 4547], xxxi, p. 31.

<sup>76</sup> *The housing of the working classes Act (Ireland)*, Return showing particulars as to the action of local authorities etc. H.C. 1906, [cmd 337], xcvi, p. 843.

<sup>77</sup> *Irish Builder*, 18 Mar, 1911, p. 68

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>79</sup> Introduction to, *Plans and drawings for corporation housing*, Limerick 1886-1932 (L/HG/HC/1).

<sup>80</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1929-30*, appendix xxvii, pp 209-12.

<sup>81</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1946*, vol. iv, Housing.

<sup>82</sup> R. V. Comerford, ‘The land war and the politics of distress, 1877-82’ in W.E Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, vi: Ireland under the union, II, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 2010), pp 42-51.

The series of land acts, starting in 1881 with Gladstone's second bill, and culminating in the Wyndham Land Act of 1903, went a substantial way towards satisfying the demands of the Land League.<sup>83</sup> The agitation of rural labourers in the 1870s, and the extension to them of the parliamentary franchise in 1884, made them into a powerful political force. Legislation for improving their housing did not reflect real concern for their conditions, but was seen as part of a political bargaining tool. Murray has argued that the housing of rural labourers can be seen as a 'response to the economic and political problems engendered by an uneven process of modernisation'.<sup>84</sup>

The burning question of land tenure and security in Ireland was essentially solved with the completion of the 1909 Birrell Land Act, which resulted in a social and economic revolution that changed the face of the Irish countryside.<sup>85</sup> The end of landlordism and the creation of a peasant proprietorship was the culminating glory of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Rural housing legislation was enacted under a series of Labourer's Acts, passed between 1883 and 1911. These acts legislated for the provision of proper, sanitary housing in the rural districts, and was aimed at re-housing the rural agricultural labourer, who was for the most part a landless tenant. Local authorities used state financial aid to demolish many of the primitive one-roomed 'cabins' in which agricultural labourers had traditionally lived. Their occupants were rehoused in simple, slated cottages, mostly located along the dense rural road network, and primarily in the south and east of the country. Hence, by 1914, as a consequence of political agitation, Irish rural labourers were amongst the best housed of their class in western Europe. This was the first major public housing initiative in these islands, conducted as it was on a grand scale, and providing real results. By 1921, local authorities had erected in the region of 50,000 new labourers' cottages through the countryside. But the conditions of the working-class in Irish towns and cities was dire, with very little amelioration in sight.

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<sup>83</sup> L. P. Curtis, Jr, 'Ireland in 1914', in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vol. vi, p. 162.

<sup>84</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 60.

<sup>85</sup> H.D. Gribbon, 'Economic and social history' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vol. vi, p. 274.

<b>Legislation on Irish Urban Planning.</b>
<b><i>Pre 1922 Legislation</i></b>
Lighting of Towns Act 1828
Towns' improvement Act 1828
Benefit Building Societies Act 1836
Poor Relief Act (Ireland) 1838
Poor Relief Act (Ireland) 1847
Public Health Act 1848
Common Lodging houses Act 1851
Towns' Improvement Act 1854
Dwellings for the Labouring Classes (Ireland) Act 1860
Labouring Classes Dwelling Houses Act 1866
Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Act 1868 ( <b>Torrens Act</b> )
Public Health Act 1872
Building Societies Act 1874
Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Act of 1875 ( <b>Cross Act</b> )
Public Health Act 1875
Public Health Act (Ireland) 1878
Labourers (Ireland) Act 1883
Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890
Local Government Act, 1898
Small Dwellings Acquisition Act, 1899
Housing of the Working Classes (Ireland) Act 1908 ( <b>The Clancy Act</b> )
Housing (Ireland) Act 1919
<b><i>Post 1922 Acts</i></b>
Housing (Building facilities) Act 1924
Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1931
Housing (Finance and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1932

**Figure 2.4. An outline of important legislation relating to health, sanitary, and housing matters in Ireland, 1828-1932.**

### **Urban housing legislation**

Following the success of the Labourers' Acts, Fraser argues that further pressure from the Nationalist parties at Westminster culminated in a policy-change which produced the 1908 Irish Housing Act, better known as the Clancy Act. The urban housing question was to become the leading social issue in Ireland up until the outbreak of World War I.<sup>86</sup>

The earliest urban housing legislation introduced into Ireland was in the form of the Labouring Classes (Lodging Houses and Dwellings Act), 1866. However, it had little impact, and only £190,000 was advanced in loans by 1886, with merely 3,416 dwellings

<sup>86</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 61.

erected.<sup>87</sup> The better-known ‘Torrens Act’, or Artisans’ and Labourer’s Dwellings Act, followed in 1868, with the intended purpose of encouraging local authorities to repair or demolish insanitary dwellings which were neglected by their owners. While this was the most significant piece of housing legislation to date, it still proved ineffective, as Aalen remonstrates: ‘In towns where the population was stable or growing, and the poor congregating, urban authorities were reluctant to use the Cross and Torrens Acts because of the increase in overcrowding which evictions caused, and the need to depend on private or philanthropic developers to erect new dwellings’.<sup>88</sup> The Torrens Act contained too many clauses safeguarding the rights of property owners and limited the power of the local authority in terms of its financial spending.

Richard Cross, the Home Secretary, piloted the Artisans’ and Labourers’ Dwellings Act –better known as the Cross Act– through parliament in 1875. He had been heavily influenced by the ideals of Octavia Hill, the philanthropist and social reformer, who was a driving force behind the development of social housing for the poor in England.<sup>89</sup> The Act was at first inadequate in Ireland, as only cities with a population of over 25,000 could avail of it, which excluded all towns outside Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Limerick.<sup>90</sup> Despite the reservations of Cross, the legislation was amended for Ireland in 1882, allowing towns with a population of 12,000 and over to avail of the terms of the act. The act ‘boosted urban housing reform’ in Dublin and Cork, where some schemes were constructed but it had little or no effect in the provincial towns. Unlike the previous Torrens Act, the Cross Act provided for slum clearance on a large scale, and recognised re-housing as a public responsibility. It was the first to advocate the clearance of poor areas of housing, and to invest this responsibility in municipal government.<sup>91</sup> Ultimately it failed partly due to the lack of central subsidies, and the inordinate expense required in compensating owners of overcrowded buildings.

### **Royal Commission on Housing 1885**

The main drivers of legislative change to assist Irish urban housing reform came as a reaction to the appalling conditions in Dublin’s working class tenements in the last decades of the nineteenth century. It was increasingly clear that any legislative reform

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<sup>87</sup> *59th Annual report of the Commissioners of public works in Ireland for the year ending 31 March 1891*, H.C. 1890-91, [Cd. 6480] xxv, p. xxxi.

<sup>88</sup> Aalen, ‘Public housing in Ireland, 1880-1921’, p. 191.

<sup>89</sup> Peter Malpass and Alan Murie, *Housing policy and practice* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., London, 1994) pp 32-3.

<sup>90</sup> Fraser, *John Bull’s other homes*, p. 71.

<sup>91</sup> Moore, ‘The development of working class housing in Ireland’, p. 35.

aimed at housing the poor would be ineffective without a financial ‘carrot’ to incentivise the municipal authorities. The failures of all previous legislative attempts to promote any level of house building for the very poor was addressed by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Housing of the Working Classes in 1885.<sup>92</sup> Dublin, by 1880 had ‘consigned over one-third of its population to conditions of intolerable overcrowding and, most often, ill-health’.<sup>93</sup> This substantive 1885 housing report is the most important and comprehensive statement on the reform of public health and housing to emerge from parliament in the late nineteenth century. The commission consisted of sixteen members, and they interviewed 41 witnesses in Dublin between 23 and 27 May 1885. The evils of the slums, which were by then common knowledge, were more systematically and authoritatively exposed in the voluminous reports and surveys.<sup>94</sup>

The main themes of the report were overcrowding and health. Public health became better defined in medical terms, as opposed to being socio-economically framed, as the mechanisms of disease became better understood.<sup>95</sup> The Royal Commission’s report is pivotal in that it shows for the first time that a shift in attitudes had occurred; it was acknowledged that no amount of legislation would reform the housing situation, where the political will to do so was absent, and there was little or no compulsion or finance from the state.<sup>96</sup> It recognized quite clearly the failure of previous legislation, and provided a foundation for future direction. Most importantly, it identified that it was the poverty of the people that was the prime cause of their housing difficult, and not merely the opposite.<sup>97</sup>

Urban housing was further legislated for under the series of Housing of the Working Classes acts, commencing in 1885, and applied to Britain and Ireland together. The 1890 amended Act<sup>98</sup> was a more comprehensive measure which repealed practically all of the preceding acts and authorized local authorities to build houses for workers and

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<sup>92</sup> *Third Report of the royal commission on the housing of the working classes (Ireland), 1885*, H.C., 1884-5 [C.4547], xxxi, pp187-202.

<sup>93</sup> Joseph V. O’Brien *‘Dear Dirty Dublin’: a city in distress, 1899-1916* (Los Angeles, 1982), p. 126.

<sup>94</sup> Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin Slums, 1800-1925, A study in urban geography* (Dublin, 1998), p. 144..

<sup>95</sup> *Third report of Her Majesty’s commissioners for inquiring into the housing of the working classes Ireland 1884-85*, H.C. 1884-85 [C.4547] [C.4547-I] [C.4402-III].

<sup>96</sup> Prunty, *Dublin Slums*, p. 144.

<sup>97</sup> *Third report of Her Majesty’s commissioners for inquiring into the housing of the working classes Ireland 1884-85*, H.C. 1884-85 [C.4547] [C.4547-I], pp 50-55.

<sup>98</sup> *An act to consolidate and amend the acts relating to Artizans and Labourers dwellings and the housing of the working Classes, (1890)*, 53 & 54 Vict., (1890), c.70.

their families living and working in urban areas. It ‘empowered urban local authorities to secure slum clearances, repair or demolition of insanitary houses, and to provide working class dwelling houses’.<sup>99</sup> The act authorized borrowing in the same manner as public health purposes, and if income from rents were not sufficient to meet the loan repayments, then the loss would be met out of the rates. A fundamental aspect of the housing acts was the granting of powers of borrowing money to the local authorities. This meant that large schemes could be supported through the financial system. The 1890 Act however, did not offer very favourable terms to the various town authorities, and as a result very little was actually built.

### **Political organisation by urban tenants**

The rights of urban tenants became a ‘significant political issue’ after 1880, in the wake of large-scale land reforms and the freedoms granted to rural tenants. This disparity in tenant rights was a source of tension between the rural tenant, and his urban counterpart, excluded as they were from the concessions of the 1881 Land Act.<sup>100</sup> Urban tenants also demanded reforms, similar to those of the rural tenant, and in many towns and villages, landlords still held extensive urban property rights. Middlemen speculators were also a particular problem in several towns, demonstrating that exploitation of tenants was not just the preserve of the landed class.<sup>101</sup> Susan Hood has argued that by the mid-nineteenth century, low rents and long leases had ‘encouraged speculative tenants – who did not always occupy the premises they leased from the ground landlord – to avail of these low rents, and re-lease to under-tenants’.<sup>102</sup>

Evictions for non-payment of rents were frequent and urban tenants were just as vulnerable as rural tenants to unfair rents, harsh leases, and lack of compensation for improvements.<sup>103</sup> Urban dwellers also felt a sense of betrayal from the Land League and its members, feeling that they had not assisted urban supporters of the land reform movement.

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<sup>99</sup> M.G. Ellison, *Papers on the law in Ireland relating to the housing of the working classes* (Dublin, 1913), pp 1-5.

<sup>100</sup> Brian J. Graham and Susan Hood, ‘Town tenant protest in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland, in *Irish Economic and Social History* vol. 21 (1994), pp 39-57, at p. 43.

<sup>101</sup> Brian Graham and Susan Hood, ‘Social protest in late nineteenth-century Irish towns - the House League movement’ in *Irish Geography*, vol. 29, no. 1, (1996), p. 3

<sup>102</sup> Susan Hood, ‘The significance of the villages and small towns in rural Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’, in Peter Borsay and Lindsay Proudfoot (eds.), *Provincial towns in early modern England and Ireland; change convergence and divergence*, (Oxford, 2002), pp. 241-263, at p. 257.

<sup>103</sup> Graham and Hood, ‘Town tenant protest’, p. 43

By the 1880s then, more affluent urban tenants and shopkeepers began to establish protest groups, aimed at agitating for similar reforms as had been won for the rural tenant. The House League movement, founded in Longford in 1885, was an attempt to emulate the successful policies of the Land League against evictions and high rents.<sup>104</sup> This short-lived political organisation was dedicated to the advancement of the Irish urban artisans and labourers. Its aims were clear: ‘we pledge ourselves to further every object which will give the artizan and labourer the rights which they have been so long denied; that we consider town tenants should be placed on equal footing in the legislation enjoyed by owners of land and that it is imperative a measure be introduced to place the tradesmen, labourer and shopkeeper in the same position as agricultural tenants’.<sup>105</sup> The League thus gave a voice to town tenants in the last decade of the nineteenth century who felt their concerns about urban affairs had been ‘neglected in the fusion of the land question with nationalist politics’.<sup>106</sup> For the first time there was an organisation that drew attention to the ‘distinctive grievances’ of urban tenants.<sup>107</sup>

There were two main centres of House League tenant protest; one in Longford, and the second centred in Limerick, north Cork and Kerry.<sup>108</sup> Nationalist in sentiment and politics, the House League had little impact outside its above-mentioned strongholds, and understandably had no impact at all in Ulster where town tenant grievances were plentiful. Brian Graham considers that branches of the League ‘only developed in cattle-grazing regions with well developed market-town networks’.<sup>109</sup> There were however, branches as far apart as Mayo, Wexford, Kerry, Carlow and Westmeath.<sup>110</sup> Sligo town did have a branch of the House League, but it is little mentioned in the papers of the day.

Pressure from Irish MPs in the House of Commons, in the wake of agitation from the House League, led to a Select Committee Report on Town Holdings in Ireland,

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>105</sup> *The Anglo-Celt*, 29 Sept. 1900, p. 8.

<sup>106</sup> Graham and Hood, ‘Social protest in late nineteenth-century Irish towns the House League movement’, pp 1-12.

<sup>107</sup> Susan Hood, ‘The significance of the villages and small towns in rural Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’, p. 257.

<sup>108</sup> Graham and Hood, ‘Social protest in late nineteenth-century Irish towns the House League movement’, p. 2.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>110</sup> Graham and Hood, ‘Town tenant protest’, p. 45.

convened in 1886.<sup>111</sup> This wide-ranging report gives an insight into the nuanced grievances in Irish urban centres during the period. Concern with middlemen and speculators, rather than just ground-landlords was one of the main themes, along with unfair rent increases and tenurial restrictions.<sup>112</sup> Tralee, in particular, suffered from a complex tenurial system, with multiple layers of middlemen between the occupier and the ground landlord. The 1886 report noted that some 300 houses in Tralee were occupied by 1,500 people on weekly tenancies. Many houses had fallen into disrepair, and the ‘intermediary interest would not take responsibility for urban improvement’.<sup>113</sup> A similar layer of middlemen leases also existed in Sligo, and was to prove a legal headache there when compulsory purchase orders were underway fifty years later. The tenor of the select committee witnesses make it clear that specific grievances were directed generally against middlemen, ‘who it was feared would replace the old landowning influence by raising rents and evicting occupying tenants’.<sup>114</sup> The role of so-called ‘head tenants’, or those who owned the ground leases from the landlord, was frequently seen as exploitative; many of these speculating tenants imposed far worse leasing terms on their sub-tenants, than they themselves had obtained from the ground landlord.<sup>115</sup> Rents were raised without any control, repairs were infrequently undertaken, and eviction was always a looming prospect. Most landlords were unable to force their head tenants to make any improvements, or to regain any control over the ground rent, due to the long nature of leases. The Select Committee concluded that ‘in many cases the bad state of town property in Ireland is owing to the middleman rather than the landlord’.<sup>116</sup> A proposal to allow occupiers to purchase their homes was not countenanced, and the parliamentary committee concluded that the grievances of most urban dwellers could not be separated from those of the rural tenant, and most urban areas could be treated as part of their agricultural hinterlands.<sup>117</sup> The government argued that instituting general reforms for Irish urban tenants was impractical given the great diversity in local grievances.

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<sup>111</sup> *Reports from Select Committees*, XV (1889). Sligo was not included in report.

<sup>112</sup> Graham and Hood, ‘Social protest in late nineteenth-century Irish towns - the House League movement’, p. 4.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>114</sup> Susan Hood, ‘The significance of the villages and small towns in rural Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’, p. 260.

<sup>115</sup> Graham and Hood, ‘Social protest in late nineteenth-century Irish towns - the House League movement’ p. 7.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7. (Select Committee, p. 390)

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*



Ultimately, despite some local success, the House League proved ineffectual, for a number of reasons. Most significantly, its membership never included the poorer urban tenantry; instead the branches were dominated by the ‘small town petty bourgeoisie, shopkeepers, traders and dealers’.<sup>118</sup> Many of these members frequently held multiple rental properties, and were effectively urban speculators themselves. Geographical distribution of branches was limited, and its social composition never really included the very poor labouring class.

But the league’s campaigning did force the hand of the Irish Parliamentary Party, who in 1886 laid a bill before parliament, aimed at extending the clauses of the 1881 Land Act to tenants in towns.<sup>119</sup> It was unsuccessful, and by 1887, the House League had all but petered out. A further ‘Town Tenants Bill’ was introduced by the IPP in 1900 aimed at securing fair rents, tenurial security and compensation for improvement. Politically divisive, this proposal was seen as giving an unfair advantage to Irish towns, particularly those outside Ulster, and impinging on the rights of landowners and lessors.<sup>120</sup> This bill was also defeated, but the failed parliamentary campaign for the reform of tenants’ rights led to the foundation of another, more successful, urban protest association, the Town Tenants’ league.

### **Town Tenants League**

Founded in 1904 in the wake of the failed parliamentary campaign for urban tenant’s rights, the Town Tenant’s League was a significant organisation that ‘lobbied for the rights of urban tenants in towns across Ireland’.<sup>121</sup> Modelled on the Land League structure, the association initially established a branch in every county to cater for its towns and villages. It was to function sporadically for over a decade and a half, finally dying out in the 1920s. The organisation claimed to represent ‘urban tenants of all social ranks’, from merchants to temporary short-lease tenants. Its principal aims were the expected ones; to ensure fair rents, fixity of tenure and improved legislation to protect the urban rental sector.<sup>122</sup> The league was similar in its social make-up to the older House League, with a large membership amongst the mercantile and commercial

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 9

<sup>119</sup> Graham and Hood, ‘Town tenant protest in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland’, p. 46.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>121</sup> Conor McNamara, ‘A tenant’s league or a shopkeepers league?: urban protest and the town tenant’s association in the west of Ireland, 1909-1918’ in *Studia Hibernica*, vol. 39 (2010), pp 135-160, at p. 135.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

class, but it did have, as one of its legislative aims, the housing of the urban workers in suitable accommodation, with reasonable rent. Nevertheless, it failed to attract any significant support from the urban poor.<sup>123</sup> Crucially Conor McNamara considers that the Town Tenants League was ‘perceived with suspicion by both nationalist politicians and organised labour’, which saw the organisation as a rival for urban votes.<sup>124</sup> While the League was active in many towns in Connacht and Leinster, it was less widespread in Munster, and had very little presence in Ulster. The great social issue of the urban poor – the provision of local authority houses at reasonable rents – was never fully reconciled with the membership of the association, which like its predecessor, consisted of a better-off mercantile class, and its politics were heavily influenced by this demographic. It would not, for example, countenance the raising of local rates to finance artisan housing for the workers, or tackle the problem of its own members being landlords and middlemen in their own right.

The League, dominated by members of the United Irish League, entrusted the parliamentary agitation of their cause to the Irish Parliamentary Party, and in 1906 the Town Tenants (Ireland) Bill was passed following a troublesome passage through the House of Commons.<sup>125</sup> The bill, (which had been in train before the founding of the TTL), contained several worthwhile clauses, including the ‘three F’s’, but the conditions of the bill were never very widely implemented, and it did not extend purchase rights to urban tenants. However, it did protect in law the urban tenant’s right to claim compensation of the improvements made to the rented property. But for the weekly tenants paying exorbitant rates for slum housing, the legislation was a failure, as it did not address the problem of exploitation of the poor urban worker.<sup>126</sup>

The Sligo Town Tenants League was founded on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1906. Ald. John Jinks was elected chairman, P.N. White, (a local chemist), as treasurer, and Messrs James Harte and R. Dunphy as honorary treasurers.<sup>127</sup> At a meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> July, the condition of the houses of the poorer classes was referred to by Ald. O’Donnell, who was to represent the corporation at the Town Tenants League ‘forthcoming conference’ in Dublin.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 136

<sup>125</sup> Graham and Hood, ‘Town tenant protest in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland’, p. 49.

<sup>126</sup> McNamara, ‘A tenant’s league or a shopkeepers league?’, p. 159

<sup>127</sup> *Irish Independent*, 9 July 1906.

<sup>128</sup> *Irish Independent*, 19 July 1906.

Branches were also formed in in county Sligo; Ballymote,<sup>129</sup> in February 1905 and Tubbercurry in November of the same year.<sup>130</sup>

It is significant to note the involvement from the beginning of John Jinks, a future TD, who would later be heavily engaged in the push for subsidised housing for the poorer classes, particularly after 1922. Sligo Corporation passed a resolution in May 1907 urging the government to pass an act which would grant the same level of aid to urban labourers as had been granted to the rural labourers. This they claimed would 'enable urban authorities to provide suitable housing accommodation for this much -neglected class'.<sup>131</sup> In November 1908, the mayor, Cllr. Flanagan, and Alderman Jinks were appointed as delegates to the all-Ireland conference of town tenants.<sup>132</sup> Jinks was appointed as the Sligo Corporation's delegate again in 1912.<sup>133</sup> The Sligo branch of the League appears to have been quite prominent in the national association, judging by the frequent mention of Sligo delegates chairing the national meetings.<sup>134</sup>

John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, made urban housing a main pillar of his political support for the Liberal government at Westminster in 1907.<sup>135</sup> He realised that this policy would sit well with the urban voters, and with the Town Tenants' League. Redmond announced this policy at a large rally in Sligo, in October 1907, where he had gone to support P.A. McHugh, MP, and accept the freedom of the borough.<sup>136</sup> 'I promise the artisans and labourers of the towns of Ireland, here today, that the Irish party will turn their full force onto this [housing] question... and to obtain money ...to provide decent habitations for the best Nationalists in Ireland, the artisans in her cities and towns'.<sup>137</sup>

The Town Tenants League went into decline after 1907, but many branches became active once again during the Great War, and there was a strong revival in county Galway towns in particular. But the grindingly slow pace of reform, and the level of activism required, resulted in the collapse of many branches after an initial surge of

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 Feb. 1905.

<sup>130</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 21 Nov. 1905.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 May 1907.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 Nov. 1904.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 July 1912.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 Nov. 1906

<sup>135</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 87.

<sup>136</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 29 Oct. 1907, p. 14.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 Oct. 1907, p. 15.

enthusiasm.<sup>138</sup> Lack of a clear policy at national organisation level, and the vastly different demands of the local branches led to its demise, and it was overtaken by national political events. Nationally, the TTL can be said to have been ‘bereft of commitment to those it claimed to represent’; McNamara has skilfully stated the obvious contradiction in small-town politics as a ‘combination of the domination...by a conservative mercantile elite, and the political docility of the urban poor’, which resulted in the plight of the very poor-housed labouring class being routinely sidelined.<sup>139</sup>

In Sligo in July 1915 there was a large demonstration by the Town Tenants League. The protest was led by the Mayor, Alderman Jinks, in reaction to the threatened eviction, by the local landlord, of a number of weekly tenants at Knappagh Road. The looming evictions had aroused considerable excitement locally, and a large force of police were drafted into the locality. The cause of the evictions stemmed from the landlord raising the rents of certain houses from 4 shillings to 6 shillings a week. Attempts were made to breach the cordon, but confrontation was avoided, when the mayor urged the protesters to move to the Town Hall where they held a rally in support of tenant rights.<sup>140</sup>

The events surrounding this protest were raised at the House of Commons several days later, when Thomas Scanlan, MP for North Sligo, asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Augustine Birrell, whether the Sligo protest was proclaimed illegal by him or not, and what were the grounds for this proclamation. Scanlon questioned if the ‘government was lending aid to landlords for the purposes of enabling them to exhort increased rents for the artisan classes’.<sup>141</sup> Birrell replied that he had indeed proclaimed the protest from taking place outside the house of the landlord who had been denounced, but that there was no impediment for the protest taking place at the Town Hall, which it had duly done.<sup>142</sup> Agitation continued in Sligo on a greatly reduced scale after 1916.

Soon after the foundation of the Irish Free State, a revived Town Tenants League sent a large delegation to meet the new ministers of the First Dáil to highlight the problems of urban tenants, including unfair evictions, high rents, decaying buildings and the ubiquitous middlemen. The delegation stressed the ‘multiplicity of interests’ in Irish

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<sup>138</sup> McNamara, ‘A tenant’s league or a shopkeepers league?’, p. 148.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>140</sup> *Freemans Journal*, 12 July 1915

<sup>141</sup> HC Deb. 15 July 1915, vol 73 cc1008-9.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

towns as regards the farming out of landlords' original ground rents to the middlemen speculators, 'each of whom extracts tribute in the shape of rent that it ultimately paid by the exertions and from the earnings of the occupiers'.<sup>143</sup> The delegation made little impact, and in fact the Minister for Local Government informed the Dáil in 1923 that he had no intention of introducing legislation specifically for town tenants. The urban voter, who once again felt neglected in favour of the rural tenant, directed much anger at government.

The issue of long leases came to the fore in Sligo in 1923, when tenants of the Ashley Estate (successors to Lord Palmerston), met in the Gilooley Hall, in June of that year, to consider the offer that was made to purchase their holdings. There was a desire of the tenants to become owners of their own properties. But they felt that the land-agent, Mr Good made it impossible to negotiate with the tenants. There was a proposal to fix a six, eight or ten year purchase on the homes. No agreement was reached that year.<sup>144</sup> In August 1923, the Sligo Town Tenants League passed a resolution condemning the actions of 'certain moneyed people', in endeavouring to purchase houses locally over the heads of occupying tenants, who had not the means to buy out their rented properties.<sup>145</sup> By November 1923, infighting appeared to be the order of the day, when one member of the national committee accused the Sligo branch of corruption, collecting rents from widow women, but not passing them onto the landlord.<sup>146</sup> A town tenant demonstration was held on the steps of Sligo Town Hall, as late as January 1929.<sup>147</sup> Meetings were however, sporadic, and at a meeting of the Sligo branch in September 1930, it was noted that no collections had been made for the previous two years. However, a large number of members were present at the meeting, seemingly due to the recent increase in rents by local landlords. A resolution was passed to petition the government to introduce the Town Tenants bill, and fix a fair rent on all houses constructed since 1926.<sup>148</sup>

Following an enquiry by a commission appointed by the Minister for Justice in 1926, a 'modest piece of legislation' was introduced in 1931, called the Landlords and Tenants Act. This act distinguished between private tenants' rights and the contemporaneous

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<sup>143</sup> Graham and Hood, 'Town tenant protest', p. 53.

<sup>144</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 9 June 1923.

<sup>145</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 3 Aug. 1923, p. 6

<sup>146</sup> *Leitrim Observer*, 3 Nov. 1923, p. 1.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 Jan. 1929, p. 4.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 Sept. 1930, p. 2.

shortage of housing, high rent demands, and the emerging drive by the state to house the poorer working-class in the provincial towns.<sup>149</sup> But the 1931 legislation did strengthen the position of urban tenants, allowing them a clearer method of purchasing the property outright, and introducing a legal review of tenancies and rent through the circuit court. This allowed long-sitting tenants, particular small shopkeepers and businessmen to renew tenancies without exorbitant rises in the rents at the time of renewal.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, by 1931 the matter of private tenants was moving in a different direction altogether, flowing the ‘Million Pound’ housing schemes, and the substantial grants from the state to assist the better-off private builder. The onus from 1932 onwards, would be the housing needs of the labouring classes. Following independence, the various branches of the League unified as the All-Ireland Town Tenants League, continuing to agitate on behalf of its members until about 1952.

The 1908 housing act, passed after much politicking between the Irish Party and the Liberal government, was not what Redmond had envisaged, but nevertheless was a major piece of legislation dealing with urban housing. This Housing of the Working Class Act (1908), commonly referred to as the Clancy Act, set up the first subsidy system for urban housing and also defined ‘working classes’ to include tradesmen, labourers, and other wage earners and self-employed persons such as hawkers, ‘whose income does not exceed thirty shillings’. Under this Act, the maximum repayment loan period for local authorities was set at eighty years, the Irish Housing Fund was established, and a sum of £180,000 invested. The Irish Local Government Board ‘predicted a surge of municipal house building’ under the act, and their expectations were fulfilled; by 1911 £150,000 had been lent to 24 urban authorities, and by 1914 over 80 of the Irish urban authorities had availed of loans totalling £950,000.<sup>151</sup> Fraser estimates that about 7,700 dwellings were erected by Irish municipal bodies by 1914.<sup>152</sup> This was proportionally seven times greater than the amount of public housing erected in British cities in the same period. Much of the development engendered by the act was to take place in the Dublin area, but with provincial towns also increasing their housing stock. Galway erected 194 houses, Kilkenny, 140, Drogheda, 116 and Wexford, 117 houses. Limerick and Waterford constructed 250 dwellings each by

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<sup>149</sup> Graham and Hood, ‘Town tenant protest’, p. 55.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>151</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 91.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

1914,<sup>153</sup> but disappointingly, both Sligo and Cork corporations constructed nothing under the act. Sligo corporation was, during this time, constantly on the verge of bankruptcy.<sup>154</sup> Cork corporation was also in political flux, at this time, following the local success of the AFIL (All for Ireland League), in the general election of 1910, which polarised the politics of the nationalist population, pushing more mundane matters aside.<sup>155</sup>

### **Post-war developments**

The intervention of the First World War meant the suspension of monies for housing schemes, and despite endeavours by the Irish Parliamentary Party to prepare for a post-war Irish housing campaign in 1918, the intervention of the War of Independence in January 1919 effectively ended British housing policy in Ireland. The strong commitment given to the formulation of a post-war Irish housing campaign by John Redmond's party was partially in the hope of fighting back against the rising power of the Sinn Féin movement by tapping into the desires of the working class electorate.<sup>156</sup> But the IPP was in terminal decline, and Sinn Féin would sweep to power in the general election of December 1918. The 1919 Housing (Ireland) Act provided substantial subsidies for housing, but actual progress on the ground was made difficult by tense dealings between the various local authorities and the Westminster government, due to the chaotic state of the country. A housing survey undertaken by the Local Government Board in 1919, indicated that about 42,000 urban houses were required.<sup>157</sup> However, planned schemes were unable to commence, and the amount of urban housing erected under the 1919 Housing act was very small.<sup>158</sup>

### **The 'Soldiers' Houses'**

Paradoxically the British government spent a substantial sum on housing in the Free State after 1921; this was in fulfilment of the Irish Land (Provision for Sailors and Soldiers) Act of 1919. This policy was aimed at providing cottages and urban houses for returning servicemen who had fought for the Empire in the Great War. Over 1,000 dwellings were erected after the passing of the act in 1919. Construction continued

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>154</sup> Padraig Deignan, *The Protestant community in county Sligo, 1914-1949* (Dublin, 2010), p. 362

<sup>155</sup> Joseph V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the course of Irish Politics, 1881-1918* (Berkeley, 1976), pp 201-2.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., pp 180-182.

<sup>157</sup> Mary E. Daly, *The buffer state: the historical roots of the Department of the Environment* (Dublin, 1997), p. 206.

<sup>158</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 206.

under the Free State government, in conjunction with a board of trustees, (the Irish Sailors' and Soldiers' Land Trust), and eventually almost 4,000 houses were built, the great majority in Leinster, Munster, and in the urban areas of Ulster.<sup>159</sup> The British Treasury set aside a sum of £1.5 million towards the scheme, and the Trust sanctioned a total of 3,673 houses, Northern Ireland getting 1,046, and the Free State 2,626. Sligo erected a scheme of twenty houses. The layout of the schemes was very much on the style of the 'garden city' ideas then being promulgated in Britain. Quality was generally high, although bathrooms were only seldom provided, mainly for ex-officers. Rents varied from about 4 shillings a week in rural areas to 9 shillings in the bigger urban houses. However, following a prolonged rent strike and in light of a Supreme Court case in 1932, the Free State government decided that the Trust had no legal power to charge rents, and no further houses were built in the South after that date.<sup>160</sup>

#### **2.4 Post 1922 – The housing policy of the Free State**

The great upheavals of the First World War, and the subsequent fight for independence in Ireland impeded the development of housing for over a decade. This inevitably resulted in an acute housing shortage, and a deterioration of existing poor stock by 1922. Despite all its socialist and republican leanings, the first Democratic Programme for Dail Éireann, drawn up in 1919, did not propose universal state housing for the people of the 'new republic'.<sup>161</sup> Even Arthur Griffith, the founder of the Sinn Féin party, was opposed to many social reforms on the grounds that they were 'extravagant and inefficient'.<sup>162</sup> Any demands for housing funds were not entertained while the country was in the throes of the War of Independence. After the signing of the Treaty, the Dáil addressed the issue by stating that Deputies understood the 'urgency of the housing problem, and they hope that at a later stage it may be found possible to make provision for affording financial assistance to local bodies in dealing with it'.<sup>163</sup>

By the mid-1920s, following the shortage of housing funds from the Provisional government, and the entrenched social and economic conservatism of the new ruling class, the cause of re-housing the urban poor had been removed to the back burner.

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<sup>159</sup> Aalen, 'Public Housing in Ireland', p. 186.

<sup>160</sup> Biographical background, TNA, <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/SearchUI/details?Uri=C14> accessed 12 December 2013.

<sup>161</sup> A. Mitchel and P. Ó Snodaigh, *Irish political documents, 1916-1949* (Dublin, 1985), p. 59.

<sup>162</sup> Fredrick W. Powell, *The politics of Irish social policy, 1600-1990* (New York, 1992), p.165.

<sup>163</sup> Quoted in Kenna, *Housing law, rights and policy*, p. 36.



Between independence and 1931, there was limited political interest in providing a major state-funded housing project in order to alleviate the slums.<sup>164</sup> This can be attributed to several factors: the sharp economic slump after the Great War; the drastic fall in agricultural prices, and the prudent ‘desire of the Cosgrave government to be seen to govern efficiently in the face of enormous difficulties’.<sup>165</sup> Government faced an economic reality whereby the state was independent in name, but still tied inextricably to Britain in terms of its currency and its external trade, with over 98 per cent of the Free State’s exports going to Britain in 1925. Ruth McManus argues that the ‘early years of the Irish Free State witnessed a particularly strong focus on the provision of quality suburban dwellings for all members of society’.<sup>166</sup>

But the emphasis was firmly on suburban and middle-class housing. In contrast, Fraser regards the housing policy of the Cosgrave government as ‘... an explicit orientation towards the provision of larger dwellings for better paid workers and the lower middle classes, on the grounds that the Free State simply could not afford to build for the very poor.’<sup>167</sup> Fredrick Powell, in his work on Irish social policies, puts it very succinctly, when he argues that ‘the import of political revolution had combined with a post-war depression, to further destabilise the already precarious living standards of the poor’.<sup>168</sup> By 1924 unemployment was over 34,000, and over 147,000 people emigrated between 1921 and 1925. Only the Labour party kept up the pressure on the state to start a slum clearance and re-building programme, with the opportunity to generate employment.

### **The ‘Million Pound Scheme’**

In March 1922, the provisional government came under political pressure from the Labour party on the housing issue. They were challenged to address a problem that was seen as of ‘vital importance’, and one which ‘nationalists had made much of in the days of British rule’.<sup>169</sup> Partially in acknowledgment of this fact that housing policy was the ‘greatest problem they had to tackle’, W.T. Cosgrave, then minister for Local Government, proposed the ‘Million Pound’ scheme, allocating a grant of £1 million to

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<sup>164</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 279

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278

<sup>166</sup> Ruth McManus, ‘Suburban and urban housing in the twentieth century’, in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* Vol. 111C (2011), p. 261.

<sup>167</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 280.

<sup>168</sup> Powell, *The politics of Irish social policy*, p. 166.

<sup>169</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 279.

help local authorities erect public housing, and to alleviate unemployment.<sup>170</sup> Cosgrove regarded the ‘subsidy on the basis of rent’ schemes as legislated for under the existing 1919 act, as ‘most undesirable, as most subsidies went to the most expensive houses, with the poorer classes not benefiting from this’.<sup>171</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal won the 1923 election partly on the promise of tackling the housing question.

This ‘Million Pound scheme’ was a grant set aside and allocated to municipal districts on the basis of their rateable valuation.<sup>172</sup> Local councils were obliged to levy a special housing provision rate of not less than one shilling in the pound, in addition to borrowing an amount about three times as great as the proceeds of the special levy. After this, the government would contribute double the amount raised by the local authority.<sup>173</sup> Of the 94 urban local authorities, 71 took advantage of this scheme, and loans to the amount of £994,000 were raised. In terms of numbers, between 1922 and 1928, about 2,100 houses, comprising of four and five rooms, were erected in the Free State at the average cost of £570 and £600. They were amongst the first post-war houses erected in the Free State, and were ultimately leased or sold to their occupiers.<sup>174</sup> Most of the subsidised houses were built in and around Dublin, but Sligo benefitted from a scheme of forty-four houses, at Ballytivnan and Cleveragh.<sup>175</sup> In terms of design, they were a huge improvement, with three bedrooms and a kitchen; larger houses had a parlour. However, due to the high rents charged on these subsidised houses, many councils sold them to occupiers, in order to avoid long-term losses.<sup>176</sup> This ‘tendency towards conservatism’ had a two-fold aim; it was intended to promote thrift and civic responsibility through ownership, and it absolved the state of the financial cost of the long-term maintenance of the dwellings.<sup>177</sup> Either way, the scheme was to prove of little benefit to those in most need.

The ideals for working class housing had changed over the decade since 1912, and the preferred designs and minimum standards were now heavily influenced by the British

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<sup>170</sup> S. J. Brandenburg, ‘Housing Progress in the Irish Free State’ in *The Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics*, vol. 8, no. 1. (1932), pp 1-10.

<sup>171</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 206.

<sup>172</sup> Fraser, *John Bull’s other homes*, p. 280.

<sup>173</sup> Brandenburg, ‘Housing Progress in the Irish Free State’, pp 1-10. Also the *First Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health, 1922-1925*, pp 77-81, and pp 158-160.

<sup>174</sup> Brandenburg, ‘Housing Progress in the Irish Free State’, p. 2.

<sup>175</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 23 May 1923.

<sup>176</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 208

<sup>177</sup> Fraser, *John Bull’s other homes*, p. 281.

‘garden city movement’, and the Tudor Walters Report.<sup>178</sup> Designs departed from the utilitarian back-to-back terraces of workers’ housing, and tended much more towards aesthetic layout of estates, with a lower housing density. An Irish housing manual was developed, providing plans for the typical layout of estates with a density of not more than ten houses to the acre.<sup>179</sup> Houses had wider frontages, small gardens, two-living rooms and three-bedrooms with minimum sizes. There were to be no shared sanitary facilities, and the inclusion of a bathroom was considered ‘essential’. Most local authorities adopted the four-or five room house as the standard of design during the 1920s.<sup>180</sup> Private developers frequently followed these same designs, although many thought the standard was too high, and only drove the price of houses higher.

### **The Housing Act of 1924**

Cumann na nGaedheal, under W.T. Cosgrave, formed the new minority government after the 1923 general election. The social and economic policies of the new Irish state have been described as ‘overwhelmingly conservative, frugal, austere and anti-urban’.<sup>181</sup> The obsession of the government with providing social stability and building a nation, resulted in a decade that was typified by low taxes, no trade barriers, minimal government spending, balanced budgets, and the ‘cheese paring’ of public spending.<sup>182</sup> Nevertheless, in 1924 a new Housing Act provided a grant of £250,000 to subsidise the building of 3,000 new urban dwellings, and in addition set aside a further £50,000 for the renovation of existing houses.<sup>183</sup> Fraser regards this policy as a ‘pale imitation of British housing policy’, and considers that from 1924 onwards the ‘Cosgrave government abandoned any pretence that it was trying to solve the housing problem’, instead offering a limited subsidy to private builders.<sup>184</sup> Even Cosgrave admitted in 1924 that it would ‘cost the Exchequer an estimated £14 million to provide 70,000 new houses at rents which working class families could afford’.<sup>185</sup> The urban housing situation was dire; in 1922 it was estimated that there were 21,000 families living in one-roomed tenements; by the time of the 1926 census that number had risen to 23,655.

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<sup>178</sup> McManus, ‘Suburban and urban housing in the twentieth century’, p. 260.

<sup>179</sup> Ministry of Local Government, ‘House designs prescribed by the minister for local government under the housing act 1924’, NLI, Catalogued in the consolidated list of government publications as K.4/3, K.4/4, K.4/5, K.4/6, K.4/7.

<sup>180</sup> McManus, ‘Suburban and urban housing in the twentieth century’, p. 261.

<sup>181</sup> O’Connell, *The state and housing in Ireland*, p. 18.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>183</sup> *The Housing (Building Facilities) Act, 1924*.

<sup>184</sup> Fraser, *John Bull’s other homes*, p.280.

<sup>185</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 210.

In all, 140,000 persons were living in one-roomed dwellings in 1926. Almost 50 per cent of the population lived in dwellings of three rooms or less.<sup>186</sup>

The 1924 Act, and indeed the housing policy of the Free State, must be evaluated against the stark economic background of the 1920s. Agriculture was the overpoweringly dominant sector, employing 53 per cent of the workforce. There was little scope for industrial and economic radicalism when industry in the Free State employed only 100,000 people, and there were 80,000 people unemployed.<sup>187</sup> The 1924 Act was the start of a long tradition of state assistance for private-sector housing, and the first time that the concept of rate remission was proposed as a stimulus to the housing industry.<sup>188</sup> The purpose of the act was primarily to incentivize employment and to increase the number of dwelling houses, by means of subsidies of between £60, £80, and £100.<sup>189</sup> The emphasis put on larger houses, and by default, higher earners, meant that the beneficiaries of this housing policy were the better-paid labourers and the lower middle classes. Fraser considers this to be state discrimination against the very poor.<sup>190</sup> Rents were to be set between 7s 4½d a week for smaller houses, to 12s 3½d per week for the bigger houses.<sup>191</sup> The act also targeted, deliberately or otherwise, the middle-class labourer, with a secure income; houses built under the act were in effect sold to their tenants at the earliest opportunity.

The 1924 Housing Act allocated £300,000 to be given to private builders in grants; the act was further extended in 1925, 1926, and 1928, when figure rose to £600,000 and £800,000 respectively. By 1928 over 9,000 houses had been constructed under the terms of the acts, 6,480 in rural areas, the remainder in the urban districts and county boroughs. 1,090 were constructed in Dublin city, and 1,169 in the main provincial towns. Sligo borough erected just 38 houses; Sligo county a more respectable 241.<sup>192</sup> Most of these grant-aided houses were owner-occupied, with farmers benefitting to a large extent. This is borne out by the fact that the greatest number of houses approved to the end of 1928, were in counties Mayo (911 houses), Cork (839), Galway (622), and

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<sup>186</sup> *Saorstát Éireann, Census 1926*, vol. iv, Housing.

<sup>187</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000* (London, 2004), p. 313.

<sup>188</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 207.

<sup>189</sup> *Irish Times*, 22 Jan. 1924, p. 7.

<sup>190</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 280.

<sup>191</sup> *Irish Times*, 22 Jan. 1924, p. 7.

<sup>192</sup> *Saorstát Éireann, Third annual report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health, 1927- 1928*, pp 79-80.

Kerry (502).<sup>193</sup> Cork city built a mere 43 houses under the scheme. A total of £88,417 had been advanced to the urban local authorities for the erection of 1,356 houses in the principal urban areas to the end of 1928, out of a total grant of £655,632, showing that housing in the urban areas was not a priority. Sligo county council received £19,471 in grants, Sligo borough just £2,915.<sup>194</sup> Rents were high, often 10s or 13s per week, well beyond the means of the lower-paid working class.

The housing drive of the 1920s did not cater for the very poor or ill-housed; in fact the vast majority of dwellings erected in the decade before 1932 were rented or sold to families who were in 'relatively comfortable circumstances'. Almost 60 per cent of the 25,500 subsidised houses constructed had five rooms, and over 8,000 houses had four rooms.<sup>195</sup> Overall, between 1922 and 1932 local councils built about 10,000 subsidised dwellings, and private developers provided some 16,500 dwellings.<sup>196</sup> The Housing Act of 1924 was further extended in 1925, and 1926, but due to the failure of individual local authorities to be in a fiscally strong enough position to raise substantial loans from the Irish banks, the volume of houses erected was low. By 1929 the government's subsidies were cut further, and the minister for local government Richard Mulcahy controversially stated that the responsibility for working-class housing was the affair of the local authority, and not the state; 'the public purse should not provide assistance for private housing'.<sup>197</sup> However, local authorities were unable to undertake housing schemes without government backing, as they were unable to borrow the necessary capital on the open market. Under pressure from Fianna Fáil, changes were made to the 1929 act, allowing local authorities to apply for housing loans from the Local Loans Fund.<sup>198</sup> However, the Wall Street crash in October of that year, effectively put a stranglehold on finances.

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Saorstát Éireann, *Third annual report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health, 1927- 1928, appendix, xxi*, pp 165-8.

<sup>195</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 218.

<sup>196</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 281.

<sup>197</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 211.

<sup>198</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 212.

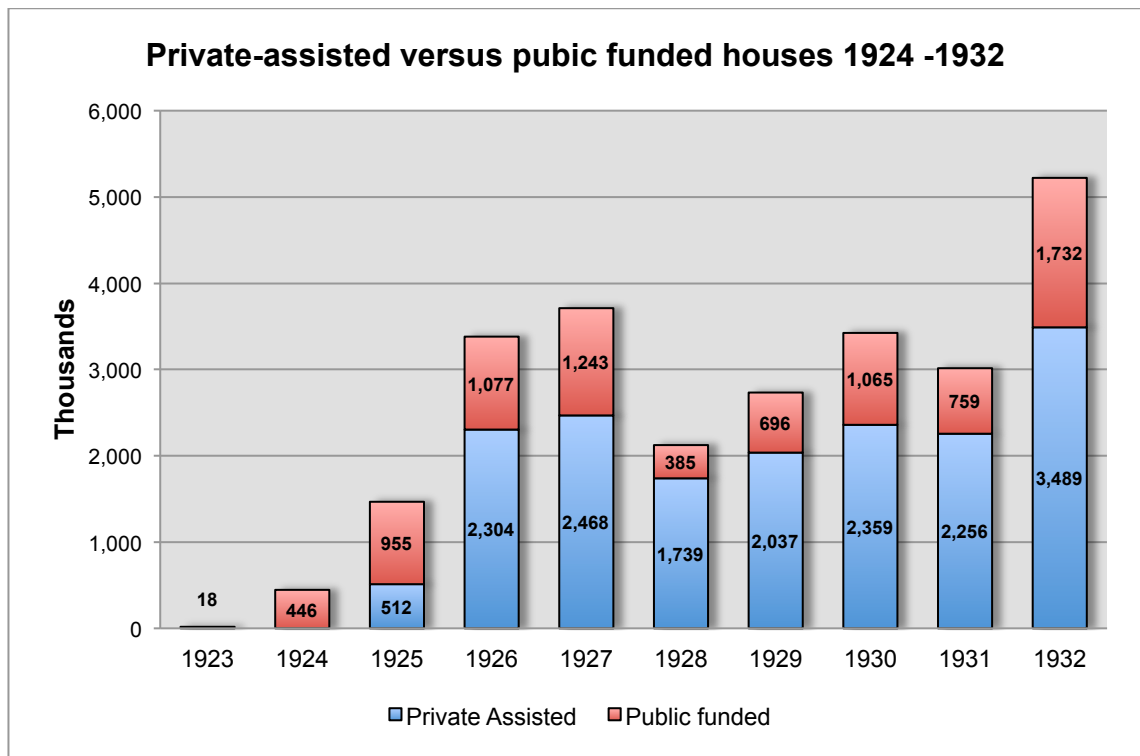


Figure 2.5. The gap between private-assisted housing figures and publicly funded houses up to March 1932, when the new Housing of the working class act was introduced. The increase in the overall number of public funded houses after 1931 is obvious, as is the fact that private-assisted housing accounts for more than half of all the houses erected in 1938. Source: DLGPH Annual Report 1945, appendix xxxi, p. 216.

## 2.5 A new departure – Housing of the Working Class Act 1931

By 1929, it was clear that a serious slum problem still existed, despite some government intervention throughout the previous decade. A survey of housing needs carried out in that year estimated that over 41,000 houses were needed to satisfy demand, and to re-house those living in abject squalor and insanitary dwellings. Over 26,000 of these dwellings were estimated as being needed in the four city boroughs, and a further 4,800 were required in the eight provincial towns examined in this thesis.<sup>199</sup> By 1930 the voices for eradicating the unimaginable slum problems in Dublin were becoming louder, and the government was coming under pressure to launch a properly-financed comprehensive housing programme.

<sup>199</sup> *Annual report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health, 1929- 1930*, pp 209-12.

<i>Town</i>	<i>Est. number needed</i>
<b>Dublin</b>	17,593
<b>Cork</b>	4,568
<b>Limerick</b>	3,220
<b>Waterford</b>	1,029
<b>Clonmel</b>	278
<b>Drogheda</b>	850
<b>Dundalk</b>	427
<b>Galway</b>	1,030
<b>Kilkenny</b>	460
<b>Sligo</b>	500
<b>Tralee</b>	1,000
<b>Wexford</b>	294
<b>Total</b>	<b>31,249</b>

Figure. 2.6. Extract from the 1929 Housing survey, showing estimated number of houses needed to meet the demand and replace insanitary dwellings in the study towns. Source: DLGPH, Annual report 1929-1930, pp 209-213.

Cumann na nGaedheal's conservatism, particularly in regard to the housing question, came under fire from the late 1920s, and driven by the entry of de Valera's new Fianna Fáil party into Dáil Éireann in 1927, the incumbent government initiated the 1931 Housing Act. Seán Lemass, then opposition Fianna Fáil TD, and later Taoiseach, had outlined the necessity for an ambitious housing programme during a Dáil debate in November 1930:

There are certain services for which we would like to see money provided on a much more lavish scale than has been provided heretofore... The service of housing is a case in point. Apart from the wisdom of embarking upon large development schemes during a time of depression and unemployment,... the social need for improved housing is so great that the problem should be faced as one of first magnitude.<sup>200</sup>

The Fianna Fáil party had a strong political commitment to housing the lower-waged, and it was increasingly clear that it was no longer possible to defer a subsidised housing programme. Ó Gráda believes that the Cosgrave government were 'forced to mimic Fianna Fáil's social and economic policy' by 1931, in an attempt at remedial action in the worsening economic climate.<sup>201</sup>

<sup>200</sup> *Dáil Éireann debates*, xxxvi, 91 (19 Nov. 1930).

<sup>201</sup> J. Peter Neary and Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Protection, economic war and structural change: the 1930s in Ireland' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 27 (May, 1991), p. 253.

The 1931 Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, was initiated after much discussion in the Department of Local Government concerning high material costs, the problems of using direct labour, the provision of sufficient exchequer funds to support a long-term programme, and the question of whether subsidies to private persons building houses should be discontinued. The need to focus on the very poor was considered paramount, but there was strong lobbying to retain some form of grants to private persons. The Act was passed on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1931, and was one of the last pieces of legislation of the Cumann na nGaedheal government. Daly notes that by giving priority to local authority housing, and more specifically slum clearances, ‘the Act reversed the thrust of government housing policy’ that had been pursued since 1924.<sup>202</sup>

Under the existing 1924 Act, two-thirds of all houses constructed with state assistance were privately owned. The state provided £2.58 million between 1922 and 1932 to subsidise house construction; of this 40 per cent went to private individuals and public utility societies; the balance to local authorities.<sup>203</sup> In effect, the state had assisted private enterprise to an enormous extent. The local authorities benefited only from the ‘million pound’ scheme, and a further £468,000 allocated after 1924.<sup>204</sup> Building cost was a major headache; it proved a political hotcake to cut labourers’ wages, as much of the government financed housing to date had been built with direct labour.<sup>205</sup> The 1931 Act gave priority to the clearance of slum housing, and housing erected directly for rental by the local authorities. Powers were given to councils to compel slum owners to repair or demolish the condemned premises.<sup>206</sup> This meant that councils finally had robust legal powers to eliminate slum areas. The Departments of Finance and Local Government were in agreement about the need to ‘target Exchequer assistance towards the poorest families’. Four -roomed dwellings catering for non-slum-clearance families were granted a subsidy of £45; the subsidy on three-roomed dwellings for slum-clearance families was £85. A subsidy of £163 would be paid for each three-roomed flat for a slum clearance family.<sup>207</sup>

Resentment was expressed by the minister that state funds for housing had been ‘misallocated’ during the preceding years, to ‘owner-occupied farms and speculative

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<sup>202</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 218.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>206</sup> Kenna, *Housing law, rights and policy*, p. 38.

<sup>207</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 217



builders', leaving the urban slums untouched.<sup>208</sup> McCarron, the minister for finance wished to abolish all aid for private houses until the slum question had been tackled, but Local Government wanted to retain grants for local authority houses not covered by clearance-legislation.<sup>209</sup> In the end, grants for private housing were retained, albeit at a lower level; the fear of political backlash from the powerful rural voter was simply too great. The general election of February 1932 resulted in the end of the Cumann na nGaedheal government, which had held power for 12 years, and the start of a long period of tenure by the De Valera-led Fianna Fáil party. They had been elected on a social and economic platform, with housing one of its main policies. When Fianna Fáil took power in March 1932, with the help of Labour TDs, further provisions were made to the 1931 Act, which provided more generous financial terms.<sup>210</sup> Fianna Fáil inherited the 1931 Act, and in many ways was a political beneficiary of its populist thrust.

The 1931 Act attempted to differentiate between the 'better paid artisan class', and the 'casual unskilled worker', and there was widespread departmental agreement to target assistance towards the poorest families.<sup>211</sup> The amendments to the original act, published as the Housing (Finance and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1932, established the formula for the subsidy of low-income housing in the Republic for decades to come. The new amendments effectively doubled the amount of subsidies available to local municipalities for house building and slum clearances. Compulsory purchase orders were introduced, making it legal and cost-effective for councils to apply large-scale clearance orders to slum areas. This was the first time in Ireland that a housing policy was aimed at the lowest, most poorly paid classes, in order to aid those in greatest need, and structure a scheme of housing grants specifically towards slum clearance. The Fianna Fáil housing programme was ambitious; a target figure of 43,600 urban houses was set, and 10,000 cottages for rural labourers. Housing subsidies were increased from 40 per cent to 66.6 per cent for slum clearance housing, and from 15 to 33.3 per cent for other local authority housings. The total cost to the Exchequer during the first year was estimated at £5 million.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> *Housing (Financial and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1932*. (No. 19 of 1932).

<sup>211</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 211.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

Year	Private Assisted	Local Authority	Total
1923	0	18	18
1924	0	446	446
1925	512	955	1,467
1926	2,304	1,077	3,381
1927	2,468	1,243	3,711
1928	1,739	385	2,124
1929	2,037	696	2,733
1930	2,359	1,065	3,424
1931	2,256	759	3,015
1932	3,489	1,732	5,221
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,164</b>	<b>8,376</b>	<b>25,540</b>

Figure. 2.7. and 2.8. Number of Houses erected and reconstructed with state financial aid, 1923-1932.

Source: *Annual Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health, 1945, Appendix XXXI, p. 216.* And, (2.8), Number of Houses erected and reconstructed with state financial aid, 1932-1945. Source: *Annual Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health, 1945, Appendix XXXI, p. 216.*

Year	Private assisted	Local Authority	Total
1933	1,004	1,177	2,181
1934	3,438	3,576	7,014
1935	6,519	6,734	13,253
1936	8,039	6,245	14,284
1937	8,270	6,094	14,364
1938	9,407	4,890	14,297
1939	10,085	6,932	17,017
1940	6,845	5,383	12,228
1941	4,992	3,432	8,424
1942	2,895	3,447	6,342
1943	1,894	1,771	3,665
1944	794	1,686	2,480
1945	567	1,084	1,651
<b>Total</b>	<b>64,749</b>	<b>52,451</b>	<b>117,200</b>

The ‘Fiery Cross’ of the Fianna Fáil housing programme from 1932-1939, is generally regarded as one of the most successful policies pursued by the party during its tenure.<sup>213</sup>

Highly critical of the previous government’s ‘failure to implement a comprehensive housing programme’, Fianna Fáil saw increased investment in housing as beneficial on several fronts; providing employment, stimulating demand for Irish products, and alleviating the squalid housing conditions of the Irish people.<sup>214</sup> The subsequent

<sup>213</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 219

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

building boom generated employment, and in an economically depressed era, this consolidated working class support for the government party, which remained in power for the sixteen years. The building schemes came as a financial boost to the moribund economy, by directly stimulating the building industry, – in many ways it was a public works scheme of sorts.

During the period 1932-1942 local authorities constructed over 29,000 urban houses, and a further 11,000 urban houses were constructed privately with grant-aid. The corresponding figures for rural cottages stood at 22,000 erected by the local authorities, and 20,000 constructed privately with grant-aid. This was a grand total of over 82,000 dwellings in a single decade. Demolition orders were passed on 10,855 houses which were occupied by 13,933 families.<sup>215</sup> The estimated housing need in 1932 was for 43,000 new dwellings, 22,839 which were in designated slum areas. Only 23,000 were constructed by later 1939, and of this only 12,858 were in slum areas.<sup>216</sup> The housing debt of the local authorities rose from £7.8 million in 1926 to £18.6 million in 1936, an indication of the huge fiscal investment in public housing. By April 1937 the Local Loan Fund sum for outstanding housing debts reached £6.7 million. By 1938 the annual cost of housing subsidies had increased from £301,000 in 1933-34 to a high of nearly £813,000 in 1938.<sup>217</sup> By 1940 over 40 per cent of the housing stock in the country had been constructed by the state, the majority of this in urban areas.<sup>218</sup>

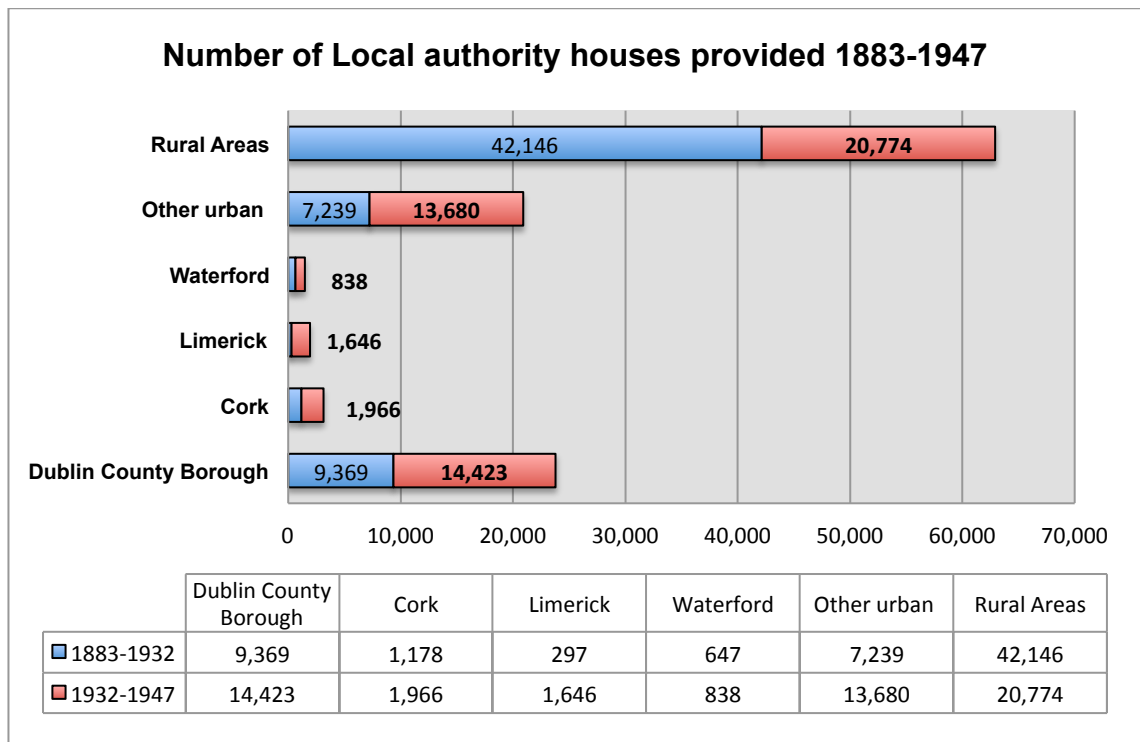
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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>218</sup> Kenna, *Housing law, rights and policy*, p. 13.



**Figure 2.9.** Total number of houses erected by the local authorities between 1883 and 1947, showing separately the figure for those houses erected after the 1932 Act. Note, that despite a political commitment to clearing the urban slums, over 20,000 rural cottages were built after 1932. Dublin County Borough refers to the geographical area under the jurisdiction of the Corporation at any given date.

Despite the remarkable construction and financial figures, it is questionable if the thrust of the 1931 Act was adhered to. Did government assistance for housing go to those in greatest need? Department of Local Government figures from 1947 show that over 20,700 rural cottages were built between 1932 and 1947, as opposed to 51,283 houses in all the urban areas of the state.<sup>219</sup> (See Figure 2.9). This was over double the planned number of rural houses, whereas only two-thirds of the intended urban houses were erected. Dublin corporation, in particular did relatively badly, managing to deliver only half of the planned new dwellings in the period to 1942. Labourers' cottages absorbed considerably more Exchequer funds that had been anticipated, but Fianna Fáil was anxious make concessions to the Labour TDs who supported the government, and who represented the rural labourers. All new Labourers cottages received a subsidy of 60 per cent of the loan.<sup>220</sup>

Mary Daly on her treatise of the Department of Local Government notes that the Department had conducted a 'sustained campaign' to have the grants for private

<sup>219</sup> DLGPH, *Housing, a review of past operations and immediate requirements* (Dublin, 1948), appendix A, pp 26-27.

<sup>220</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 226.

housing reduced or withdrawn. But the major political benefits derived from ‘wooing the electorate’ was too strong; particularly since state-assisted housing was generally erected by better-off middle-class families. The abolition or remission of rates on new houses, which had been introduced in 1925, was designed to give a stimulus to construction in the post WWI economic environment. This subsidy benefited the private –assisted sector. Extended to 1938, the remission reduced the income of the local authorities, which affected their ability to repair their loans. Mary Daly argues that the Fianna Fáil housing programme was much less successful in the four major cities and the provincial towns, despite the fact that the 1931 Act had been specifically designed to deal with urban slums.<sup>221</sup>

## Conclusions

Irish housing strategies are considered to be unique in both a British context and a European one, in the early emphasis on the provision of dwellings for the rural poor, mostly driven by the forces of nationalism and political agitation for land re-distribution in the later nineteenth century. The slower urbanisation of Irish society, along with the unique demographic collapse caused by the Great Famine, meant that Irish working-class urban housing developed in a different way than elsewhere in Britain and Europe. Lack of an industrial base resulted in a larger proportion of very poor people in cities and towns, relying entirely on casual labour. Only the north-east of the island had significant industrialisation. The urban experiences of Dublin and Belfast were very different.

Irish urban slums were of two varieties: the first was experienced in Dublin and the larger cities of Cork and Limerick, where the extreme subdivision of large former town-residences, led to unimaginably overcrowded and unsanitary tenements, as exposed in Prunty’s work on Dublin slums.<sup>222</sup> The other variety was to be found in the second tier of Irish provincial towns, where the conditions were just as bad, if on a smaller scale. Here, slums were characterised by long lines of third class cottages, crowded lanes and back alleys, and a proliferation of one-roomed dwellings. Little industrial development, long-term economic stagnation and resulting low wages, meant for most of the labouring class, accommodation could only ever be found at the lowest end of the scale.

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>222</sup> Prunty, *Dublin Slums* (Dublin, 1994), p. 111.

The move towards large-scale public housing in the last decades of the nineteenth century, unnerved the wealthier rate-payers, who strenuously opposed tax increases proposed by the local authorities. The lack of political will on the part of Irish municipal authorities, and few financial incentives, resulted in most paying only lip service to the housing of the working classes before 1890. Despite a surfeit of legislation, primarily relating to health issues, little was achieved in the way of a comprehensive and financially subsidised urban housing policy for the poor before 1908. Private or charitable bodies contributed only very modest amounts of housing to the poor. The enactment of more progressive Irish housing acts commencing with the 1908 Clancy Act, resulted in a substantial change in the way housing the working-class was approached. Central government subsidies were recognised as the only resolution to the abysmal conditions of the working class poor. Agitation before 1914 by the Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster, provided ‘uniquely favourable terms’ for Irish urban housing, and was paraded by the party as ‘clawing back financial benefits from an exploitative Imperial system’.

Fraser argues that within the context of European and American experiences, that Ireland had, ‘by far the most socialised system of working class housing’, in the period before 1914.<sup>223</sup> Fraser posits that the Irish housing experiment had a large effect on post-war housing policies in Britain itself, faced as it was with a huge number of returned soldiers in 1918, and poor work prospects. Mary Daly however, contends that there was a significant lack of Irish political commitment to urban housing issues,<sup>224</sup> and this is borne out by the relatively small numbers of urban houses constructed between 1880 and 1921, in contrast to the number of rural dwellings. But Ireland was far less urbanised than Britain or most European countries, (a significant percentage of the areas returned as ‘urban’ in the 1911 census, were in effect small villages), so perhaps it was inevitable that political focus would be on the large and dispersed rural populace.

The advent of a new state in 1922 heralded a fresh approach to housing the urban poor, but conservative politics, the art of state-building and economic recession meant that most subsidised housing erected in the period 1922-1932 catered for the better-waged classes, and the rural farming classes. The fiscal conservatism of the first Free State

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<sup>223</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 293.

<sup>224</sup> Daly, ‘Housing conditions and the genesis of housing reform in Dublin, 1880-1920’, in M. J. Bannon (ed.), *The emergence of Irish planning, 1880-1920* (Dublin, 1985), pp 120-23.

government has been remarked on as being detrimental to the urban sphere of Ireland in the 1920s, and emphasis was placed on the agricultural labourers, and consolidation of the tenant farmer as the ‘backbone’ of the new nation.<sup>225</sup>

The Department of Local Government and Public Health was itself an important agent of change in the story of Irish housing, though its responsibility for public health.<sup>226</sup> After 1932, interventionist policies, promulgated by government, devised by ‘progressive civil servants, and carried through by politicians who were more attuned to the corrosive consequences of poverty’,<sup>227</sup> were to have an indelible impact on the sphere of public housing in Ireland.

Public housing is considered to be the most successful programme carried out by the Fianna Fáil government of 1932-1944.<sup>228</sup> However, a substantial proportion of government funds went to the property-owning urban middle class and powerful rural farmers, leaving the worst urban slums, mostly in Dublin, still intact by the mid 1940s.<sup>229</sup> By 1947, over 67,000 houses had been provided in the urban areas of the Republic.<sup>230</sup> More tellingly, the populism of the re-housing programme demonstrated to politicians that ‘the allocation of housing could be a very useful means of political patronage, clientelism and control’.<sup>231</sup>

While the legacy of this policy benefited innumerable families by the provision of modern housing, it has been argued that rather than being a radical attempt to meet the working class housing needs, the aim of the housing programme of the 1930s ‘was populism, not socialism’.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> O’Connell, *The state and housing in Ireland*, p. 18.

<sup>226</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 216.

<sup>227</sup> Logan, ‘Frugal comfort’, p. 577.

<sup>228</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 210; Ó Gráda, *Ireland, a new economic history* pp 439-40.

<sup>229</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*: p. 248.

<sup>230</sup> DLG, *Housing: A review of past operations and immediate requirements* p. 28.

<sup>231</sup> Kenna, *Housing law, rights and policy*, p. 39.

<sup>232</sup> Fraser, *John Bull’s other homes*, p. 283.

## Chapter 3

### The Irish country and provincial towns 1841-1932: Sligo in context

#### Introduction

Ireland is a country of small towns.<sup>1</sup> Today, even after a half century of positive economic growth, there are only eleven distinct towns in the Republic with more than 25,000 inhabitants, and four of these are the historic so-called ‘county-boroughs’ or large cities, such as Dublin, Cork and Limerick.<sup>2</sup> Below this group of cities lies a relatively stable cluster of towns which we can refer to as the ‘country town’ or second-tier urban centres. This stratification of Irish towns is a direct result of social and demographic evolutions from the eighteenth century onwards. Sligo town is one of these second-tier towns: a late medieval foundation, a chartered borough, long a centre for local administration, and a county-town. It is typical of a ‘country-town’, set at a significant distance from Dublin, in the overwhelmingly rural province of Connacht.

These provincial or country towns hold a powerful grip on the Irish political and social psyche. Clearly defined urban spaces, exhibiting distinct urban functions in a landscape characterised by dispersed rural settlement, they were, and still are, a significant aspect of Irish identity.<sup>3</sup> However, there was little of the urban-rural tension between town and country that existed in other European counties, due to the interdependent relationship between Irish towns and their agricultural hinterlands, and the dearth of any measurable industrial urban centres. Any examination of the changes in Irish provincial towns during the course of the nineteenth century exposes much about the Irish economy and society as a whole.<sup>4</sup> The pattern and pace of urban growth and decline throughout the island reveals enormous population changes, the diversification of economic occupations, and a general rise in living standards particularly during the later decades of the nineteenth century. The growth and persistence of slums throughout most of the smaller towns of the island can be seen in the larger context of social and political change, and so too can the eventual provision of housing for the poor.

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<sup>1</sup> Anngret Simms & J.H. Andrews (eds), *Irish country towns* (Dublin 1994), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Central Statistics Office, Census returns from 2011. The cities are Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick. Waterford is also a city, but has a population more akin to the provincial towns.

<http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/saveselections.asp>

<sup>3</sup> T.W. Freeman, ‘The Irish country town’ in *Irish Geography*, vol. 3, (1954), pp 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Mary E. Daly, *Social and economic history of Ireland* (Dublin, 1981), p. 100.



This chapter will examine aspects of the housing situation in other Irish country towns – not Sligo – over the period of this study, and draw some conclusions as regards similarities and differences in working-class housing provision across this particular group of towns. The method for identifying the towns selected for study will be discussed, and a general overview of the position of these towns in the Irish urban hierarchy will be considered. The degree of poverty and the geography of slum housing in these provincial municipalities will be examined briefly, using the statistics from various surveys and the population census to identify the volume, extent and pattern of poorer-class housing. Finally, conclusions will be drawn as to the extent of the slum problem in this important group of Irish urban settlements, until the passing of the 1932 Housing Act.

### **3.1 The development of an urban hierarchy in Ireland**

Ireland possesses an unusual urban hierarchy, with few medium-sized towns.<sup>5</sup> The size-distinction between Dublin, the primate city, and the provincial towns became even more pronounced after the 1960s, when the growth of Dublin and its suburbs eclipsed all other urban centres in the state. Even today, Cork, the second city of the Republic, fails to exceed a population of 200,000. The majority of the larger towns in Ireland lie in the eastern part of the island, with the west and southwest having fewer large towns, spread at greater distances. The towns of Ulster have always been historically distinct, and after 1900, evolved in a different fashion to the remainder of the island.

Historically, the hierarchy of Irish towns consisted of four distinct tiers. At the bottom are the large villages, with a population of under 3,000, which served the surrounding agricultural hinterland with basic services. Above these were distinctly larger towns, typically with a population of between 3,000 and 10,000, and which were often more than thirty miles apart. These towns frequently held a church, schools, specialised shops and banks. The next tier has been referred to by several geographers as the ‘regional capital tier’, or ‘second-tier’ towns. Each of these had a population in excess of 12,000, were over sixty miles apart, and offered a ‘complex array of commercial, cultural and administrative facilities’ for very large surrounding areas.<sup>6</sup> At the top of the hierarchy of Irish towns are the cities, Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway, with

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<sup>5</sup> F.H.A., Aalen, *Man and landscape in Ireland*, (London, 1978), p. 269.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

Belfast and Derry fulfilling the same dominant role in Northern Ireland after 1922. With the exception of Dublin and Belfast, these ‘cities’ are small by British and European standards. The growth of towns in Ireland has been modified by their agricultural backgrounds; bigger towns frequently acted as centres of service for a widespread area and dispersed population. Throughout the period, industrial and economic growth was relatively weak outside of Dublin and the northeast of the island.

After the initial development of the plantation towns of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, urban centres remained stagnant until the period of relative stability and growth starting in the 1750s. In the second half of the eighteenth century Irish towns and the dominant east coast cities and southern ports grew steadily. This was due to improved economic conditions, better transport links –coach roads and canals – and a greater volume of trade.<sup>7</sup> By 1841 most of the principal Irish towns were ports, a situation which had persisted for centuries; all five towns with more than 20,000 people were located on the coast. This was also the case with the second tier of Irish towns. In 1841 eight of the thirteen towns containing between 10,000 and 20,000 inhabitants were ports.<sup>8</sup> These provincial towns held their population during the famine, but fluctuated in sizes over the seventy years between 1861 and 1931.

The devastating effects of the 1840s famine on the demographic and economic condition of the country were not evenly spread, but rural living conditions fell dramatically in the post-famine decades, and remained stagnant until the 1890s. Towns and cities did not suffer the massive population drop that occurred in the countryside, instead experiencing in-migration for much of the post-famine period. Small towns thus gained a relative significance in the second half of the nineteenth century, and contributed towards an increase in urbanisation nationally.<sup>9</sup> The country towns had all experienced a sharp drop in population between 1851 and 1861, due to emigration, but frequently still held a substantial percentage of the population of their respective counties.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> T.W. Freeman, ‘Irish towns in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ in R.A. Butlin (ed.), *The development of the Irish town* (London, 1977), p. 108.

<sup>8</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1841*, vol. i, Population.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen A. Royle, ‘Small towns in Ireland’ 1841-1951’ in H.B. Clarke, Jacinta Prunty and Mark Hennessy (eds), *Surveying Ireland’s past: multidisciplinary essays in honour of Anngret Simms* (Dublin, 2004), p. 548.

<sup>10</sup> Kevin Hourihan, ‘The cities and towns of Ireland, 1841-1851 in John Crowley, William J. Smyth, and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the great Irish famine* (Cork, 2012), p. 254.

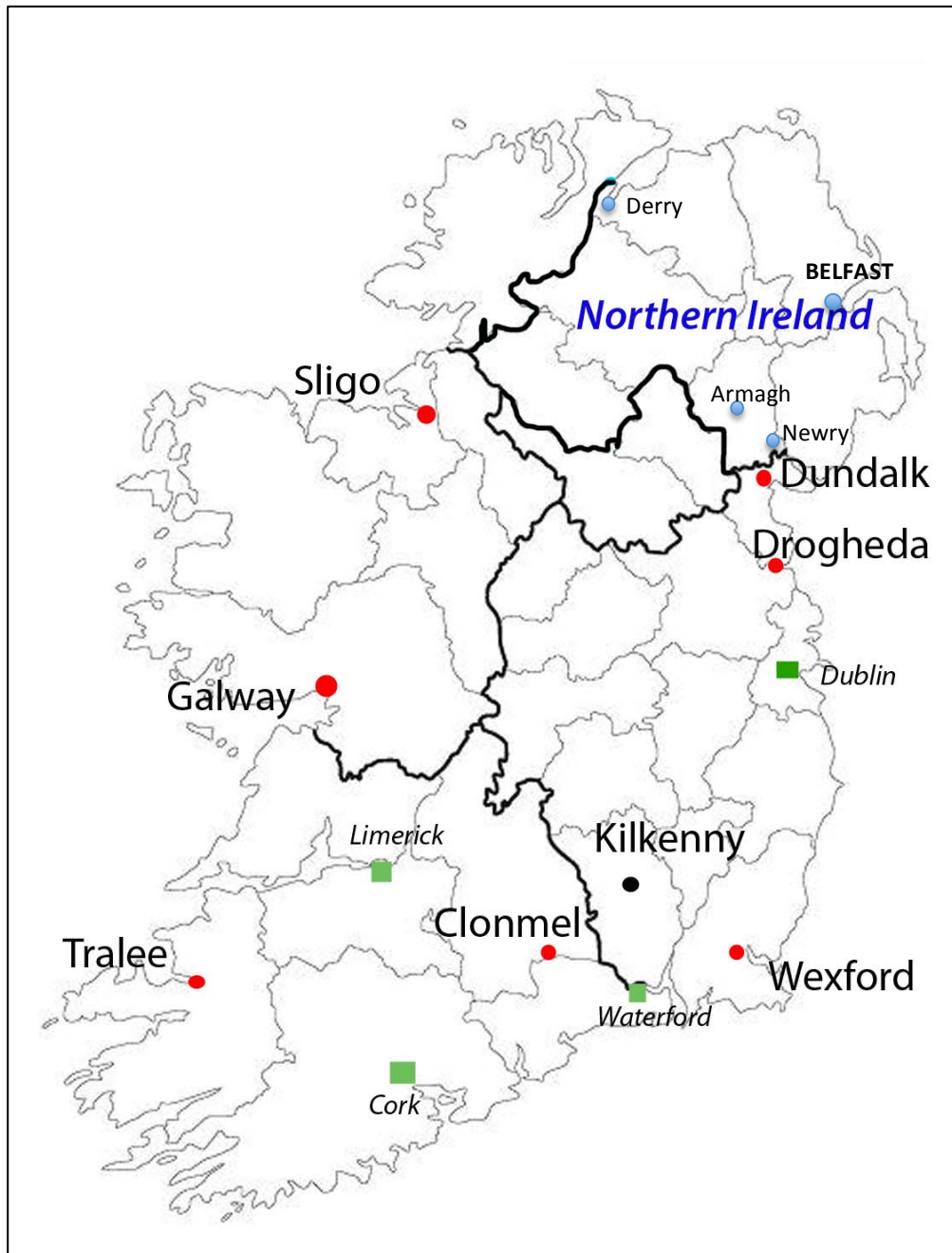


Fig. 3.1. Map of Ireland showing the location of the study towns in red, and the larger cities in green. The peripheral location of Sligo is evident. Towns now in Northern Ireland are shown for reference.

In the immediate aftermath of the Great Famine, during which, paradoxically, the population of most Irish urban centres increased, many Irish towns lost their diverse social and economic base.<sup>11</sup> In the period after Independence in 1922, the overwhelming domination of Dublin and its suburbs, in consort with the international economic depression, led to stagnation and decline in many provincial towns.<sup>12</sup> The

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>12</sup> G. A. Duncan, 'Decline of the country town', in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. xv, no. 2, (1931/1932), pp 21-33.

resulting fossilized nature of the smaller Irish towns has led to them being described by T. Jones-Hughes, in a classic 1961 paper, as ‘the museum piece in our landscape’.<sup>13</sup> Most would not recover until the late 1970s.

In 1841 less than ten per cent of the total population of most Irish counties lived in small towns, and some counties, such as Leitrim, had no urban developments of more than 2,000 inhabitants. Even counties with several substantial towns, like Mayo, had such an overwhelmingly rural population that the small-town sector still fell below ten per cent.<sup>14</sup> By 1851 the impact of the famine was starkly evident. The overall population fell, but the percentage of the population inhabiting small towns rose to 11.26 per cent. A greater proportion of a reduced population residing in small towns meant that these towns gained in their relative significance.<sup>15</sup> Stephen Royle’s study on small towns excludes the 180,000-strong workhouse population from this estimate, but postulates that many of their inmates would have been from the towns themselves.

At the time of the census of 1841, Ireland was an overwhelmingly rural country, with only just over twenty per cent of the population living in 1,257 ‘towns’ as identified by the census commissioners. Most of these had a population of only 500 people, but thirty-five had a population of over 5,000.<sup>16</sup> Some 745 of these ‘towns’ held fewer than 500 people, and as such are not true urban centres as defined for the purposes of this study.<sup>17</sup> Ten towns had a population of between 10,00 and 24,000, including Sligo, and also Armagh and Newry, now in Northern Ireland. (See figure 3.1). Between them, these towns held over 148,000 people, with over 40 per cent of families living in third and fourth-class houses. Recent research has shown that some of the smaller towns recorded in 1841 with populations of less than 2,000 survive to this day, with similar populations.<sup>18</sup>

This pattern of settlement over the country was to change drastically over the four decades after 1841. By 1880, the theoretical start of this study, the picture had altered substantially. In 1881, the total number of houses in Ireland was returned as just over

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<sup>13</sup> Tom Jones Hughes, ‘The origin and growth of towns in Ireland’ in *University Review* vol. 2, no. 7 (1961), p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Royle, ‘Small towns in Ireland’ 1841-1951’, p. 546.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.548.

<sup>16</sup> Hourihan, ‘The cities and towns of Ireland, 1841-1851, p. 228

<sup>17</sup> Census of Ireland, 1841, *Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland for the year 1841*, H.C. 1843, (504), xxiv, various tables.

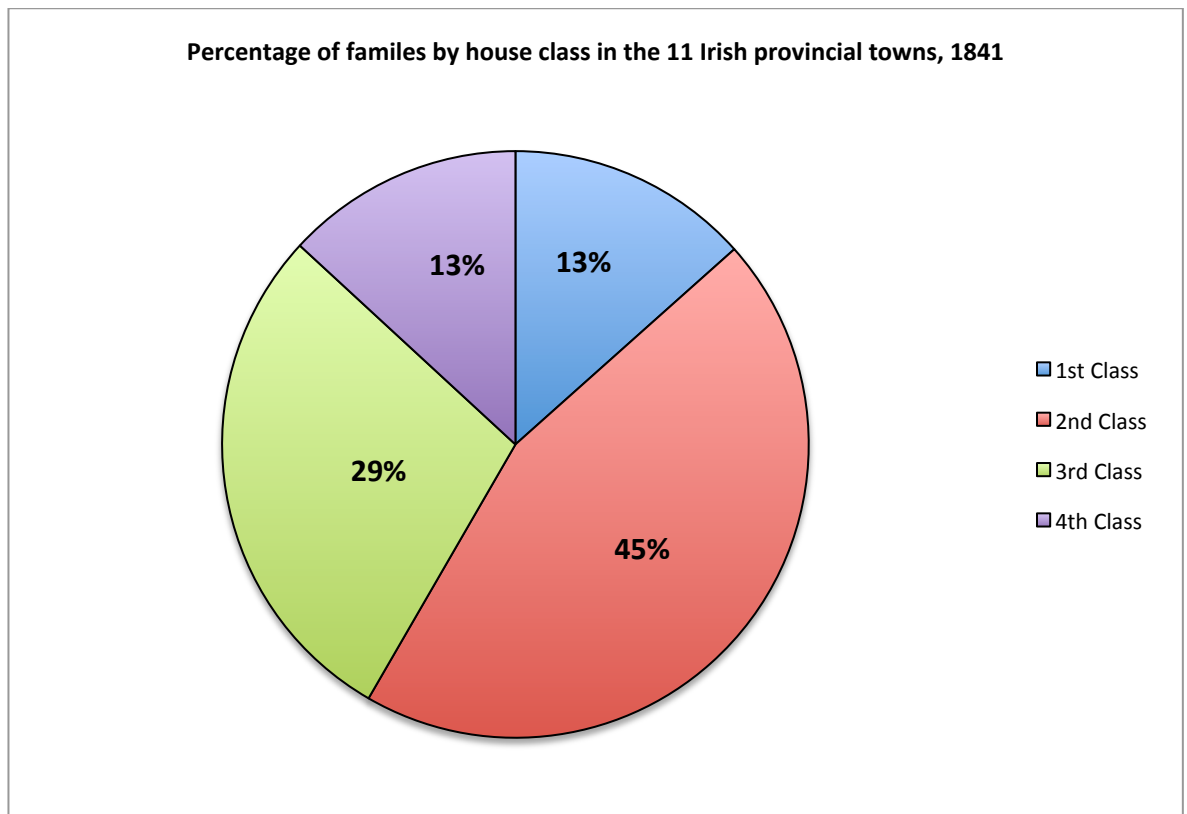
<sup>18</sup> Hourihan, ‘The cities and towns of Ireland, 1841-1851, p. 230.

914,000, with 189,000 houses being in the designated urban districts of the island. Of these urban houses, 33,286 were first-class; 121,702 second-class; 32,143 third-class, and there were a mere 1,804 urban houses designated as fourth class. In contrast, there were still over 38,000 fourth-class houses in rural Ireland. The disappearance of the fourth-class house from the built-up areas was tempered by the rise in the number of second-class dwellings, which housed on average 1.20 families per house, and first-class dwellings holding 1.8 families per house.<sup>19</sup> This was an indication of the development of the tenement or multi-occupancy house, with the attendant problem of overcrowding.

In fact, in the sixty years between the censuses of 1841 and 1901, the total number of houses fell from 1.32 million to just over 858,000. This reduction was largely due to the mass emigration that occurred in the two decades after the famine, when the population of the island fell by just over 12 per cent. The census of 1861 gives the population as 5,764,543, or 787,842 less than that of 1851. During this period, as many as 1.16 million people emigrated from Ireland. Throughout the immediate years of the great famine, the population of the Irish country towns increased, as people resorted there for relief and shelter. The numbers housed in union workhouses, which were practically always among the institutions to be found in the larger market towns, also increased greatly. Figure 3.7 shows the dramatic population increase in the towns selected for study over that period, and the subsequent decline and stabilization or stagnation of succeeding decades.

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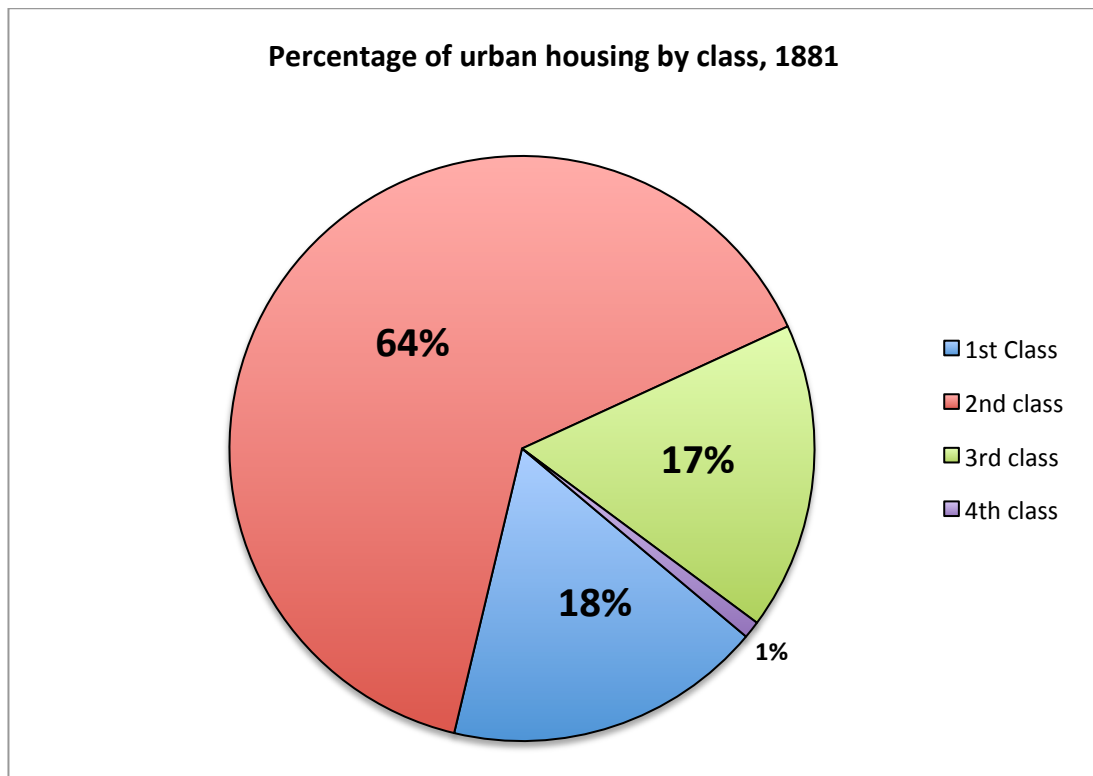
<sup>19</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1881, Part II, General report, with illustrative maps and diagrams, tables, and appendix*, H.C. 1882, [C.3365], lxxvi, p. 163.



**Fig. 3.2.** Percentage of families in aggregate population of the 11 provincial towns, living in each class of house, 1841 census. Source: Census of Ireland, 1841, *Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland for the year 1841*, extracted from various tables.

However, an analysis of the census between 1841 and 1861 shows that the aggregate population of the ten towns with over 10,000 inhabitants at the 1841 census, fell by 5.1 per cent in the two decades; a further fall of 8.2 per cent occurred between 1861 and 1926. In the eighty-year period after 1841, the overall decline was 13 per cent.<sup>20</sup> The general tendency was for the population of the smaller towns to decrease steadily, with that of larger towns decreasing at a slower rate, or stagnating. This percentage decrease is illustrated in figure 3.4. Sligo and the study towns are included in the second grouping, ‘Other (10) towns’, each with a population over 10,000.

<sup>20</sup> G. A. Duncan, ‘Decline of the country town’ in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. xv, no. 2 (1931/1932), p. 22.



**Fig. 3.3. Classes of houses in total Irish urban areas in 1881 Census. Source: *Census of Ireland 1881, part II, General report with illustrative maps and diagrams, and appendix, H.C. 1882, lxxvi, [c.3365], p. 163.***

In relation to housing, there was a significant shift in the relative number of houses of each class through the country. Fourth-class houses – one roomed cabins with mud walls – formed 37 per cent of the total number of Irish rural houses in 1841, meaning that over 490,000 dwelling were of the worst possible type. A decade later the dominance of this classification had been utterly destroyed, as their number plunged to just 135,000, or 13 per cent of the total housing stock.<sup>21</sup> In the civic districts, (towns of over 2,000 inhabitants), fourth-class houses comprised 20,700 dwellings in 1841, over 13.6 per cent of the total. By 1901, this had shrunk to 527 houses, or just 0.23 per cent of the urban housing stock.<sup>22</sup> However, the demise of the lowest classification of housing did not necessarily mean an improvement in the stock that remained; many third-class houses in urban areas were at the absolute bottom of their class, with little to distinguish them from the older fourth-class dwellings. The condition of many third-class houses also deteriorated as the decades wore on; improvement meant a rise in the rent, a situation many could not afford.

<sup>21</sup> R.E. Matheson, ‘The housing of the people of Ireland during the period 1841-1901’ in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, xi, part lxxxiii, (1902/1903), p. 200.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.199.

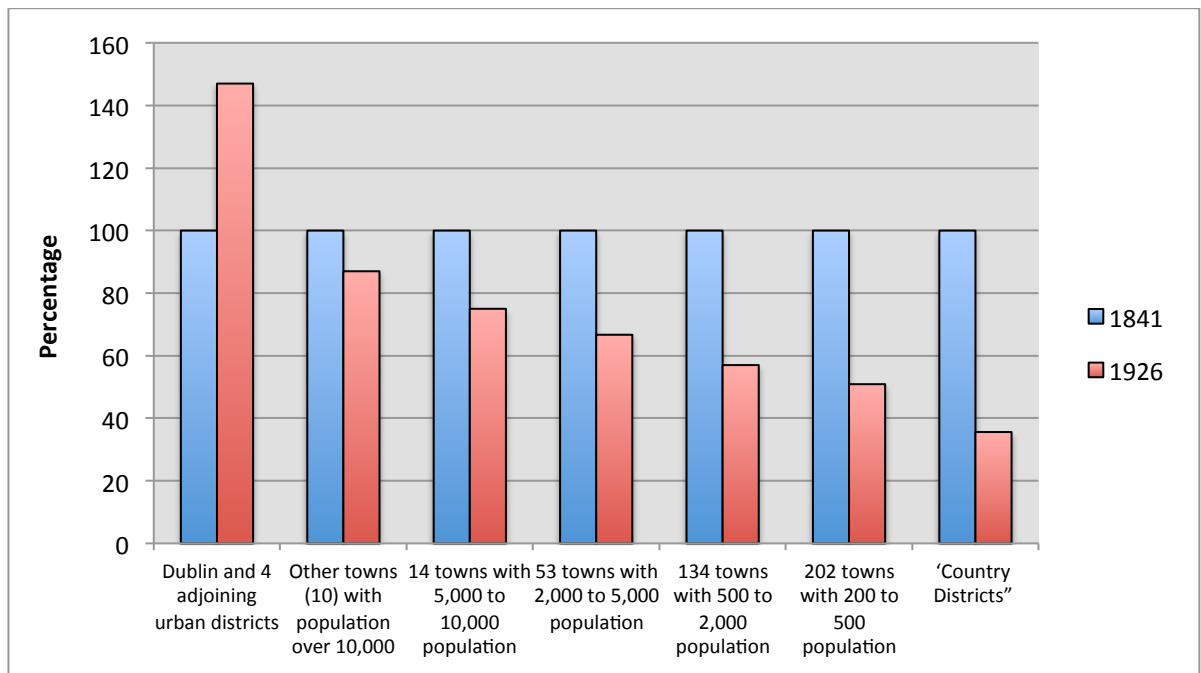


Fig 3.4. The decline in population in the various categories of Irish towns, 1841-1926. Graph based on information given in, G. A. Duncan, 'Decline of the country town', in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland* vol. xv, no. 2, 1931/1932, pp. 21-33 (Dublin, 1936).

### Collapse of small urban centres

A glance at the map of urban population decrease in the landmark work, *Atlas of the great Irish famine*, shows clearly the collapse of urban centres across the country between 1841 and 1851.<sup>23</sup> With them disappeared a host of urban and social functions, such as coach inns, fairs, and small shops. The ten selected towns,<sup>24</sup> with populations of between 10,000 and 25,000, had an aggregate urban population of just 151,275 in 1851, a drop of over three per cent.<sup>25</sup> Almost 4.2 per cent of their housing stock was comprised of fourth-class dwellings at that date. The census also recorded that 67.4 per cent of all families in urban centres were living in first and second-class housing in 1851, a rise of over eight per cent in this class. Clearly by 1851, the numbers of fourth-class houses had fallen dramatically in the second tier of Irish towns. In the 1841 census, these dwellings, classified as being built of mud and thatched, comprised over

<sup>23</sup> Hourihan, 'The cities and towns of Ireland, 1841-1851', p. 235.

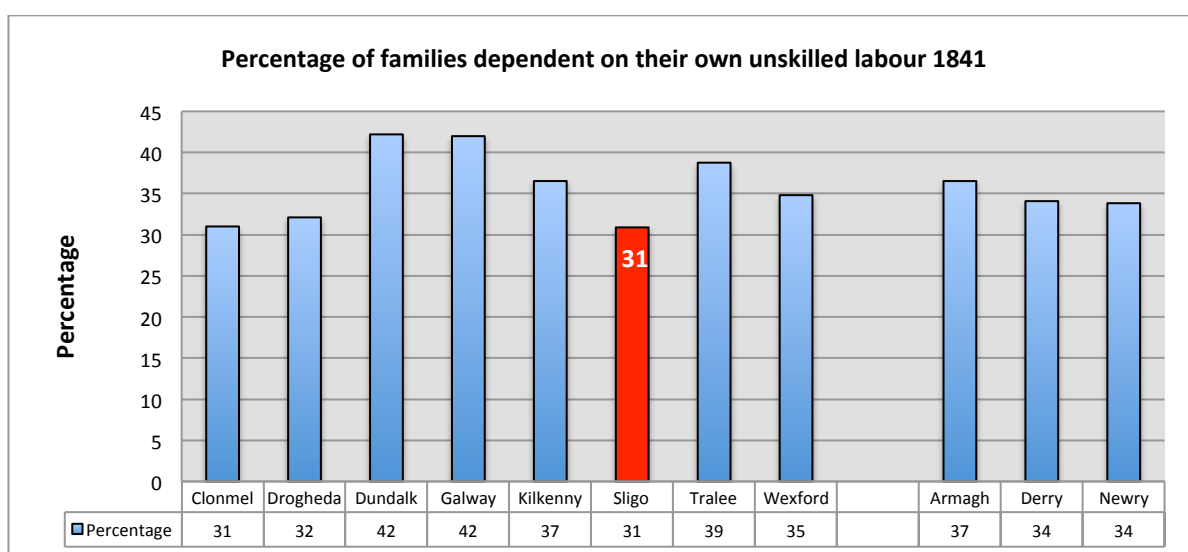
<sup>24</sup> These ten towns include the eight study towns, as well as two towns now in Northern Ireland: Derry (pop. 15,196), and Armagh (pop. 10,245). Newry, also now in Northern Ireland, had an urban population of 11,972 in 1841, and was divided between counties Down and Armagh. Hourihan's analysis has included Newry in the category below the study towns, i.e. towns with a population of just under 10,000. However, there is a discrepancy in the 1841 census returns for the total figures for Newry. See original returns, H.C. 1841-1843 xxiv, (504), p. 280. This may account for the placing of Newry in the lower classification.

<sup>25</sup> Hourihan, 'The cities and towns of Ireland, 1841-1851', p. 232.



14 per cent of all urban houses, and sheltered up to 40 per cent of all families.<sup>26</sup>

However, the disappearance of the fourth-class house did not improve the quality of the third-class houses, and in time they became the lowest affordable, poor-quality accommodation of the underprivileged. The adult literacy rate in the ten towns was almost 50 per cent in 1841, rising to 53.3 per cent in the same towns a decade later. Most tellingly, the percentage of families who were chiefly dependent on their own manual labour in the ten provincial towns increased from 35.2 per cent in 1841 to 67.5 per cent a decade later. This points to the increasing ‘pauperization and proletarianisation’<sup>27</sup> of Irish towns and cities, which became home to more families utterly reliant on their own labour for subsistence, as opposed to regular paid work.



**Fig. 3.5.** The percentage of families reliant on their own direct labour in the eleven Irish towns with populations of between 10,000 and 25,000 as returned in the 1841 Census. Their ‘own direct labour’, includes families without capital, land or education, such as labourers, and persons who obtained their income from employment which required ‘little or no education or instruction’. The large number of persons without a regular income is an indicator of the extent of poverty in provincial towns on the eve of the famine. Source: *Census of Ireland 1841, General Returns, showing the population of every borough returning a member to parliament*, p. 442-445. H.C. (504), 2843, xxiv, p. 442.

There was a dramatic fall in the numbers of urban dwellers who were dependent on ‘vested means and direction of labour’, the term used to describe a semi-professional bourgeoisie. This class was essentially decimated by the famine; Sligo lost two-thirds of all its population in this category, despite the population remaining relatively stagnant between 1841 and 1851. This resulted in a much greater percentage of very low-waged inhabitants in the town. Sligo saw a 74 per cent increase in those dependent on casual labour for a living in the period; other towns in the same class saw similar or greater increases, such as Drogheda (+103 per cent), Dundalk (+48 per cent), while Galway’s

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp 228-30.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 253, Fig.11.

component of casual labourers doubled in size.<sup>28</sup> But there still remained a sizable proportion of skilled artisans, small manufacturers and traders in Sligo, as is borne out by the trade directories for the period.

### **3.2 Identifying other towns for comparative study.**

Selecting study towns that might offer valid comparisons with Sligo is crucial to this research. For this purpose a study by Stephen A. Royle, called ‘Small towns in Ireland 1841-1951’, was utilised.<sup>29</sup> In this study, Royle, set out to identify and categorize all the small towns in Ireland, using a methodology similar to one he used in his earlier paper, ‘The development of small towns in Britain’.<sup>30</sup> Royle’s analysis shows that small towns had gained a relative significance and contributed towards a period of increased urbanisation in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> Royle aimed to identify all Irish small towns at a certain date, and to trace their evolution and changing significance at the county and national level, through time.<sup>32</sup> He uses 1841 as a base date, due to the reliable census of that year, and prior to the seismic changes of the great famine. The study continues through the years, 1851, 1901, and 1951. This provides continuity with the period covered by his British study, although the gap between the critical period 1851 to 1901 is, in my opinion, too large. It also fails to take account of the steep decline in rural county populations as a percentage of the populations of their corresponding large towns. The 1841 census defined ‘towns’ as places with twenty or more houses, and recorded their population separately from their surrounding townlands.<sup>33</sup> Royle lists these places, while noting that these ‘towns’ were very tiny, and had no proper urban functions. He cautions against using a higher population threshold to identify a town, as did Dickenson in a 1932 study, when he maintained that the ‘definition of an urban settlement is fundamentally a question of function, not of population’.<sup>34</sup> This was very true for Ireland, where many towns with a small population still had highly urban functions, such as a post office, a market, a school, and a church with resident clergyman.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 253, Fig.11.

<sup>29</sup> Royle, ‘Small towns in Ireland, 1841-1951’ pp 535-63.

<sup>30</sup> Royle. ‘The development of small towns in Britain’ in Martin Daunton (ed), *The Cambridge urban history of Britain*, (Cambridge, 2000), iii, pp 151-184.

<sup>31</sup> Royle, ‘Small towns in Ireland, 1841-1951’, p. 548.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 548

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 536.

<sup>34</sup> R.E. Dickenson, ‘The distribution and functions of the smaller urban settlements of East Anglia’ in *Geography*, vol. xvii (1932), p. 20.

Royle also remarks that T.W. Freeman, the pioneer of Irish geographical studies, has noted that an 1891 classification of towns as places over 1,500 people, was ‘not entirely satisfactory, as without doubt, many small places were towns in function’.<sup>35</sup> Royle then sets out to examine *Lewis’s topographical dictionary of Ireland* for 1837, in order to identify and exclude any ‘towns’ listed in the 1841 census which did not possess urban functions. The use of this directory to identify urban places is justifiable in that Lewis used descriptors such as ‘market town’, ‘post town’, ‘port’, ‘borough’ etc., which helped Royle to narrow down the list of towns from the 1841 census. He chose the threshold of 10,000 inhabitants as the upper limit of a small town, even though a town of 10,500 inhabitants would have had identical functions. This, he explains is arbitrary, and any study which uses interval data or thresholds is problematic. Royle adds that Freeman had already used the figure of 10,000 to identify ‘small towns’, that is, those with a population under this figure.<sup>36</sup>

In this thesis, sixteen towns exceeding 10,000 people are identified from the 1841 census: Armagh, Belfast, Clonmel, Cork, Drogheda, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick, Derry, Newry, Sligo, Tralee, Waterford, and Wexford.<sup>37</sup> By 1951 there were twenty-five towns in Ireland exceeding this figure. Some towns exceeded this 10,000-population threshold at periods during the nineteenth century, but often dropped below it again, as emigration continued. Many of the growing towns in the latter half of the nineteenth century were in the industrial areas of Ulster, and thus untypical of the country as a whole.

Royle also demonstrated how counties with a more developed settlement network had greater numbers of small towns, while some counties, such as Sligo, had just one dominant town. This ‘dominant’ town structure frequently occurred in counties with broadly similar characteristics. They contained a substantial rural population, a poorly developed urban structure outside the county town, many small villages which possessed market and executive functions for a small surrounding area, and then the large county town. This dominant town was often a port, in which all the apparatus of local government was focused and which offered high-level economic functions. Examples of these towns in the second half of the nineteenth century are Galway,

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<sup>35</sup> Freeman, ‘Irish towns in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’, p.105.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p.129.

<sup>37</sup> Census of Ireland, 1841, *Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland for the year 1841*, H.C. 1843, (504), xxiv, p. 417.

Limerick, Derry, Tralee, Kilkenny, and Sligo itself. After the famine, a greater proportion of a much-reduced population lived in towns above 5,000 inhabitants.<sup>38</sup>

### **Selection of study towns**

This particular study continues up to 1947, so census data from 1926 to 1946 is analysed. This clarifies the development picture for the several large towns that form part of this thesis. These towns have been initially identified from the 1936 census (the census year nearest the start of the great slum clearances), as towns which then had a population between 10,000 and 25,000, and excludes the city boroughs, which all had populations in excess of that figure. Only towns that are now in the Republic of Ireland will be examined, as the housing policies of the Irish Free State after 1922 diverged from those of Northern Ireland. Economic and social aspects were substantially different in many Ulster towns, due to the financial backing of the Westminster government.<sup>39</sup>

The towns identified for study are as follows: Clonmel, Drogheda, Dundalk, Galway, Kilkenny, Sligo, Tralee and Wexford.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, further analysis of the census data from 1841 to 1901, showed the same spatial and demographic relationship between these towns as illustrated by figures 3.6 and 3.7. They all follow a similar pattern of expansion and subsequent decline and stagnation over the period. Notable in particular is the sudden spike of population in the famine years, followed by the slump in population between 1841 and 1871. Then follows a slow decline or stagnation until about 1920 when some of the towns started to grow significantly again.

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<sup>38</sup> Liam Kennedy, Paul S. Ell, E. Margaret Crawford and Liam A. Clarkson, *Mapping the great Irish famine: a survey of the famine decades* (Dublin, 1999), p. 27.

<sup>39</sup> Murray Fraser, *John Bull's other homes* (Liverpool, 1996) pp 272-8.

<sup>40</sup> Based on *Saorstát Éireann, Census of population 1936*,

YEAR	Clonmel	Drogheda	Dundalk	Galway	Kilkenny	Sligo	Tralee	Wexford	Total
1841	13,505	17,300	10,782	17,275	19,071	12,272	11,363	11,252	112,820
1851	15,204	16,847	9,842	23,787	19,975	11,047	13,759	12,819	123,280
1861	10,572	14,740	10,360	16,967	14,174	10,693	10,309	11,673	99,488
1871	10,112	13,510	11,327	15,597	12,710	10,670	9,506	12,077	95,509
1881	9,325	12,297	11,913	15,471	12,299	10,808	9,910	12,163	94,186
1891	8,477	11,873	12,499	13,800	11,048	10,274	9,318	11,545	88,834
1901	10,167	12,760	13,076	13,426	10,609	10,870	9,867	11,161	91,936
1911	10,209	12,501	13,128	13,255	10,514	11,163	10,300	11,531	92,601
1926	9,056	12,716	13,996	14,227	10,046	11,437	10,533	11,879	93,890
1936	9,391	14,495	14,686	18,285	10,237	12,247	10,285	12,247	101,873
1946	9,861	15,715	18,562	20,370	10,289	12,926	9,900	12,296	109,919

Fig. 3.6. Population figures for the selected study towns, 1841-1946. Extracted from the various *Censuses of Ireland, housing and population returns, 1841-1946*. Figures refer to the municipal or civic districts of each borough only, and do not include the population of the rural portions of each borough, where and when that distinction is made.

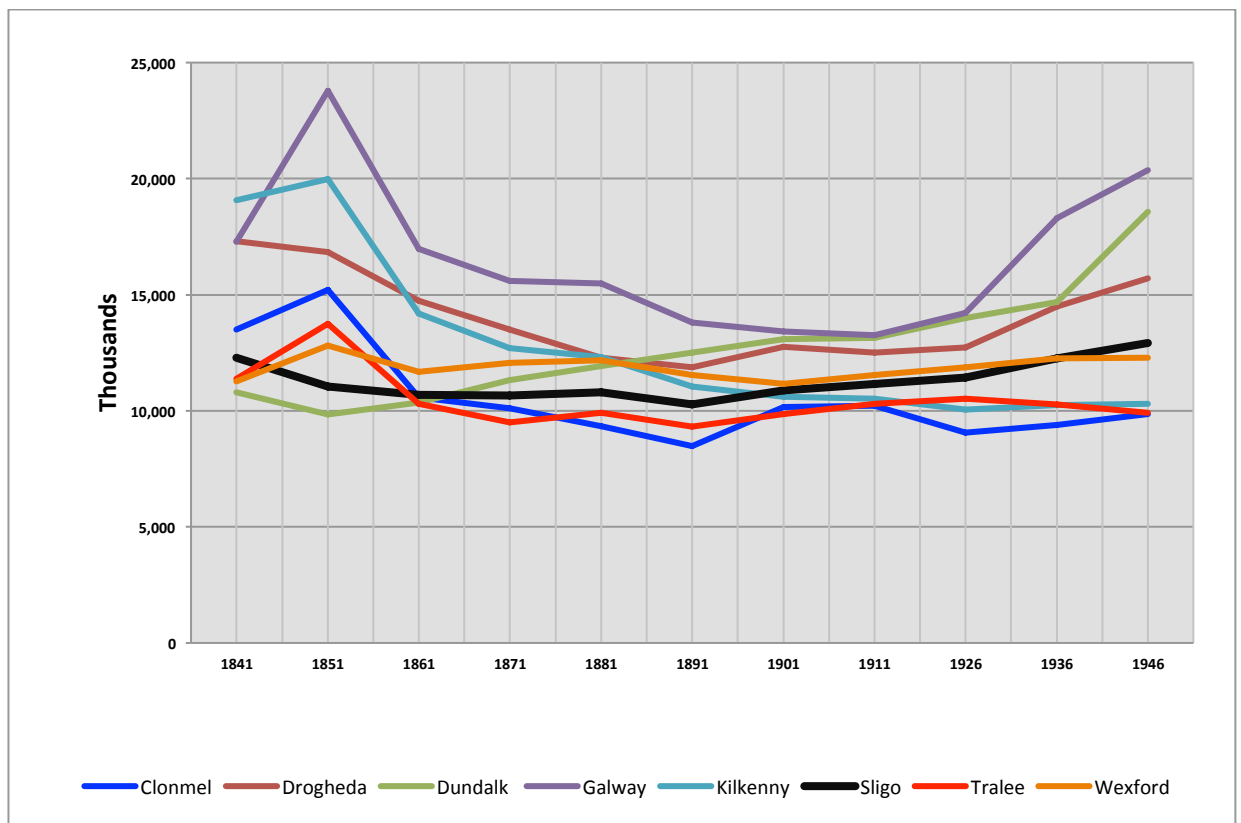


Fig 3.7. Population graph of selected study towns, 1841-1946, showing relative increases and decreases over the period. Source: *Census of Ireland, Housing and population returns, 1841-1946*. Figures refer to the municipal or civic districts of each borough only, and do not include the population of the rural portions.

### 3.3 Classification of housing in Irish provincial towns, 1841-1911

Statistics on the number of Irish houses were first gathered in the census of 1821. This category was further expanded in the census of 1841 to classify the condition of the housing stock. The reasoning behind this was the recognition by the census commissioners that the actual number of houses gave no indication of the housing quality, or the abject condition in which the vast majority of the population were living.<sup>41</sup> Houses were divided into four classes, depending on several characteristics, including the materials of which the structure was built, indicating its durability; the number of rooms, number of windows, and whether it was slated or thatched. At the same time, the census divided the population into two distinct elements, rural and 'civic' or urban. The urban category was attached to all towns above 2,000 inhabitants, which the commissioners considered a sufficient number to enable a settlement to possess the functions associated with a town. Crucially, the commissioners felt that this figure was the threshold at which the 'evils of crowded habitations' began to be felt, 'especially in a sanitary point of view'.<sup>42</sup> It can be seen then, that even in 1841 the issue of housing conditions in built-up areas was of active concern to the authorities.

The categories of housing in 1841 as derived using the physical characteristics of a property were as follows:<sup>43</sup>

4<sup>th</sup> class: Single-roomed mud cabins.

3<sup>rd</sup> class: Mud-walled cottages with 2 to 4 rooms and windows.

2<sup>nd</sup> class: Farm or town house with 5 to 9 rooms of stone or brick construction

1<sup>st</sup> class: 'All houses of a better description than the preceding classes'.

These categories applied to all dwellings, both urban and rural. However, in the countryside, many families lived in 'scalpeens', which were little more than dug-outs, partially underground. These dwellings, if they could be called that, were sufficient in number to form a fifth classification, but were instead lumped together in the census with fourth-class houses. It will become apparent from the case study that many houses were at the very bottom of their respective classes. Hence a substantial proportion of third-class housing was in fact no better than fourth. In addition, if there was more than one distinct family living in a house, this would constitute overcrowding and cause the

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<sup>41</sup> E. Margaret Crawford, *Counting the people: a survey of Irish censuses, 1813-1911* (Dublin, 2003), p. 48.

<sup>42</sup> Census of Ireland, 1841, *Report of the Commissioners*, p. viii.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

classification of the house to be downgraded. This wide band essentially hid the realities of the housing stock until the 1901 census, although some distinction was made in the 1871 returns as noted below.<sup>44</sup>

From the 1841 to 1861 censuses the quality of housing was recorded at parish, town and baronial level, aggregated to county, provincial and national level. From 1871 to 1911 housing quality was given only at county level. The 1871 census further divided the fourth-class housing into two grades, classified as A and B, to distinguish between one-roomed brick or stone cabins, and one-roomed mud-walled cabins, which were vanishing from the countryside.<sup>45</sup> From 1881 onward the older classification resumed. In the county returns for 1901 and 1911, second and third class housing numbers were amalgamated, although in the census General Reports county numbers were prepared and presented as in the older four-grade formula.<sup>46</sup> A further statistic was adopted in 1841 to accompany the enumeration of housing quality. This was the classification of accommodation, according to the number of families living in each class of housing.<sup>47</sup> First-class accommodation consisted of a first-class house containing one family. Second-class accommodation consisted of second-class houses, each containing one family, and first-class houses, each containing two or three families. Third-class accommodation consists of third-class houses, each containing one family, plus second-class houses, each containing two or three families, plus first-class houses, each containing four or five families. Fourth-class accommodation consisted of all fourth-class houses, plus all the other housing classes where there was more than one distinct family under the roof. This was a complicated calculation, but gave a clearer picture of the quality of shelter, particularly in the towns. This data was returned at large town level in the census of 1841, 1851, and 1861, but only at county and city level between 1871 and 1911. Thus is it not possible to see the accommodation-class of housing for Sligo and many of the other study towns in the crucial period between 1881 and 1911.

The 1841 census divided the housing returns into 'civic' or urban areas, and rural areas. 'Civic' was defined as towns consisting of more than 2,000 inhabitants. The county of Sligo in 1841 possessed only one town above that figure, Sligo town, with a population of 12,272, as confined within its municipal boundary. The only other small towns

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<sup>44</sup> Crawford, *Counting the people*, p 49.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid p. 49.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid p. 49.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas P. Linehan, 'The history and development of Irish population census' in the *Journal for Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. xxvi, part iv (1991), pp 91-132.

within the county were Ballisodare (869 persons), Ballymote (839), Tubbercurry (783), and Collooney (651). Thus the primacy of Sligo town is self-evident, and the urban housing returns for that census relate solely to the town.<sup>48</sup>

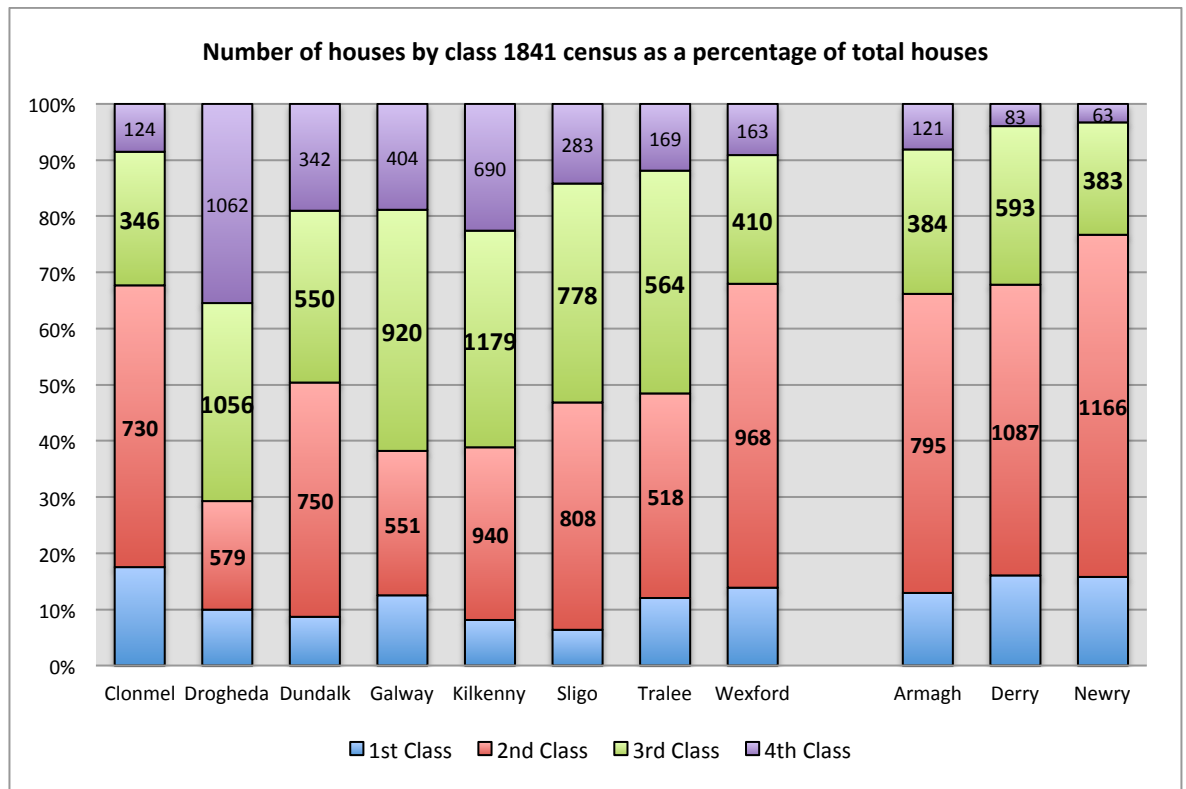


Fig. 3.8. Classification of housing in provincial Irish towns in 1841. The relatively large numbers of fourth-class houses in the towns outside Ulster can be seen. Sources: *Census of Ireland 1841, General Returns*. p. 444.

Many Irish small towns in the mid-nineteenth century were a refuge for the poor, and almost a rural ‘add-on’ to a small urban area. The description of Cashel in county Tipperary in the mid-1850s could well be applied to a dozen or more other small Irish towns, including Sligo:

The suburbs of Cashel, - straggling and dirty in the manner of Irish towns,- a legion of cabins of every variety of mud architecture, stretching nearly half a mile towards the next village, like a string of old sticks, clods and rubbish attached by the urchin to the tail of his kite, and with a similar effect.....<sup>49</sup>

Post-famine Irish towns shared with the countryside the same problems of unemployment and under-employment. This was underscored by the lack of industry

<sup>48</sup> Census of Ireland, 1841, *Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland for the year 1841*, HC 1843, (504), xxiv p. 417.

<sup>49</sup> Kevin Whelan, ‘Towns and villages’ Aalen, F.H.A., Kevin Whelan, and Matthew Stout (eds), *Atlas of the Irish rural landscape* (Cork, 2012), p. 192.



and major manufacturing in most Irish provincial towns. There simply was not the work to support the numbers of people who flocked there.

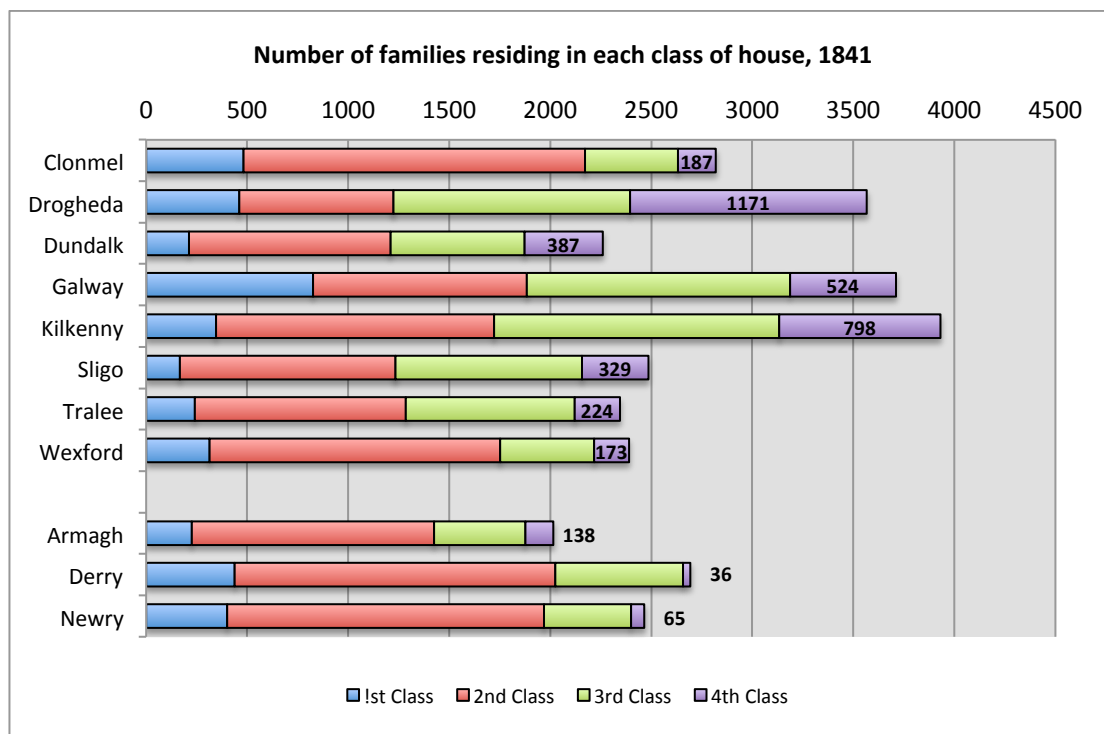
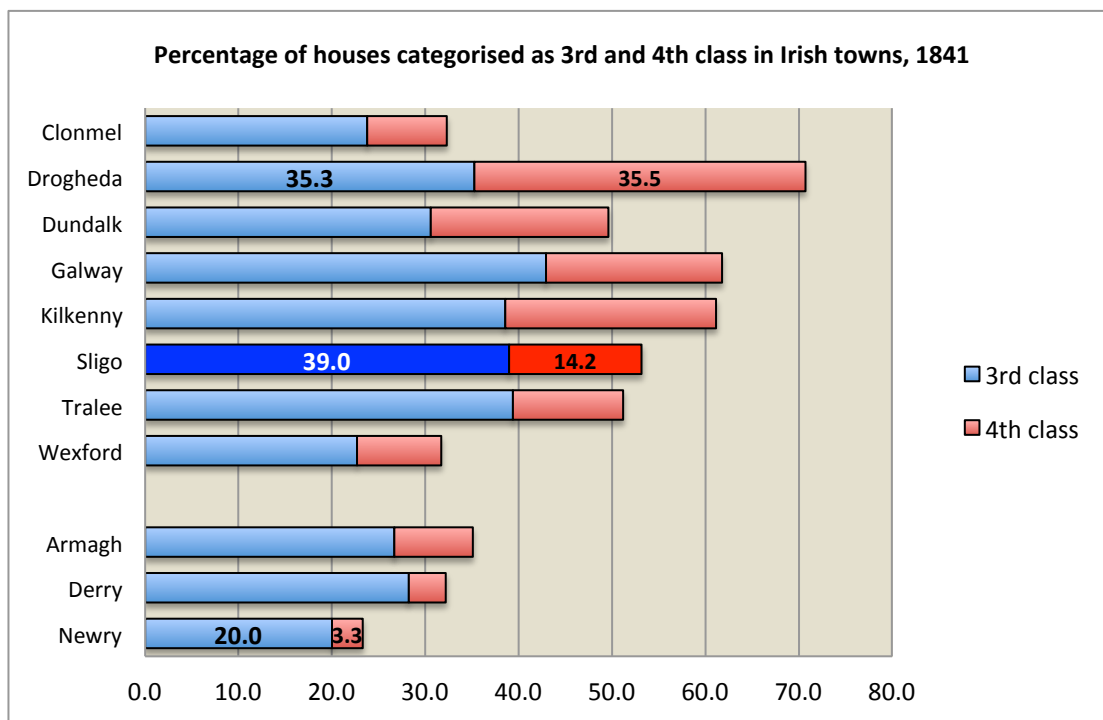


Fig. 3.9. Number of families living in fourth-class houses in 1841 census in the study towns. Source: *Census of Ireland, 1841, Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland for the year 1841, H.C. 1843, (504), xxiv, pp 442-45.*

The returns of the 1841 Census give us some idea of the number of third and fourth-class houses in Irish country towns. They amounted to nearly thirty per cent of the sum of all inhabited dwellings in the study towns. Some towns had higher percentages of differing categories. Drogheda had over a thousand fourth-class houses in 1841, home to over 1,110 families. Seventy per cent of the town's housing stock was comprised of third and fourth-class houses in 1841, a total of over 2,000 dwellings. Kilkenny and Galway were equally as bad, with over 60 per cent of their housing stock comprised of the lowest quality homes. In the thirteen towns with greater than 10,000 persons, over 41 per cent of families lived in third- or fourth-class housing.<sup>50</sup> This did not bode well for the future development of good housing; the elimination of the fourth-class category in most towns by 1851 simply led to more pressure on the remaining housing. There is a distinct difference in housing classes in the Ulster towns and the towns in the remainder of the island. Newry, Armagh and Derry had much smaller percentages of the lowest

<sup>50</sup> Calculated from *Census of Ireland, 1841, Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland for the year 1841, HC 1843, (504), xxiv p. 442.*

class of housing in 1841, indicative of the more economically developed northeast and greater socio-economic progress.



**Fig. 3.10.** The combined percentage of third- and fourth-class housing in selected Irish provincial towns, 1841 census. In some towns these two categories formed over 70 per cent of the housing stock. Notice the distinctly smaller percentages in the Ulster towns. Sligo had almost 40 per cent of its housing classified as third class.

The dilapidated condition of the Irish housing stock on the eve of the famine is illustrated by figure 3.12. Over 43 per cent of all Irish urban families lived in third- and fourth-class dwellings, with a further 45 per cent in second-class dwellings. Many of the fourth-class dwellings disappeared after the famine, particularly in the urban areas. This had little effect on the actual quality of housing. By the time of the 1890 census the number of inhabited houses in all the civic districts of Ireland had increased by 6 per cent over the preceding decade, but the number of third and fourth class houses had decreased by 20 per cent.<sup>51</sup> By 1901 the quality of some municipal housing had improved, as is evidenced by the number of artisan schemes that were built in the various provincial towns, but this contribution to alleviating the condition of the labouring classes was very modest.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1891, General report with illustrative maps and diagrams, tables and appendix*, HC 1892 [C.6780], xc, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> In the 1891 Census quality of housing is only given at aggregate civic district level, for all towns over 2,000 in each county persons. So for example in counties Kerry, Tralee, Listowel and Killarney are all

<b>Percentage of families living in classes of houses, 1841 census</b>				
	<i>1st Class</i>	<i>2nd Class</i>	<i>3rd Class</i>	<i>4th Class</i>
<b>Clonmel</b>	17.1	60.0	16.3	6.6
<b>Drogheda</b>	12.9	21.4	32.8	32.8
<b>Dundalk</b>	9.3	44.0	29.2	17.0
<b>Galway</b>	22.2	28.5	35.1	14.1
<b>Kilkenny</b>	8.8	35.0	35.9	20.3
<b>Sligo</b>	6.7	42.9	37.1	13.2
<b>Tralee</b>	10.3	44.5	35.7	9.6
<b>Wexford</b>	13.1	60.2	19.5	7.2
<b>Armagh</b>	11.2	59.5	22.4	6.8
<b>Derry</b>	16.0	57.9	23.0	1.3
<b>Newry</b>	16.3	63.6	17.5	2.6
<b>Total %</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>44.8</b>	<b>28.5</b>	<b>13.1</b>

Fig. 3.11. Percentage of families in the study towns living in the various categories of housing, 1841. Extracted from *Census of Ireland, 1841, Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland for the year 1841, HC 1843 xxiv (504) pp 442-45.*

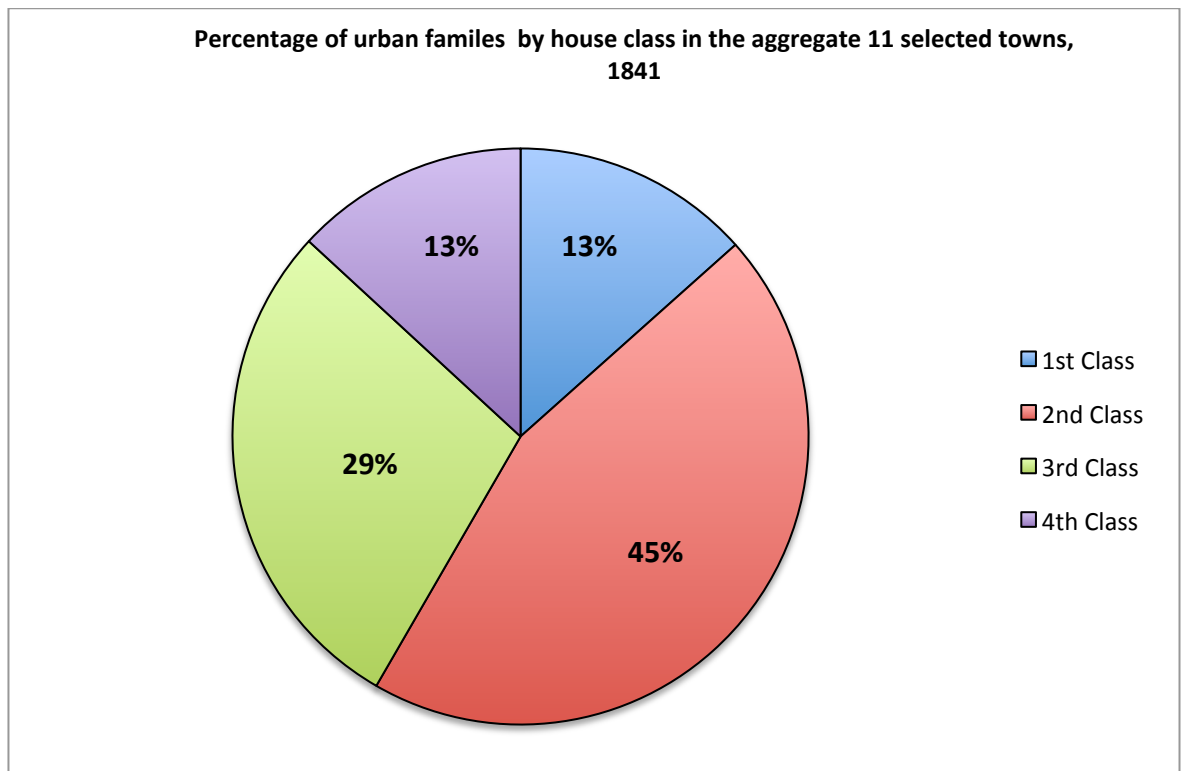
Specific overcrowding questions were added to the 1901 census enumeration. These returns were analysed to show the number of occupiers living in fewer than five rooms and further tables were published showing the numbers of people living in ‘tenements of one room’.<sup>53</sup> This classification was continued into the 1911 enumeration. From the first Free State census in 1926, the statistics on housing and occupiers expanded to cover such themes as density, average number of persons per room, and ‘overcrowding’.<sup>54</sup> These twentieth century census returns are an important tool for analysing the scale of overcrowding in the smaller country towns.

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grouped together as regards housing classifications, making it impossible to see what percentage of housing in Tralee was actually below second-class level.

<sup>53</sup> Crawford, *Counting the people*, p. 49.

<sup>54</sup> *Census of Saorstát Eireann, 1926*, vol. v., chapter v.



**Fig. 3.12. Percentage of urban families by house class in the aggregate of the 11 selected provincial towns, 1841. Source: Census of Ireland, 1841, vol. iv, (Housing), various tables.**

### **3.4 The 1885 slum survey and a start to municipal intervention.**

Housing for the poor was not a political or social priority in the Irish provincial towns before 1875 and the extension of the of the Labourers’ Dwellings Acts (The Cross Act), to Ireland.<sup>55</sup> After that date, some towns and cities managed to build labourers’ dwellings, but not in numbers sufficient to alleviate the problem. In all there was a total of 570 dwellings erected in thirteen Irish municipalities in the 1880s, which was proportionally more than the 2,400 dwellings erected in Britain before the Housing Act of 1890.<sup>56</sup> Philanthropic housing was erected in Dublin, in the form of the Iveagh Trust buildings, and the Dublin Artisans’ Dwellings Company, which were described as ‘outstanding attempts’ to provide better accommodation for the labouring class.<sup>57</sup> However, these homes cost more than three times the price of similar housing in Belfast. Low-standard housing was erected in Dublin and Cork well into the second half of the nineteenth century, due to the failure to enforce local regulations, and the

<sup>55</sup> Fraser, *John Bull’s other homes*, p. 77.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>57</sup> F.H.A. Aalen, ‘Public housing in Ireland, 1880-1921 in *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 2 (1987), pp 175-191.

relatively high cost of building, as compared to construction costs in Ulster.<sup>58</sup> Derry, also in Ulster, was ‘far better circumstanced with regards to housing conditions than either Limerick or Waterford’.<sup>59</sup>

There is evidence of public housing being built in about eleven other Irish towns in the period between 1880 and 1906, including municipal housing schemes in Dublin and Waterford.<sup>60</sup> Cork corporation constructed 90 houses in two separate schemes in 1886 and 1888, the largest number erected outside of Dublin. In fact by 1906 Cork had erected 378 dwellings, in comparison to Dundalk, which had built just 83 houses in four separate schemes, costing almost £11,000. Drogheda trailed behind with 42 homes, while Galway corporation had erected merely seven. In the south, Kilkenny forged ahead with the construction of 84 houses for the working class, costing £11,000, and Wexford constructed 78 houses for its inhabitants. Tralee managed 26 houses.<sup>61</sup> Fraser makes the comment that Ireland, while comprising an urban population of only five per cent of that in Britain, had by 1890 produced nearly twenty-five per cent of the British Isles’ municipal housing stock.<sup>62</sup>

### **The 1885 Slum Survey**

A major inquiry into the slums was carried out in 1885, mostly concentrating on Dublin, but also highlighting the appalling situation in other urban areas of the country.<sup>63</sup> The commissioners concurred that the urban centres of Ireland ‘differ considerably as to the condition of the houses of the working class, and each of the towns. ... displayed features sufficiently distinctive to deserve a separate account in brief forms’.<sup>64</sup> Attention is paid mostly to the larger cities, such as Limerick, where the state of affairs was described as being as ‘bad as possible’. ‘Matters could not be much worse anywhere in the world’, declared the former mayor in 1885.<sup>65</sup> Limerick was home to numerous tenement houses, somewhat different than the cabins of other Irish towns, and many of

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<sup>58</sup> Frank Cullen, ‘The provision of working- and lower-middle-class housing in late nineteenth-century urban Ireland’ in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. 111C, 217–251 (2011). p. 251

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251

<sup>60</sup> *Housing of the working classes acts. Return to an order of the Honourable the House of Commons, dated 14th May, 1906 for a return showing particulars as to the action of local authorities in Ireland under the acts, compiled to the 31st day of March, 1906.* HC 1906 (337).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Fraser, *John Bull’s other homes*, p. 77.

<sup>63</sup> *Third report of Her Majesty’s commissioners for inquiring into the housing of the working classes Ireland*, HC 1884-85 [C.4547], [C.4547-I], [C.4402-III].

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

the inhabitants were ‘so poor that they have not a stick of furniture, and are compelled to sleep on the floor’.<sup>66</sup>

Belfast was considered ‘on the whole satisfactory’, as was Derry, where a ‘far more satisfactory state of things’ was found, and where the death rate was low and decreasing. There had been a vast improvement in the dwellings of the working class in Derry in the ten years between 1875 and 1885, particularly in the arrangements of lavatories and the supply of fresh running water. In that decade, 1,137 new houses had been built, and many of the artisan class owned their own homes, and savings were invested in property.<sup>67</sup>

The housing of the working class in Cork in 1885 appeared to ‘be in a very bad condition in many respects’. There were 1,732 tenement houses in the city, occupied by about 22,000 persons. The tenements were said to be in a disgraceful state, and the overcrowding had existed for 50 years, with scarcely any improvement.<sup>68</sup> Waterford was considered to have a very wealthy corporation, with income being sufficient to cover all the municipal expenses of the town. However, its high municipal death-rate of 43 per thousand in 1885 was attributed by the medical officer to overcrowded housing, poor drainage and disease. Almost twenty per cent of the houses of the working classes were tenement buildings, and although some of the most insanitary dwellings had been built on corporation property, no health and sanitary by-laws had been made to regulate their condition. Waterford corporation, it was claimed, was reluctant to adopt the clauses of the Town Improvement Act, for fear that new local taxation would be introduced.<sup>69</sup>

The moral aspect of overcrowding in tenement buildings was addressed in the 1885 report, when the commissioners enquired about the segregation of the sexes as regards sleeping arrangements. The St. Vincent de Paul Society undertook visitations to many of the tenement slums, and its visitors regularly asked this question of the tenants. The commissioners expressed doubt as to whether the segregation of girls and boys into different beds in the same room was sufficient, but one witness, Rev. A. Plunkett

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., v.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., viii.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., viii.

replied that the ‘parents always adopt every safeguard they can under the circumstance with regards to the morality of their children’.<sup>70</sup>

The Housing of the Working Class Act of 1908, usually known as the Clancy Act, was the first piece of legislation to provide a subsidy for urban housing.<sup>71</sup> Following the agitation of the Irish Parliamentary Party, the Irish Housing Fund was established under this Act, and a sum of £180,000 invested. The funding was simply insufficient to meet the large demand, but nevertheless the act had a positive effect. The promoter of the act, J. J. Clancy MP, ‘boasted that municipalities were now only too keen to act due to the carrot of subsidy, rather than the stick of legal compulsion’.<sup>72</sup> By 1911 over £150,000 had been loaned to twenty-four urban authorities through the island under the terms of the Act, prompting a relative surge of house-building.<sup>73</sup> Municipal involvement in public housing resulted in over 5,000 new housing units by 1908; almost half of these were in Dublin or the wealthier townships to the south. Cork and Waterford had the other two main concentrations of public housing.<sup>74</sup> At the end of the financial year 1908, the amounts loaned under the housing acts totalled £759,699,<sup>75</sup> By 1914 and the outbreak of war, municipal authorities had taken out public loans to the sum of about £950,000, completing over 7,500 dwellings in the decade and a half between 1890 and 1914.<sup>76</sup>

### **3.5 Housing in the study towns compared 1850-1926**

All the Irish urban centres selected for this study have characteristics which set them and their inhabitants apart from their rural hinterlands, and equally from the larger cities. These characteristics are many and varied, influenced by historic events, local topography, and economic fortunes. However, one defining characteristic at the end of the nineteenth century, was that all these towns, to varying extents, were afflicted by extreme urban poverty, poor housing, low-waged workers and frequently a contracting economic base. Lack of political will, and low municipal rates were regularly problematic as well.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>71</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 91.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>75</sup> *Annual report of the Local Government Board for Ireland, for the year ended 31st March, 1908*, H.C. 1908 [Cd. 4243] p. xliv.

<sup>76</sup> Fraser, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 92.

The eight study towns can be categorised into four separate groupings, each of which had their own discrete elements and attributes. Sligo is on the west coast, a port town set at a distance from Dublin, features which apply equally to Galway and Tralee. Drogheda and Dundalk are almost twin towns, both ports in county Louth, on the east coast and lying within the economic orbit of the 'Pale'. Dundalk had strong economic and spatial ties with Ulster and the industrial northeast, ties that were severed after the imposition of the border in 1922. Clonmel and Kilkenny were the biggest inland towns in the agriculturally rich south, both on navigable rivers, with a long history of economic activity and as market and distribution centres for their considerable hinterlands. Wexford is an anomaly to the group; situated on the extreme south-east coast of Ireland, it was a Viking foundation, and a major fishing port, with medieval links to Bristol and the English fishing industry. A declining port by the 1920s, Wexford's population was similar to Sligo's throughout the study period. Its nearness to the city of Waterford overshadowed it economically.

### **Galway**

Galway is the largest town in the western province of Connacht, with a rich history as an Anglo-Norman foundation, and later as a semi-independent city-state. As early as 1600, Galway was the second-largest urban area in Ireland outside of Dublin, with a population of 4,200, and it attained county-borough status in 1610.<sup>77</sup> However it subsequently languished mainly due to the peripheral nature of the city on the remote west coast. By the beginning of the eighteenth century Galway's population stood at just 6,000, ostensibly increasing to 14,000 by 1762.<sup>78</sup> The unsatisfactory returns of the 1812 census, give a total of 24,484, with the number of houses returned as 3,353.<sup>79</sup> It is clear, even allowing for the rural nature of much of the administrative area, that the population was increasing, and we must assume the bulk of these people belonged to the labouring poor. Hardiman described the city in 1820 as 'comprehending a vast number of daily-increasing poor, without trade, manufacture or adequate employment'.<sup>80</sup> With the more exact enumeration of the 1821 census, the population of the urban area proper, (St. Nicholas' parish), is seen clearly, showing just under 17,000

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<sup>77</sup> Matthew Potter, *The municipal revolution in Ireland; a handbook of urban government in Ireland since 1800* (Dublin, 2011), p. 49.

<sup>78</sup> James Hardiman, *The history of the town and county of the town of Galway, from the earliest period to the present time* (Dublin, 1820), p. 188.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*



inhabitants, in 2,107 houses, comprising 4,000 distinct families.<sup>81</sup> The town thus had a high population density of 8.09 persons per house. By 1841, Galway's urban population stood at over 17,000,<sup>82</sup> with a significant rise in the following decade to 23,787, a result of the impoverished people of the surrounding areas flocking to the city after the famine.

The census of 1881 demonstrates that there were still over 1,600 houses in Galway classified as third or fourth-class, out of a total of over 3,000 houses – almost half of the entire housing stock.<sup>83</sup> The figure was little different in other towns. In 1885, the commissioners reporting into the housing of the working classes considered that Galway was characterised by the 'extreme poverty of its labouring population, and the miserable condition of a large proportion of the houses in the town'. The dilapidated condition of the 'dwellings of the poorer classes is productive of great misery'. The commissioners were scathing of the Galway authorities: 'the town commissioners are said to have shown no activity in putting in force the statutory powers that they possess, the reason being that many of the members of the sanitary authority are interested in defective house property'. Over 1,200 houses in the city were considered unfit for human habitation, with considerable overcrowding in about 70 tenement houses. In one tenement house alone, there were 22 rooms, and 22 families.<sup>84</sup> Rent for these rooms was between 6d and 1 shilling per week, and shock was expressed by the commissioners at the state of one family of four children and two parents occupying a room nine feet square by seven feet, six inches high. 'They have no bed, no table and no utensils, and they are in an abject state of poverty and dirt.'<sup>85</sup>

However, Galway corporation did take advantage of the financial subsidies of the Clancy Act of 1908, to build 194 houses, and the amount received from the Irish Housing Fund sufficed to cover the interest on the public loans.<sup>86</sup> Overcrowding

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<sup>81</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1821, Abstract of answers and returns*, HC, 1824, xxii, p. 340.

<sup>82</sup> Population of the urban portion of the county borough; the rural area was just over 15,000. *Census of Ireland, 1841, Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland for the year 1841*, HC 1843, (504), xxiv, p. 417.

<sup>83</sup> *Census of Ireland 1881*, table VIIIa, showing by classes the number of houses in the Town of Galway, p. 113.

<sup>84</sup> *Third report of Her Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the housing of the working classes Ireland* HC 1884-85, [C.4547] [C.4547-I] [C.4402-III], p. x.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>86</sup> Frazer, *John Bull's other homes*, p. 92.

continued, and was endemic in 1911 when Galway had 186 one-roomed dwellings, housing over 600 people.<sup>87</sup>

By the 1930s Galway's slums were particularly bad. In 1934, an inquiry was held into the clearance of five slum areas in the city, and shocking conditions were revealed. The doctors giving evidence at the inquiry singled out one house in Munster Lane, in the western part of the city, as being hopelessly overcrowded, with ten occupants sleeping in the makeshift loft of the dwelling, without windows or ventilation. The roofs of these cottages were barely six feet high, constructed of wood or corrugated iron, and badly leaking. The floors of the dwellings were earthen, and there was only one lavatory to serve five houses in the lane. In a tenement house in Cross Street, in the historic heart of the city, over thirty people in eight families shared just one lavatory.<sup>88</sup> The Claddagh, the Irish speaking fishing village of poor cabins in the western suburbs of Galway, was earmarked for re-development by 1929 when the council planned to build fifty houses with three and four rooms, starting in April 1930, in order to avail of the government subsidy of £70 per house. It was expected that a substantial grant would be made towards the scheme, as it was unquestionably in need of clearance, and also an Irish language area, eligible for higher grants.

The Claddagh consisted of over 200 cottages, and the corporation had plans for a much bigger scheme of clearance and re-building, the houses having been condemned by the sanitary officials.<sup>89</sup> However, there was much opposition from the people of the Claddagh to the demolition of their homes, many of which were considered to be in good condition. They feared the breakup of their unique fishing community, and the loss of family ties. The Claddagh was a rural 'clachan' settlement, adjacent to, but separate from the city, and as early as the 1820s was remarkable for its cleanliness and cobbled streets.<sup>90</sup> Even in the 1930s, there were many white-washed houses that were 'warm clean and comfortable', if small. This is a valid alternative vision of these vernacular houses, rather than the more usual description of an 'unsanitary settlement requiring demolition'.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1911*, vol. iv, Housing.

<sup>88</sup> *Cork Examiner*, 28 Nov. 1934, p. 9.

<sup>89</sup> *Cork Examiner*, 13 Feb. 1929, p. 5.

<sup>90</sup> Fidlema Mullane, 'Distorted views of the people and their houses in the Claddagh in nineteenth century' in *Journal of the Galway Archeological and Historical Society*, vol. 61 (2009), pp 170-200.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

## Drogheda & Dundalk

Drogheda and Dundalk are sizable port towns on the east coast, midway between Dublin and Belfast, traditionally competing with each other, and dominating the county of Louth economically and topographically. Drogheda, situated on the river Boyne, had a higher population than Galway in 1841, being ranked the ninth most populous of the Irish towns and cities. It was one of the few Irish towns not under the control of a patron.<sup>92</sup> Drogheda was described in 1836 as home to ‘long ranges of mud cabins...low and dark, with the smallest of apertures for windows, made it seem... the receptacle for half the pauperism in Ireland’.<sup>93</sup> Inglis noted in 1834 that ‘rows of the most wretched mud cabins extend a least a mile from the town’.<sup>94</sup>

The rapid growth of Belfast from 1850 led to a decline in Drogheda’s economic hinterland, and the unexpected growth of the neighbouring town of Dundalk meant that Drogheda stagnated, with its population dropping by 6,000 in the intercensal period to 1891. Dundalk, in contrast, grew to become the industrial centre of county Louth, resulting in a rivalry between the two towns that exists to this day. Drogheda retained its older street-pattern and an improved urban fabric, but its municipal area was reduced drastically under the Reform Act of 1840, and its population continued to decline until 1900. Industry was established in the 1860s, with cotton and corn mills built, resulting in substantial employment. A mix of landed gentry and wealthy catholic merchants governed Drogheda corporation until the 1890s. By 1873 Drogheda had constructed a modern sewerage system under the auspices of the Local Government Board, and connected individual houses to it. Such was the success of the town that under the Drogheda Corporation Act in 1896 the borough boundary was extended to 1,486 acres, and the corporation was granted borrowing powers in order to pursue such social schemes as purchasing the waterworks, commissioning street improvements, and building social housing.<sup>95</sup> The town’s first social housing scheme, consisting of 42 units, was constructed by 1898.<sup>96</sup> However, the decline in population persisted, as the industrialisation of Dundalk continued apace. The local corporation continued its role as

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<sup>92</sup> Potter, *The municipal revolution in Ireland*, p. 107.

<sup>93</sup> Baptist Wriothsley Noel, *Notes of a short tour through the midland counties of Ireland in the summer of 1836* (London, 1837), quoted in Ned McHugh, *Drogheda before the famine: Urban poverty in the shadow of privilege, 1826-45* (Dublin, 1998), p. 13.

<sup>94</sup> Henry D. Inglis, *A journey through Ireland 1834* (London, 1834), ii, p. 328.

<sup>95</sup> 61 & 62 Victoria. C. 134 (UK) 25 July 1896.

<sup>96</sup> Potter, *The municipal revolution in Ireland*, p. 170.

one of the most active in the country, municipalizing the gasworks, and constructing 116 units of public housing in the town centre by 1914, under the terms of the Clancy Act. Drogheda corporation boasted that the rents ‘were probably the lowest charged by any urban council in Ireland’, owing to the fact that the sites were already owned by it. Low, though, as such rents were, they were considered still too high for the working class to afford. There were about 800 dwellings in the town which were considered sub-standard.<sup>97</sup> In the same period a total of 125 houses were built privately in the town.<sup>98</sup> Two small schemes of public housing consisting of twenty-three units were constructed after the war of independence in 1922.<sup>99</sup>

Dundalk, the county-town of Louth, enjoyed a period of economic prosperity in the late eighteenth century, with its population rising to 8,600 by 1813.<sup>100</sup> As in the other Irish provincial towns, Dundalk exhibited the disconcerting contrast between the good quality buildings of the main streets, and the cabin dwellings of the suburbs. Atkinson writing in 1823, describes the main street as ‘decently paved and flagged’, but there are also ‘some lanes of inferior magnitude, which ... contribute to increase the poverty and population of the town’.<sup>101</sup> Along with an increase in population came the rise of low-waged labourers in the town’s port industries, breweries and commercial activities. As the population increased so did poverty, insanitary housing and outbreaks of infectious disease, including the disastrous cholera outbreak of 1832.<sup>102</sup> In 1846 the *Parliamentary Gazetteer* described Dundalk as having ‘some good shops and very many tolerable houses, yet it is far from having an attractive interior and is burdened and filthified as much as not a few second rate Irish towns with dismal lanes and squalid suburbs’.<sup>103</sup> 500 men were employed on harbour improvements in the period 1842-46, which gave steady employment through the famine, but also contributed to a large mass of low-skilled labourers and dependent families. O’Sullivan considers that ‘by the close of the nineteenth century, Dundalk was an industrial town, similar in many respects to towns in Britain that had developed as part of the industrial revolution’.<sup>104</sup> In 1861, with

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<sup>97</sup> *Appendix to the... report of the housing conditions of the working class... 1914...* HC 1914 [Cd. 7317], p. 384.

<sup>98</sup> Frank Gibney, *Drogheda Survey, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1940* (Drogheda, 2000), pp. 300-6.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 303.

<sup>100</sup> Harold O’Sullivan, *Dundalk*, Irish Historic Towns Atlas, No.16 (Dublin, 2006), p. 7

<sup>101</sup> A. Atkinson, *Ireland exhibited to England, in a political moral survey of her population* (London, 1823), p. 91.

<sup>102</sup> O’Sullivan, *Dundalk*, IHTA, p. 5.

<sup>103</sup> *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland: 1844-45*, ii, p. 142.

<sup>104</sup> Harold O’Sullivan, *Dundalk*, IHTA, p. 7.

a population of 10,542, Dundalk had 760 of its 1,929 dwellings classified as second and third-class, almost 40 per cent of its housing stock.<sup>105</sup>

Some housing developments constructed by private developers in Dundalk took place after 1850, mostly in the form of terraces of artisans houses, and ‘high-quality houses of two or three storeys’, mostly built of red brick. The largest of the artisan schemes was located on a site west of Chapel Street, consisting of more than 50 houses laid out in terraces, grouped around Bachelors Walk and James’s Street. These houses were in high demand, being let at an almost nominal rent by the philanthropic developer, John McDowell. They survived until the 1930s, when they were cleared.<sup>106</sup> By 1906 Dundalk had managed to build 83 artisan houses, scattered across the town.

Interestingly, Dundalk and Sligo both had branches of the ‘House League’, the short-lived political organisation dedicated to the advancement of the Irish artisan and the labourers, who had;

to endure many hardships in the appliance of legislation to their grievances, high rents and unsanitary dwellings and pledge ourselves to further every object which will give the artizan and labourer the rights which they have been so long denied; that we consider town tenants should be placed on equal footing in the legislation enjoyed by owners of land and that it is imperative a measure be introduced to place the tradesmen, labourer and shopkeeper in the same position as agricultural tenants.<sup>107</sup>

The House League movement was founded in Longford in 1885, in an attempt to emulate the successful policies of the Land League against evictions and high rents. According to Brian Graham, branches ‘only developed in cattle-grazing regions with well developed market-town networks, and were nationalist in their politics’. Although a short-lived movement, the House Leagues gave a voice to town tenants in the last decade of the nineteenth century who felt their concerns about urban affairs had been ‘neglected in the fusion of the land question with nationalist politics’.<sup>108</sup> There is little evidence that this organisation made any real difference to the poor labouring classes, who remained outside its membership.

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<sup>105</sup> *Census of Ireland 1861*.

<sup>106</sup> Harold O’Sullivan, *Dundalk*, IHTA, p. 5.

<sup>107</sup> *The Anglo-Celt*, 29 Sept. 1900, p. 8.

<sup>108</sup> Brian Graham and Susan Hood, ‘Social protest in late nineteenth-century Irish towns - the House League movement’ in *Irish Geography*, vol. 29, no. 1, (1996), pp 1-12.

## Clonmel & Kilkenny

Clonmel, an inland fording point on the Suir, and Wexford, an ancient port on the southeast coast, at the mouth of the river Slaney, are both representative of the Irish country town in the fertile south of the island.

Clonmel, originally a medieval settlement on the north bank of the river Suir, exhibited a linear street pattern, a medieval plot pattern, and was naturally bounded to the south by the foot-hills of the Comeraghs, a similar topographical situation to Sligo. It had been a regional administrative centre since the seventeenth century.<sup>109</sup> A prosperous town on the eve of the famine, Clonmel had a population of over 13,500. It was the second most populous inland town after Kilkenny, and was strongly influenced by its fertile agricultural hinterland.<sup>110</sup> It became an important town for river-traffic on the Suir, but this declined after the construction of the railway to Limerick in 1854. By the late nineteenth century, the town was graced by numerous churches, schools, shops, warehouses, fashionable town mansions and pleasant thoroughfares. However, in common with other towns of its size. Clonmel was also home to many insanitary lanes, which were ‘regarded as a breeding ground for fever’ during the famine.<sup>111</sup> There were 33 lanes in 1850, containing 184 houses, but by 1886, the number of lanes had been reduced to 24, and the dwellings to just over 100.<sup>112</sup> The congested lanes were home to the poor of the town, with the attendant poor quality housing and high levels of disease. Many of these lanes were immediately adjacent to the Main Street, with a further concentration on the western end of the town. In addition, the poor also lived in the cellars of the townhouses, which were described in 1886 by the sanitary officer as being about 40 in number, and unfit for human habitation. In common with most Irish towns of its size, Clonmel suffered from the cabin-built suburbs, and all the roads on the outskirts of the town were lined by dwellings described as ‘mud cabins and houses of inferior value’.<sup>113</sup> By 1881 Clonmel’s status had waned, suffering a drop of over 30 per cent in its urban population, and a decline in tillage in the surrounding countryside led to a decrease in the corn and milling industry.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Seán O’Donnell, *Clonmel 1840-1900: anatomy of an Irish town* (Dublin, 1999), p. 27.

<sup>110</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1841, Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland for the year 1841*, HC 1843, (504, xxiv, p. 229.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

In April 1897, Clonmel corporation proposed providing artisans' and labourers' dwellings under the 1893 act, and subsequently 45 houses, were completed in 1906, at a total cost of £7,476.<sup>115</sup> These were comprised of three separate developments, at varying parts of the town. Fourteen houses were completed in 1913 at Davis Road, and a further seven in James's Street in 1914. Rents were substantial, at about 4 shillings a week, and the tenants were largely skilled labourers and artisans, who had a more predictable income. It was considered that the cost of the Clonmel houses compared favourably with other similar schemes around the country.<sup>116</sup>

Overcrowding was endemic in Clonmel in 1901, as evidenced by the census returns for the urban area. There were 250 one-roomed dwellings in the town, and fifty of these houses were occupied by families of between four and eight persons, a total of almost 600 persons lived in unhygienic, cramped conditions. Clonmel was clearly no different, if in fact a little better off, than most of the towns in its class. In its submission to the commissioners reporting on the housing of the working classes in 1914, Clonmel corporation maintained that the houses of the labourers in the town were 'so bad as to menace the health of the town'. To provide a satisfactory remedy, it proposed building 150 houses at an average cost of £160 per house, which should be let at no more than 1s 6d per week, in order that the poor could afford them.<sup>117</sup>

By 1926, the town's population had dropped to 7,500, a decrease of over 45 per cent from its 1841 population. The closure of the major employer, Murphy's Brewers in 1925, was a severe blow to the town. However, Clonmel was still a major market town by the 1930s, with a thriving services sector, and many small shops and retailers.<sup>118</sup> An indication of the desperate housing situation can be gleaned from the fact that in 1926, Clonmel still had 5.6 per cent of its population living in one-roomed dwellings, with almost 24 per cent living in dwellings of two rooms or less.<sup>119</sup>

Kilkenny is the Republic's largest inland city, straddling the river Nore, and owes its origins to the presence of a Patrician church in the seventh century.<sup>120</sup> Later rising to

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<sup>115</sup> O'Donnell, *Clonmel, 1900-1932*, p. 80.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>117</sup> *Appendix to the....report of the housing conditions of the working class... 1914*, H.C. 1914 [Cd. 7317], p. 384.

<sup>118</sup> O'Donnell, *Clonmel, 1900-1932*, p. 78.

<sup>119</sup> *Saorstát Éireann Census, 1926*, taken from table 15, vol. 4, p. 60.

<sup>120</sup> John Bradley, *Kilkenny*, Irish Historic Towns Atlas, No.10 (Dublin, 2000), p. 1.

ecclesiastical prominence, the settlement became one of the main power-centres in Anglo-Norman Ireland. By 1702 it had a population of about 5,000, rising to almost 15,00 by 1801 and later developed into a large brewing centre, offering jobs for skilled artisans and labourers.<sup>121</sup> As a county town, Kilkenny developed much the same nineteenth-century public institutions as did Sligo, with workhouse, hospital, gaol and fever hospital, as well as the large Catholic cathedral and diocesan college.<sup>122</sup> In 1841 the city's housing stock consisted of 3,357 houses of which over 1,800 were classified as third and fourth-class. Essentially over half of all the houses in Kilkenny in 1841 were mud cabins. This proportion decreased by 1861, with a large increase in the number of second-class dwellings, but with little real improvement in quality.<sup>123</sup> The population of the city rose to over 23,000 in 1831, but dropped sharply after the cholera epidemic of 1832.<sup>124</sup> By 1881, following the famine and decades of emigration, Kilkenny's population stood at just 12,299, and was to decline further over the half century to just 10,572 by 1951. Public housing was limited in the city, mainly due to the high cost of borrowing. By 1891, almost 25 per cent of the houses in Kilkenny were classified as third or fourth class, a drop from 55 per cent in 1841.<sup>125</sup>

Kilkenny corporation had provided 140 houses between 1880 and 1914, most constructed under the generous terms of the Clancy Act of 1908. But it was considered that a great number of the dwellings existing in the city at that date were of a 'very inferior description'. The corporation deemed it an 'utter impossibility' to erect labourers' houses under the existing circumstances, due to the high cost of borrowing, and the extra town rates that would be required. Any houses built would have to have high rents in order to pay back the loans to the Board of Works. It was impossible to extract rates from the properties occupied by the poorer classes, and all deficiencies had to be made up by the ratepayers of the borough.<sup>126</sup> By 1911 Kilkenny's housing crisis had escalated, and the city had almost 80 one-roomed dwellings housing over 150 people, and one notable case of a single-roomed house, which housed seven people.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>123</sup> *Census of Ireland*, 1851, and 1861.

<sup>124</sup> John Bradley, *Kilkenny*, IHTA, p. 8.

<sup>125</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1891. part I, Area, houses, and population vol. i., province of Leinster* H.C. 1890-91, [C.6515], xcv, p. 354.

<sup>126</sup> *Appendix to the...report of the housing conditions of the working classes... 1914*, H.C. 1914 [Cd. 7317], p. 386.

<sup>127</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1911, Area, houses, and population*, HC, 1912-13, [Cd.6049], cxiv, p. 54.



At the time of the 1926 census Kilkenny city still had 1,744 people living in dwellings of two rooms or less, over twenty-per cent of its population.

## **Wexford**

Wexford, the principal town and port of the county of the same name, was a Viking town, historically of strategic importance on the sea route to Britain and beyond.

Latterly a Norman town, Wexford had expanded by the late eighteenth century, with a substantial sea-faring tradition, good economic links across the Atlantic and a thriving corn trade.<sup>128</sup> A period of house building by successful landed families in the later 1700s changed the face of the town. New quays were constructed, and tidal areas filled in. A visitor to Wexford in 1764, Amyas Griffiths, commented on the lower class housing in the suburb of Faythe, where the ‘very broad street’ a mile in length was composed mostly of ‘very snug cabins’, and their dwellers were ‘the most industrious people on earth’, whose main employment was spinning hemp, or weaving nets.<sup>129</sup> The population of the town reached 9,179 by 1788. After 1829, there was a boom in shipping, brewing business and industry, which continued until the 1880s, accompanied by a period of urban expansion and the erection of institutional buildings. Slum housing appears to have been problematic in Wexford in the 1840s, when the *Parliamentary Gazetteer* described the town as and ‘ill-paved, filthily, repulsive place, most of its thoroughfares orientally narrow and multitudes of its houses squalid, disgusting and pestiferous’.<sup>130</sup> Many of Wexford’s small medieval lanes were lined with cabins and occupied by the poor, a fact reflected in their valuation in Griffith’s valuation of 1853.

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The removal of the port out to the deeper water at Rosslare in the 1880s, led to a period of deep decline and the success of the previous years evaporated in the general slump following the First World War. By 1914, 117 houses had been provided under the various acts, providing accommodation for 142 families, although the council listed 250 dwellings in 1914 as ‘unfit for human habitation’.<sup>132</sup> By the 1926 enumeration 13.5 per cent of the population lived in houses of two rooms or less, the lowest proportion in all

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<sup>128</sup> Billy Colfer, *Wexford, A town and its landscape* (Cork, 2008), p. 3

<sup>129</sup> As noted in Colfer, *Wexford, A town and its landscape*, p. 122.

<sup>130</sup> *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland*, 1844-45, iii, p. 540.

<sup>131</sup> Colfer, *Wexford, A town and its landscape*, p. 170.

<sup>132</sup> *Appendix to the...report of the housing conditions of the working classes... 1914*, H.C. 1914 [Cd. 7317], p. 392.

the study towns.<sup>133</sup> Wexford did not see any substantial development until the second half of the twentieth century. Small schemes of public housing were completed by the 1930s, at Hill Street, Distillery Road, and St Ibar's Villas. Larger schemes took place after 1932, with principal schemes at Wolfe Tone Villas (94 houses), Maudlintown (154 houses), and Whiterock view (62 houses).<sup>134</sup> Despite all these schemes, Wexford still had over 380 people living in one-roomed dwellings in 1946.<sup>135</sup>

## **Tralee**

Tralee is a county town in the fertile lowlands of north County Kerry, on the south-west coast far from Dublin, but within the economic orbit of the city of Limerick. Founded by the Normans in the thirteenth century, by the nineteenth century it was a stable and prosperous town, with a similar range of functions as most of the other county-towns in Ireland.<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, Tralee was characterised by impoverished urban quarters by the 1840s, when over half of all its houses were classified as third and fourth class.<sup>137</sup> This situation had arisen owing to the complex tenurial system in the town, caused by the granting of long-leases to speculator 'middlemen', and there were frequently several layers of middlemen between the occupier and ground landlord.<sup>138</sup> This resulted in insecure tenure, profiteering and the raising of rents whenever improvements were made by a sitting tenant. In a commissioned report in 1886, over 300 of Tralee's houses, occupied by 1,500 people were leased on weekly tenancies, a precarious situation for many families.<sup>139</sup>

By 1891, the housing situation had improved somewhat, with only 600 houses in all the urban areas in Kerry returned under the two bottom classes. Eighty-eight houses were provided in Tralee under the relevant acts by 1914.<sup>140</sup> As early as March 1922, a deputation from the town met key ministers from the new Provisional Government, in

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<sup>133</sup> *Saorstát Éireann Census*, 1926, vol. iv, Housing, table 20a, pp 126-149.

<sup>134</sup> Colfer, *Wexford, A town and its landscape*, p.189.

<sup>135</sup> *Census of Ireland*, 1946, vol. iv, Housing, p. 29.

<sup>136</sup> John Bradley, 'Tralee' in Anngret Simms and John H. Andrews (eds), *More Irish country towns* (Dublin, 1995), pp 177-8.

<sup>137</sup> *Census of Ireland 1841*.

<sup>138</sup> Susan Hood, 'The significance of the villages and small towns in rural Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', in Peter Borsay and Lindsay Proudfoot (eds.), *Provincial towns in early modern England and Ireland; change convergence and divergence*, (Oxford, 2002), pp 241-263, at p. 257.

<sup>139</sup> Brian Graham and Susan Hood, 'Social protest in late nineteenth-century Irish towns - the House League movement' in *Irish Geography*, vol. 29, no. 1, (1996), pp 1-12, at p. 7.

<sup>140</sup> *Appendix to the...report of the housing conditions of the working classes... 1914*, H.C. 1914 [Cd. 7317], p. 392.

relation to securing funding to alleviate Tralee's housing crisis.<sup>141</sup> But by 1926 Tralee was in the unenviable position of having a quarter of its population living in dwellings of two rooms or less. Tralee UDC erected only 30 houses between 1919 and 1926, a miserable record by any standard.<sup>142</sup> It struggled to clear the one-roomed cabins, and by 1946 almost 6.5 per cent of the towns' population remained in this class of accommodation.<sup>143</sup>

### **3.6 'Homes fit for Citizens'? - The crisis intensifies, 1926-1932**

Following independence much was expected of a native government, but the fact that a parliament now existed in Dublin did not change the situation for the poor in any significant way. Conservatism and caution were the policies pursued by the Cosgrave government, and with restricted financial means there were limited attempts to address the housing problems, despite the rhetoric of the pre-independence years. The social policies of Cumann na nGaedhael were also more inclined to favour the middle-class and farmers, who had voted for them, and Cosgrave's attitude to the poor is often seen as prejudiced.<sup>144</sup> Some ministers ascertained that 'one of the most serious defects of the Irish character is this tendency to dependence on one kind or another'.<sup>145</sup> It must be acknowledged that the new government had a large loan to service in the aftermath of the civil war, and wished to prove that the Irish could be trusted to run their own country in a proper manner.

The upheavals and civil war of the early 1920s, precluded the making of the decennial census due in 1921, with the result that the first census of the Irish Free State took place in 1926, a full 15 years after the 1911 enumeration. This period spanned the Great War, the end of the long Victoria and Edwardian eras, the Irish war of independence and the creation of a new state. For most of Europe, the 1920s ushered in a period unrecognisable from the social and political norms of a decade previously. For the Irish slum-dweller however, precious little had changed.

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<sup>141</sup> *Cork Examiner*, 8 Mar. 1922, p. 5.

<sup>142</sup> *Department of Local government and Public Health, Annual Report 1927-1928, appendix xxiii*, p. 174.

<sup>143</sup> Census of Ireland, 1946, vol. iv, Housing, p. 29.

<sup>144</sup> James O'Reilly, 'Dublin's outstanding problem': an analysis of the debates policies and solutions regarding the housing crisis, 1922-39' (MA thesis, UCD, 2010), p. 14.

<sup>145</sup> James A. Burke, Minister for Local Government, quoted in Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (Dublin, 2005), p. 317.

In late 1922, industry in the Free State employed only 100,000 people, and by late 1923 almost 80,000 people were unemployed. In contrast in Northern Ireland, 35 per cent of the population were engaged in industry in the same period, leading to a better standard of living in the Ulster towns.<sup>146</sup> Analysis of the 1926 census shows that overcrowding was endemic in the Free State by that date, with over 580,000 people, or 16 per cent of the population, living in dwellings of two rooms or less. Even more disconcerting, was the fact that a total of 1.37 million or 49 per cent of the population were living in dwellings of three rooms or less. This was out of a total population of 2.3 million. Further examination shows that if the number of persons living in dwellings of four rooms or less are tabulated, then an overwhelming majority of the population, that is 72 per cent, or just under 2 million people, lived in dwellings of four rooms or less.<sup>147</sup> And the quality of these dwellings was in many cases only too well documented.

<b>Overcrowding -1926 Census -Saorstát Éireann</b>								
	<i>1 room</i>	<i>2 rooms</i>	<i>3 rooms</i>	<i>4 rooms</i>	<i>5 rooms</i>	<i>6 rooms</i>	<i>7 or More rooms</i>	TOTAL
<b>1 person</b>	13,300	15,100	11,000	7,200	2,100	1,200	1,600	<b>51,500</b>
<b>2 persons</b>	21,400	45,600	56,200	37,000	14,400	9,800	12,500	<b>196,900</b>
<b>3 persons</b>	22,700	56,100	91,500	63,700	27,300	18,600	28,100	<b>308,000</b>
<b>4 persons</b>	22,200	62,500	111,500	83,300	39,300	26,200	40,000	<b>385,000</b>
<b>5 persons</b>	19,700	63,600	118,100	92,000	43,700	29,200	45,300	<b>411,600</b>
<b>6 persons</b>	16,400	59,100	112,100	88,800	42,000	28,500	45,000	<b>391,900</b>
<b>7 persons</b>	11,300	49,900	95,200	79,900	37,400	25,300	39,900	<b>338,900</b>
<b>8 persons</b>	6,700	37,800	76,200	64,200	30,000	20,100	31,400	<b>266,400</b>
<b>9 persons</b>	3,800	24,800	54,700	46,200	22,000	14,500	23,800	<b>189,800</b>
<b>10 persons</b>	1,900	15,600	37,100	32,300	15,800	10,400	18,800	<b>131,900</b>
<b>11 persons</b>	500	6,000	16,200	14,800	7,800	5,600	9,500	<b>60,400</b>
<b>12 persons</b>	200	4,000	13,300	13,600	7,400	5,800	14,000	<b>58,300</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>140,100</b>	<b>440,100</b>	<b>793,100</b>	<b>623,000</b>	<b>289,200</b>	<b>195,200</b>	<b>309,900</b>	<b>2,790,600</b>

**Fig. 3.13. Overcrowding in the Irish Free State, 1926. Source, *Census of Saorstát Éireann, 1926, vol. iv, Housing.***

In contrast to the situation in the Free State, the 1921 census returns for England and Wales showed that the average number of rooms per family was 4.55, with London having a lower ratio, and rural areas also having a lower density at about 5.09 rooms per family.<sup>148</sup> In the Free State the number of persons per room is significant. Over 793,000

<sup>146</sup> Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, p. 314.

<sup>147</sup> The census defined occupied rooms as 'usual living rooms, including bedrooms and kitchens, but excluding bathrooms, sculleries, etc'. This probably indicates that many of those dwellings with four rooms, may have had a small scullery or toilet, but many may not.

<sup>148</sup> *General Report, Census of England and Wales, 1921*, vol. iii, p. 45.

people were living in dwellings consisting of just three rooms, an exceptionally high density. A total of 54,700 persons in families of nine people still lived in dwellings of three rooms or less. Many of these may have been in Dublin, where tenement buildings proliferated.

	<i>Clonmel</i>	<i>Drogheda</i>	<i>Dundalk</i>	<i>Galway</i>	<i>Kilkenny</i>	<i>Sligo</i>	<i>Tralee</i>	<i>Wexford</i>
<i>Persons in 1 &amp; 2 rooms 1926</i>	1,741	2,600	4,460	2,680	1,744	1,874	2,337	1,448
<i>Total population in 1926</i>	9,056	13,996	12,716	14,226	10,046	11,437	10,533	11,879
<i>Percentage 1926</i>	<b>23.7%</b>	<b>28.7%</b>	<b>21.0 %</b>	<b>23.1%</b>	<b>20.7%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>25.2%</b>	<b>13.5%</b>

Fig. 3.14. Selected provincial towns, showing the number and percentages of populations living in dwellings of two rooms or less. Source: *Census of Saorstát Éireann, 1926, vol. iv., housing.*

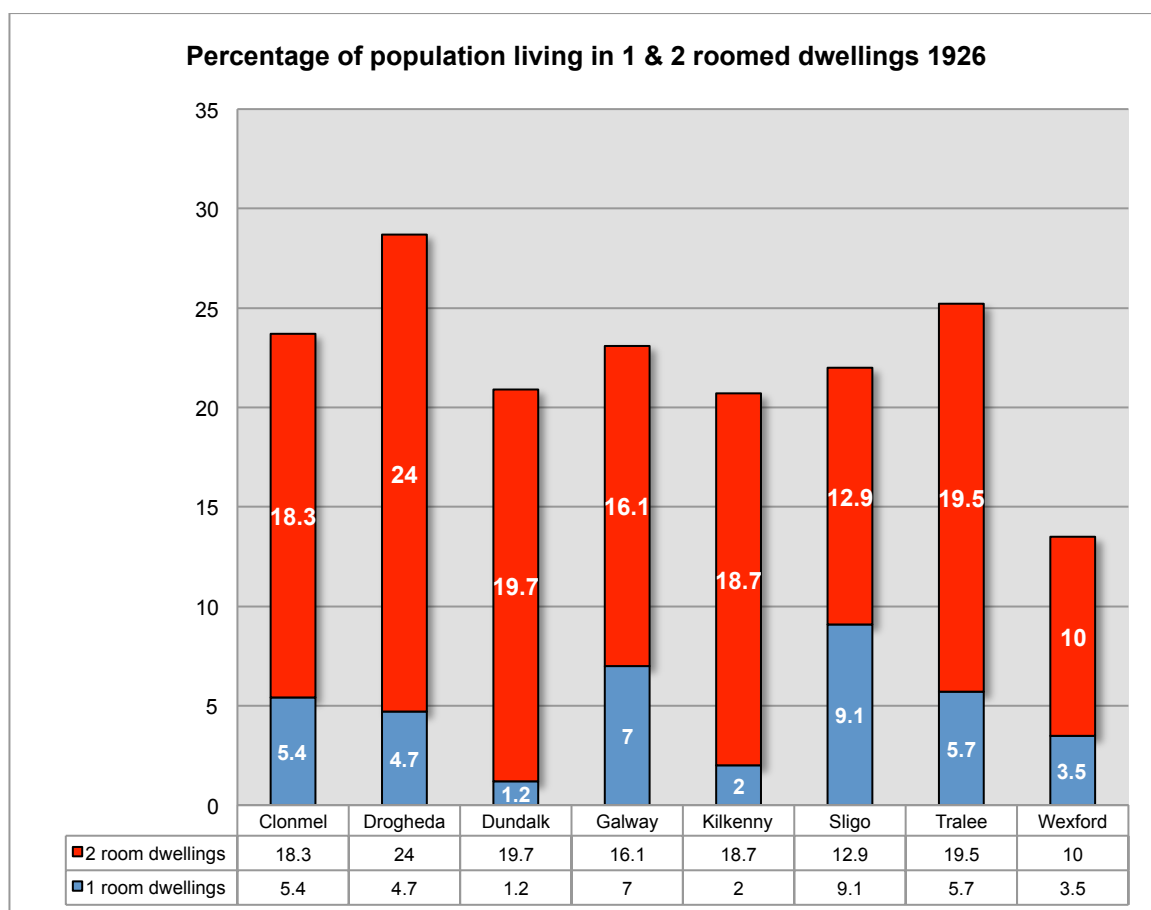
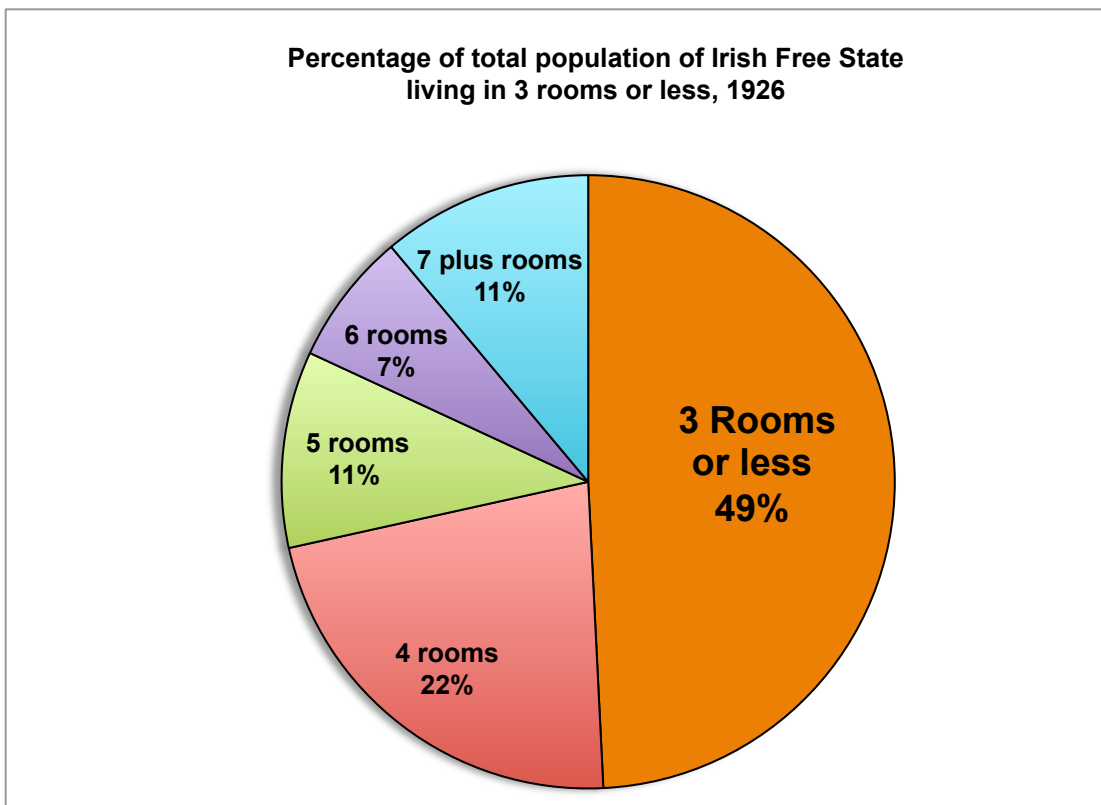


Fig. 3.15. Percentage of study town's populations living in dwellings of one and two rooms, 1926. Source: *Census of Saorstát Éireann 1926, vol. iv, Housing, Table 20a, p. 126 et al.*

The rate of overcrowding in the provincial towns was a source of major concern right through the 1920s. The statistics from the 1926 census illustrate this vividly in the number and percentage of one-and two roomed houses in the study towns. Sligo had

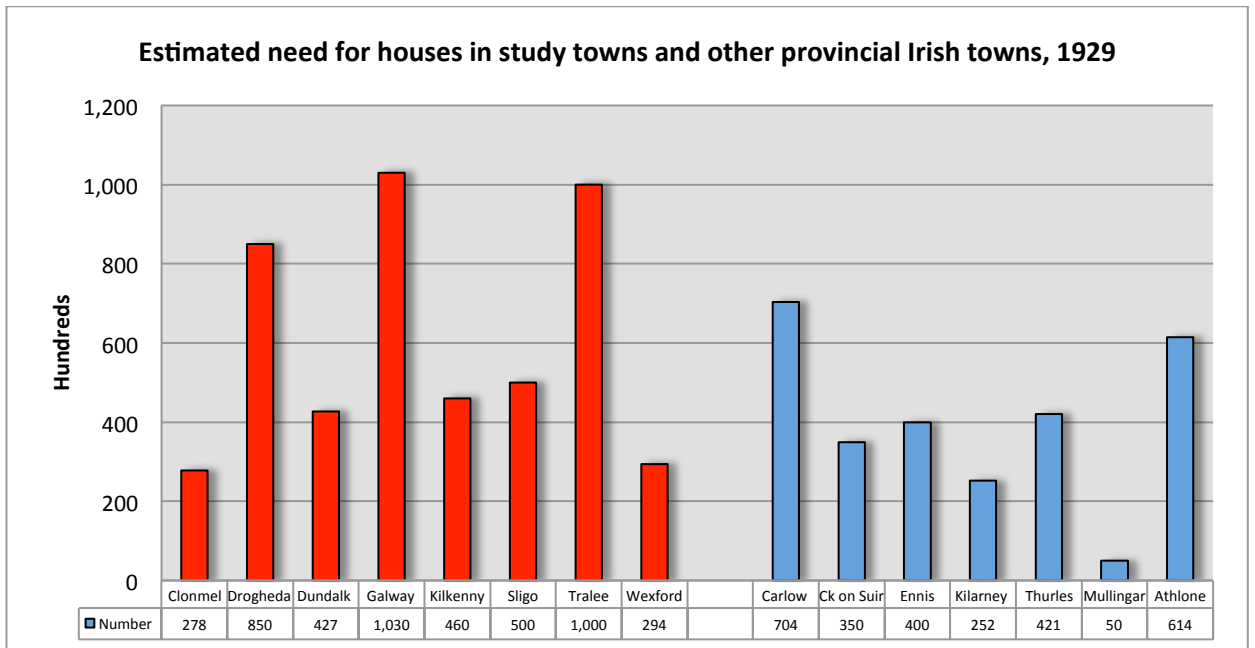
almost 13 per cent of its population living in dwellings of just two rooms in 1926, and 9 per cent living in one-roomed dwellings.<sup>149</sup> Through the Free State as a whole in 1926, over 49 per cent of the population, rural and urban, inhabited dwellings of three rooms or less. The percentage of the population in houses of four rooms or less was a startling 72 per cent, almost three-quarters of the country's population. Drogheda, despite building some artisan houses, still had almost a quarter of its population living in dwellings consisting of two rooms. Cork, the second city, had improved little by 1926; 12,850 houses were inhabited by 15,496 families, and a large proportion of the population were 'crowded into tenements and small houses, with an average of 12.6 people per house'. Over 5,500 people lived in one-roomed dwellings, and a further 8,675 people lived in tenement buildings.<sup>150</sup> This was clearly a housing crisis, not just a problem.



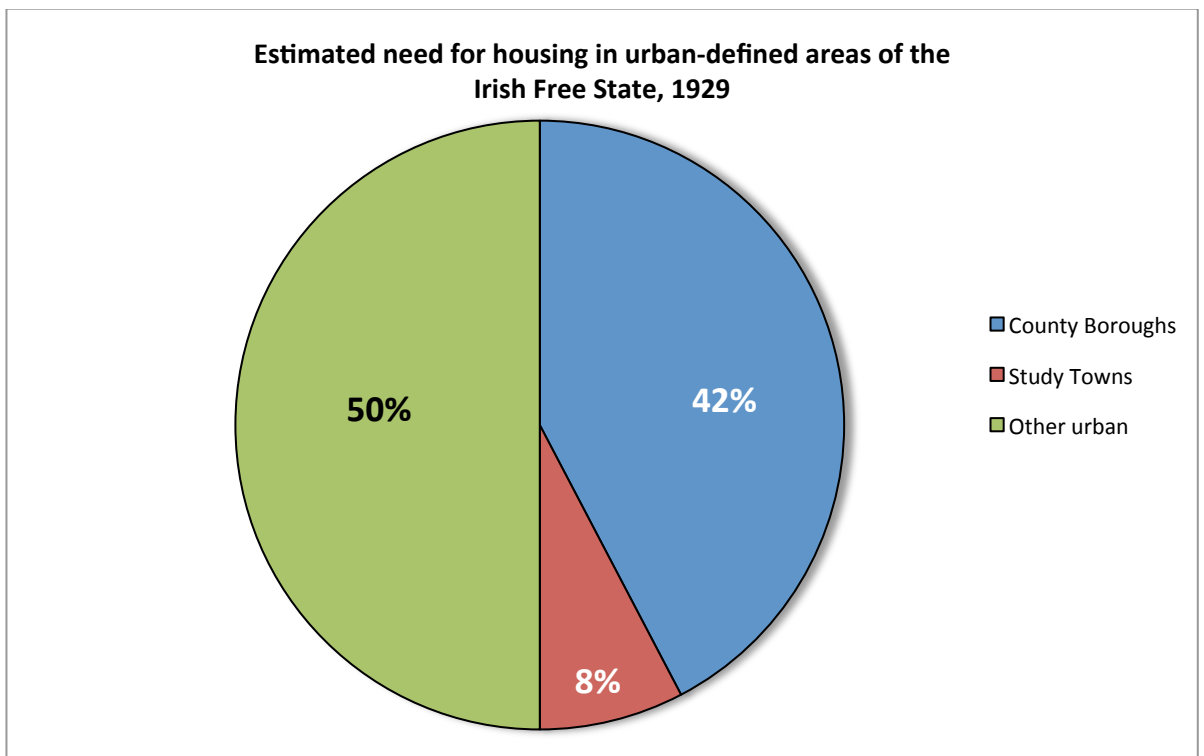
**Fig. 3.16. Percentage of population of the Free State living in 3 rooms or less, 1926 census. Source: *Census of Saorstát Éireann, 1926*, vol. iv, Housing.**

<sup>149</sup> *Saorstát Éireann 1926 census*, vol. iv, housing, table 20a, p. 126 &c.

<sup>150</sup> Michael A. Dwyer, 'Housing conditions of the working classes in Cork city in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century' in Margaret Lantry (ed.), *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archeological Society*, vol. 117 (2013), pp 91-99.



**Fig. 3.17. Estimate of housing needs in the study towns and other smaller Irish provincial towns, 1929.**  
 Source: *DLGPH Annual Report 1929-30*, appendix xxvii, pp 209-212.



**Fig. 3.18. Estimated needs for housing in the urban areas of the Irish Free State 1929.** Source: *DLGPH Annual Report, 1929-30*, appendix xxvii, pp 209-212.

In 1929 the Department of Local Government conducted a housing survey in all the urban areas of the new Free State to quantify the needs for new housing for the working class and very poor. The results were telling. In the 86 urban areas of the State,

excluding the cities, there was an estimated need for over 14,790 houses. The requirement in the four cities was for 26,300 dwellings. All eight study towns together required an aggregate of 4,800 houses, or 8 per cent of the total estimated need in the state, while Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford combined had an estimated need of 42 per cent. Half of the estimated houses needed in urban areas were however outside the main cities and the eight study towns.<sup>151</sup> Therefore an estimated 31,500 houses were needed in the third tier of Irish towns in 1929. The average urban household size in the Irish Free State in 1926 was 4.32 persons per house, which fell only very slowly to 4.15 in 1946.<sup>152</sup> Even with a concentrated housing programme, overcrowding would continue to be an issue in larger families.

Towns and Urban Areas	To meet unsatisfied demand	To rehouse persons displaced by clearance of unhealthy areas	To replace unfit houses	To replace obstructive or other buildings	To replace houses below a reasonable standard	To meet anticipated deficiencies arising from industrial development	Total Units Required
Other Municipal areas	3,091	2,002	2,110	414	2,081	242	9,940
4 Cities	7,012	3,485	9,208	28	5,977	700	26,410
8 Study Towns	1,677	1,732	571	27	652	180	4,839
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>11,780</b>	<b>7,219</b>	<b>11,889</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>8,710</b>	<b>1,122</b>	<b>41,189</b>

Fig. 3.19. Categories of municipal towns in the Irish Free State in 1929, showing the estimated need for housing as ascertained by their local authorities.

The *Irish Press*, generally a paper strongly politically aligned with Fianna Fáil, ran a very vociferous and public campaign between 1934 and 1936, which highlighted the deprivation in the slums of Dublin and in other Irish towns.<sup>153</sup> The paper traced the root of the problem firmly to the ‘tragic British legacy’, ignoring the other key issues in the housing question. The crusade run by the *Irish Press* was unique in that it brought on board many religious leaders, including the Chief Rabbi, and the Church of Ireland Archbishop Dr Gregg, as well as the Catholic hierarchy and local clergy. The newspaper also drew attention to slum problems in some of the larger towns outside of Dublin, launching a ‘national slum survey’ in October 1936.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>151</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1929-1930*, appendix xxvii, housing survey by local authorities, 1929, an estimate of housing needs, p. 212.

<sup>152</sup> *Censuses of Ireland, 1926, 1936, 1946*.

<sup>153</sup> Barry Sheppard, *The Irish Press Slum Crusade 1934-1936*, at <http://www.theirishstory.com/2015/04/20/the-irish-press-slum-crusade-1934-36/#.VjDA60vUPqU> Retrieved on 28 Oct., 2015.

<sup>154</sup> *Irish Press*, 20 Oct. 1936, p. 9.



While Sligo town was not included in the survey, conditions in Ballymote, the second largest town in the county, with a population of 750 people, came under fire from the paper. Out of 251 dwellings in the town 85 were condemned by the medical officer in 1936. One particular dwelling in Wolfe Tone Street, was home to the Langan family of seven children and two adults, packed into an incredibly confined space. The dwelling was over a hundred years old, and all the children, ranging from 22 years to 10 years, slept in one room. ‘There was absolutely no partitioning at all in the room. Three boys slept in a settle bed, two little girls on a straw pallet squeezed between the foot of that bed and the wall, and John Joe, 22, being the hardiest, slept on the bare, damp floor on sacking stuffed with hay’. The family had lived in the same place for eighteen years.<sup>155</sup> Some months previously, 150 of the townspeople of Ballymote, shocked by the conditions in which their fellow-citizens were housed, signed a petition to the Sligo Board of Health asking that body to act on relieving the conditions in the 85 houses which were condemned, but nothing had been done by the time the *Irish Press* campaign started. The paper’s campaign was successful in drawing attention to the plight of the Dublin tenements in particular, and in highlighting the fact that despite a decade of independence and the commencement of large state-aided schemes throughout the country, thousands of Irish citizens were still living in appalling conditions.<sup>156</sup>

## Conclusions

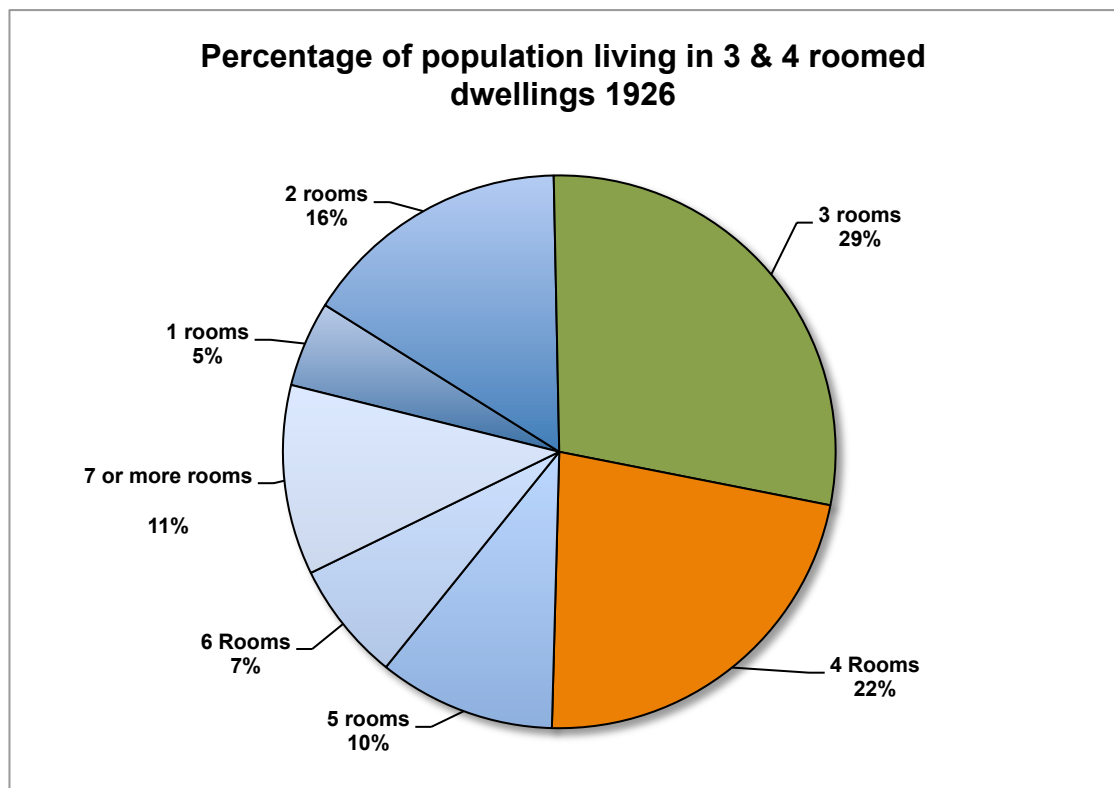
Ireland in the nineteenth century was characterised by a widely dispersed, second tier of middle-sized towns, with distinct urban functions which exerted a strong influence on their hinterland. They differed from British towns in that there was little industrial activity taking place in them, but instead served as service, market and administrative centres. With populations averaging around 10,000 by the 1840s, these towns experienced a sudden influx of poor people in the wake of the famine. Their population fell in the 1870s, with continued mass emigration, but then stabilised and stagnated for another 90 years. With a larger proportion of the reduced population living in these towns after 1870, they gained in economic and social significance, but retained large areas of very poor housing well into the middle of the twentieth century. The lack of any major industry or significant economic base in most of these urban centres led to

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<sup>155</sup> *Irish Press*, 18 Nov. 1936, p. 9.

<sup>156</sup> *Irish Press*, 19 Oct. 1936, p. 9

the polarisation of their populations into a poor labouring class, totally dependent on their own direct labour, and a more middling-sort of merchant shop-keeping class, which had access to more secure finances, and thus better housing.



**Fig. 3.20. Percentage of population in the Irish Free State living in dwellings of 3 and 4 rooms, 1926.** Source: *Census of Saorstát Éireann, 1926*, vol. iv, Housing. Just over half of all people were living in accommodation which had 3 or 4 rooms. Half of the population inhabited dwellings of 3 rooms or less.

Lack of legislation, and poor implementation of any existing sanitary regulations, led to the proliferation of the straggling cabins of the poor on the outskirts and in the narrow lanes of most Irish provincial towns, where they were a source of frequent comment and anxiety by the 1850s. Towns in Ulster did not suffer the same fate as those in the rest of the country, thanks in part to a more diversified industrial base, and more effective municipal government. Southern towns exhibited a large percentage of lower-class houses within their boundaries right up to the 1880s, when the first urban housing acts were passed. However, the meagre financial incentives in these early acts resulted in relatively few dwellings being erected until after the Clancy Act of 1908. The unexpected intervention of the Great War and the subsequent revolutionary period brought this hopeful era to a sudden close. The onus for rehousing the poor was shifted onto the shoulders of a native Irish government, which addressed it reluctantly, and with limited success, until after 1931.

Slums were an unmistakable feature of the eight towns selected for this study from the 1820s onwards, and while some of these towns made early attempts to address the plight of the poor, the lack of political will and the absence of a sufficient rate-base made borrowing difficult for many local authorities. Additionally, those in power did not see housing of the poor as their responsibility until forced to do so by legislation, and a shift in public opinion. Limited housing supply and a surplus of low-waged labourers ensured overcrowding in even the smaller towns. The excessive rate of overcrowding was evident by 1926, and it became very clear that nothing short of a social revolution by way of mass government intervention would make any inroads on the squalor of the slums, or better the lives of the poor. That intervention, when it came was to change the face and fabric of the Irish country town.

Sligo was a classic example of exactly this situation, as explored in the case study which follows.

## Chapter 4

### Prelude to a housing crisis: Sligo 1730-1880

‘Stragglings, irregular and cabin-built suburbs’<sup>1</sup>

This chapter, although outside the dates set for the case study, aims to firmly place the origins of Sligo’s urban poverty in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when a rising urban population, combined with low-incomes and complex tenurial leases, resulted in long, linear cabin-built suburbs and densely packed back-alleys and lanes behind the main streets of the expanding town. This was a period when the urban population rose rapidly with little corresponding growth in housing of quality.

This chapter will chronicle the development of Sligo, and its urban topography from the 1730s to 1880, setting the background and context for the case study of Sligo, the second part of this thesis. The political and social issues of the era can be seen as a prelude to the poverty and housing crisis of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The century and a half between 1730 and 1880 was a period of fundamental demographic and social change in Ireland, embracing enormous increases in population, the catastrophic effects of the great famine, and the major municipal and social reforms of the second half of the nineteenth century. The end of this period also saw the first attempts to identify and tackle the interconnected issues of poverty, health and poor housing.

Sligo’s demographic growth, the proliferation of poverty, destitution and poor housing will be examined in light of fluctuating economic fortunes. The role of an entrenched political elite, and their control of the economic life of the borough of Sligo from the 1730s to the era of municipal reform will form a backdrop to these issues. The development and growth of local government in the later half of the nineteenth century will be examined through the lens of health and sanitary reforms, and the increasing role of central government in peoples’ everyday lives.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Parliamentary Gazetteer for Ireland 1844-1845*, vol. iii (Dublin, 1846), pp 268-269.

#### 4.1 Urban expansion and urban leases

It has been argued by Susan Hood, and Lindsay J. Proudfoot, that much of the development in eighteenth century Irish provincial towns was as a result of the co-operation between landlords and urban tenantry in the process of urban building.<sup>2</sup> It is suggested that considerable evidence exists in rentals, leases and estate accounts to show that ‘the rent profits of a small group of landlords, were translated into local development and improvement’ in the period between 1760 and 1815.<sup>3</sup> The lessors involved in many of the urban leases that were granted from the 1760s onwards, were merchants, retailers, craftsmen, and a rising professional class. The unprecedented economic growth of this period, spurred on by increased cattle and linen exports, resulted in landlord-income from rents doubling between the 1740s and the 1770s.<sup>4</sup> The increases in local trade and ‘local demand for foodstuffs and other goods’ consolidated the network of Irish market towns, and indeed the bigger provincial towns.<sup>5</sup> Many independent builders leased plots and constructed houses, shops, tanneries and hotels in various Irish towns. Sligo appears to have been no exception to this general pattern, with significant growth in housing, particularly in the poorer areas on the periphery of the town, between 1770 and 1790.<sup>6</sup> The late 1790s also seen a notable increase in the number of large speculative warehouses and corn stores.<sup>7</sup> The town had two main landlords throughout the eighteenth century: the Wynne family of Hazelwood and the Temple family, personified by Henry Temple, second Viscount Palmerston. The land-agent for Palmerston for much of the period, Thomas Corcoran (or Corkran) and his three sons – a well-off Catholic merchant family – were heavily involved in building and industry in Sligo, being leaders in the linen business and trading directly with the North American ports.<sup>8</sup> They are noted in the estate rentals as being the immediate lessors of several significant banks of land on the eastern side of town, which included cottages and a school, as well as the ‘lease of the Sligo mass-house’.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See B. J. Graham & L.J. Proudfoot, *Urban improvement in provincial Ireland, 1700-1840* (Dublin, 1994); Also, Susan Hood, ‘The significance of the villages and small towns in rural Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’, in Peter Borsay and Lindsay Proudfoot (eds.), *Provincial towns in early modern England and Ireland; change convergence and divergence* (Oxford, 2002), p. 247.

<sup>3</sup> Hood, ‘The significance of the villages and small towns in rural Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’, in Borsay and Proudfoot (eds.), *Provincial towns in early modern England and Ireland*, pp. 241-263, at p. 247

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, at p. 246.

<sup>6</sup> Fíona Gallagher, *Streets of Sligo: urban development over the course of seven centuries* (Sligo, 2008), p.64. Also Gallagher & Legg, IHTA No. 14, *Sligo*, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Gallagher, *Streets of Sligo*, p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 384.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159. See also Palmerston papers, Broadlands Archives, Southampton, BR 141/58.

Urban improvement throughout Ireland during this time appears to have relied upon the granting of long leases from landlords, enabling tenants to have a plot of land at a relatively low rent. The tenant bore most of the cost associated with constructing individual properties. Hood has viewed this as a ‘delegation of authority by landlords to tenants of some of their monopolistic property rights’, which also ‘conferred a greater social status’ to the new tenant.<sup>10</sup> The landlord and the tenant became contracted together by the urban lease, but this lease was frequently sold on – sometimes several times – so that middlemen became speculators of urban properties without any inclination to improve them over the long lease-period. Landlords’ ground rents were frequently low, but weekly rents could be high, most of this going to middlemen. Some towns had a multitude of lessors, which made the position of the occupier precarious at the least. An intricate tenorial structure resulted in a ‘complex web of tenures’, which frequently curtailed urban improvement.<sup>11</sup>

The low ground rents and ‘favourable leases’ that were typical of urban estate rentals in the eighteenth century, were continued into the nineteenth, and ‘encouraged speculative tenants’ to become developers themselves.<sup>12</sup> This ‘middle-man’ interest meant that much of the responsibility for the building and up-keeping individual holdings was unintentionally in their hands, as opposed to the landlords. They took advantage of the low ground rents to develop small houses and charge higher rents for profit. This complex situation made the tenorial position of the leasing tenant very precarious, and rents unpredictable. The system mitigated against any cohesive urban improvement, as in areas or streets where there were long leases, but many intervening lessors, no one took responsibility for improving housing conditions, or adding sanitation or clean water.<sup>13</sup> Graham has argued that from a social and political point of view the ‘offer of long leases to a reliable urban tenantry’ was a sensible strategy; it aligned the ‘interests of the wealthier tenants with those of the elite’, and contributed to the persistence of the aristocratic power.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hood, ‘The significance of the villages and small towns in rural Ireland’, p. 255.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> B.J. Graham & L.J. Proudfoot, *Urban improvements in provincial Ireland, 1700-1840* (Dublin, 1994), p. 49.

While an in-depth examination of the urban tenurial arrangements of Sligo's poor quality housing in the later quarter of the eighteenth century is outside the scope of this thesis, many indicators suggest that commercial speculation and middle-men leases may have played a significant part in the proliferation of the 'straggling lines of cabins' which were so commented on by contemporary travellers.

#### **4.2 Sligo's topography and urban historical development.**

Sligo is a port and market town, situated on the north-west Atlantic coast of Ireland, midway between Galway and Derry. Founded by the Normans in the thirteenth century, it lies astride the historic route-way between Ulster and Connacht, and therefore it was often a contested site in the medieval and early modern periods. A vital strategic and nodal location, the borough grew up on the only fordable spot where the short river Garavogue drains the expansive Lough Gill into Sligo Bay. Surrounded by a cordon of uplands, hills and the sea, Sligo lies in a hollow, dominated by the steep ridges and hills to the north and south of the Garavogue river, resulting in all roads descending steeply into the town. The street pattern of Sligo is thus irregular, driven by the surrounding topography and the location of the river crossing at the acute bend in the Garavogue, an urban pattern which has remained largely intact since medieval times.<sup>15</sup> The most significant port in the north-west during the medieval period, Sligo was home to a friary, castle, customs house, and many medieval merchants until the wars of the 1640s. A county town since 1603, Sligo was granted corporation status in 1612-13, which heralded a period of expansion and growth.<sup>16</sup> An influx of Scottish and English merchants and settlers in the latter part of the early modern period changed the demography of the town, and a permanent garrison resulted in several barracks being constructed. The disappearance of the catholic merchant-class after the defeat of 1690 led to an overwhelmingly protestant merchant and ruling class for much of the eighteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

At the start of the eighteenth century, Sligo was placed to make its greatest strides towards becoming a substantial town since its foundation 500 years previously.<sup>18</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> Fíona Gallagher and Marie-Louise Legg, *Sligo*, Irish Historic Towns Atlas, no. 24 (Dublin, 2012), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

economy of the island was improving, with a huge expansion in the valuable linen trade, which had major benefits for Sligo town.<sup>19</sup> As commerce improved, the port expanded steadily, new streets were laid out, and several notable public buildings were erected. Rev. Samuel Henry, a travelling clergyman, visited the town in 1739, and he considered it to be the second most developed town in Connacht, next to Galway.<sup>20</sup> ‘It contains about three hundred houses, and is extended between two hills, taking up the space of an English mile in length and half that space in breadth. The river, running in a winding course through the midst of the valley, divides the town into two parts, which are united by two handsome bridges’. The town had much improved in its buildings and industry since the wars of the 1690s, with several new barracks having being constructed. Public buildings included a gaol house and session house, and a large work-house for ‘disorderly persons’. In 1749 there was a doctor, a surgeon and three apothecaries in the town.<sup>21</sup> A new market yard was laid out to the west of High Street, in the early 1720s, when Colonel Wynne, the patron of the town and owner of its tolls and customs, enclosed an area of over 125,000 square yards, with an entrance, market house, and weighbridge.<sup>22</sup> The growth of the linen market led to the construction of a new linen hall along the river, about 1760. A large mill dominated the entrance to the Oldbridge, at the point where the river Garavogue became tidal. The port exhibited significant growth; several large stores and warehouses were erected along the quays, mostly in the 1780s and 1790s, including a large customs store, and additional quays.<sup>23</sup>

Eighteenth-century Sligo became prosperous, as customs and excise records demonstrate. Trade through the port developed steadily from the 1750s onwards; in 1756 duties on imports were £1,208 11s 4d, and on exports £26 11s 7d. Two decades later, import duties had grown to £2,256, while exports were worth £986.<sup>24</sup> By the 1790s, Sligo as a market town was prospering, and its expanding primary and secondary industries became a magnet for unskilled labourers and their families in the surrounding region. It was around this period that low quality housing for these in-coming families began to appear on the outskirts of the town. The economic prosperity experienced by

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<sup>19</sup> John C. McTernan, ‘The linen industry in county Sligo’ in *Olde Sligoe* (Sligo, 1995), p. 158.

<sup>20</sup> Rev. William Henry, *Hints towards a natural and topographical history of the Counties of Sligo, Donegal, Fermanagh and Lough Erne* (Dublin, 1739), as re-reproduced in Martin Timoney, (ed.), *Dedicated to Sligo; thirty-four essays on Sligo’s past* (Sligo, 2013), pp 129-155, at p.147.

<sup>21</sup> Marie-Louise Legg, *Census of Elphin 1749* (Dublin, 2005), p. 523.

<sup>22</sup> John C. McTernan, *In Sligo long ago: aspects of the town and county over 750 years* (Sligo, 1998), p. 262.

<sup>23</sup> Gallagher and Legg, *Sligo*, IHTA, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> John C. McTernan, *Memory harbour: The port of Sligo, an outline of its growth and decline as an emigration port* (Sligo, 1992), p. 30.



the town certainly led to an influx of people, and the occupations noted in the 1749 Elphin census indicate this growing prosperity and a taste for genteel living. Indeed, traders and merchants formed 45 per cent of the urban population of 2,468 people at this time.<sup>25</sup> Many of the professions were agriculturally based, with a quarter of all households described as farmers or ‘cotters’. Labourers – nearly all catholic– make up the next biggest group, 14 per cent, and there were twenty-two fishermen. Small cottage industries are represented by weavers, of whom there were 42, mainly protestant. There were 19 tailors, and 30 shopkeepers and merchants. An interesting distinction is between the 13 shoemakers, (nearly all protestant), and 17 brogue-makers (nearly all catholic).<sup>26</sup> There were 14 ‘gents’ resident in the town, and the same number of pensioners, perhaps an indication of a number of retired soldiers who settled in Sligo. All this is suggestive of a growing economic base, which however, was tempered by the lack of any industrial promise outside weaving. Exports of salted meat and butter continued throughout the 1730s, and the trade in processed wool thrived, with yarn exports to Manchester amounting to £80,000. A significant industry was brewing, and the four breweries had sales amounting to £210,000 in 1739.<sup>27</sup> The improved economy of Sligo in the latter part of the eighteenth century was conducive to the growth in the number of unskilled labourers. When Richard Pocock visited in 1752 he noted a Sligo was ‘a town of some small trade’.<sup>28</sup> The growth of the linen market led to the construction of a linen hall around 1760 on the newly laid-out Corkran’s Mall, or ‘Abbey Quay’, along the river. Several large stores and warehouses were erected along the quays, mostly in the 1780s and 1790s.<sup>29</sup> The town had a postmaster by the 1740s, and a post office was operating on Quay Street in the 1790s.<sup>30</sup>

### **A new century**

In 1800, from a slow start, the pace of growth in Sligo accelerated, and despite setbacks during the cholera epidemic of 1832, Sligo was the leading market and retail centre between Ballina and Enniskillen by 1839.<sup>31</sup> Industrially, the nineteenth century borough was dominated by its port. The main industries apart from this were brewing,

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<sup>25</sup> Marie-Louise Legg, *The Census of Elphin 1749* (Dublin, 2005), p. 523.

<sup>26</sup> See Appendix II for the extraction of the professions from the Elphin census returns.

<sup>27</sup> Síle Ní Chinnéide, ‘A Frenchman’s tour of Connacht in 1791, part iii’ in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, xxxvi, (1977-78), pp 30-42, at p. 34.

<sup>28</sup> John McVeagh, (ed.) *Richard Poccocke’s Irish tours* (Dublin, 1995), p.72.

<sup>29</sup> Gallagher and Legg, *Sligo*, IHTA, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Legg, *The Census of Elphin 1749*, p. 523.

<sup>31</sup> Henry D. Inglis, *Ireland in 1834: A journey throughout Ireland, during the spring, summer, and autumn of 1834* vol. i, p. 123.

distilling, soap boiling, tanning, rope-making and the manufacture of candles. Tenants of the Palmerston estate in Sligo town ran tanneries for the processing of agricultural by-products. Old industry declined and new industries took over. The linen industry declined sharply after 1810, so that by 1840 the large linen hall had become a warehouse. Some weavers still made stockings and a few hawkers sold linen in the streets, but there were no spinning mills.<sup>32</sup> Trades in nineteenth-century Sligo began to change from the supply of agricultural and maritime goods to consumer-led materials. The number of cabinetmakers increased, as did saddlers, tailors, watchmakers and boot and shoemakers. Suppliers to the linen and wool trades disappeared. Industry in 1839 was represented by four breweries, a large flour mills, and dozens of small workshops such as soap makers, candle makers, tobacco rollers, hat makers, rope makers, cable makers, blacksmiths, boot and shoemakers.<sup>33</sup>

Large shops, woollen and furniture warehouses opened after 1850, catering for an increased retail trade. Hotels prospered, especially after the arrival of the railway in 1862, to accommodate visitors to the markets and fairs and those embarking on cross-channel steamers. Banks were an important part of this growing prosperity and savings banks were established in the early years of the century. The larger Irish banks followed between 1825 and 1835.<sup>34</sup> All these new buildings were evidence of the growing self-confidence of Sligo, independent of its former landlords. The shipping business was expanded; emigrant agents established businesses and fast ships improved the links with Scotland, Liverpool and North America.<sup>35</sup>

Sligo in the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a major investment in the sanitary infrastructure of the town, but nothing was done to improve the housing conditions of the poor. On the health and sanitary front, and in line with the increased scientific advances in that area, a new county infirmary was built on The Mall in 1816. A fever hospital followed soon after, and two medical dispensaries were set up to provide basic healthcare. The influx of people to the town before and after the famine brought problems associated with a population living close together in dilapidated

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<sup>32</sup> *Royal Commission on hand-loom weavers, assistant commissioners reports, part ii, Ireland*, HC 1840 (43-11).

<sup>33</sup> *Sligo Directory* (Derry 1839), (Exact citation is uncertain; directory extract appears to be part of the *New Directory* series).

<sup>34</sup> Fíona Gallagher, *The streets of Sligo; urban evolution over the course of seven centuries* (Sligo, 2008), pp 651-657.

<sup>35</sup> John C. McTernan, *Memory harbour: The port of Sligo*, part 1, p. 11, and part 2, pp 3-7.

housing. The town was considered to be dirty and unsanitary, and the river was grossly polluted by sewage and by the effluent from industrial processes like soap boiling and tanning.<sup>36</sup> The cholera epidemic that scourged the town in the summer 1832 led to increased efforts to improve its sanitary affairs. The polluted state of the town's wells, and lack of proper sewers, meant that the spread of the disease was rapid. Up to 1,500 may have died, and much of the town's population fled to the countryside for several weeks. Sligo suffered a higher number of deaths from the disease than any other town in the country.<sup>37</sup> Increased efforts were made after the cholera outbreak to channel the open sewers underground, and provide fresh pumped water for the townspeople. There were about ten wells in the town, some of which were replaced by pumps, but even these were condemned in the 1860s.<sup>38</sup> The grand jury built sewers along the main streets and culverted some open sewers in the 1840s, but no sanitary waterworks were yet built. The river Garavogue was a conduit of disease and infection, right up to the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Gallagher and Legg, *Sligo*, IHTA, p.10.

<sup>37</sup> W.G. Wood Martin, *History of Sligo* (Dublin, 1892), vol. iii, p. 206.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* vol. iii, pp 184-85.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iii, pp 85-6.

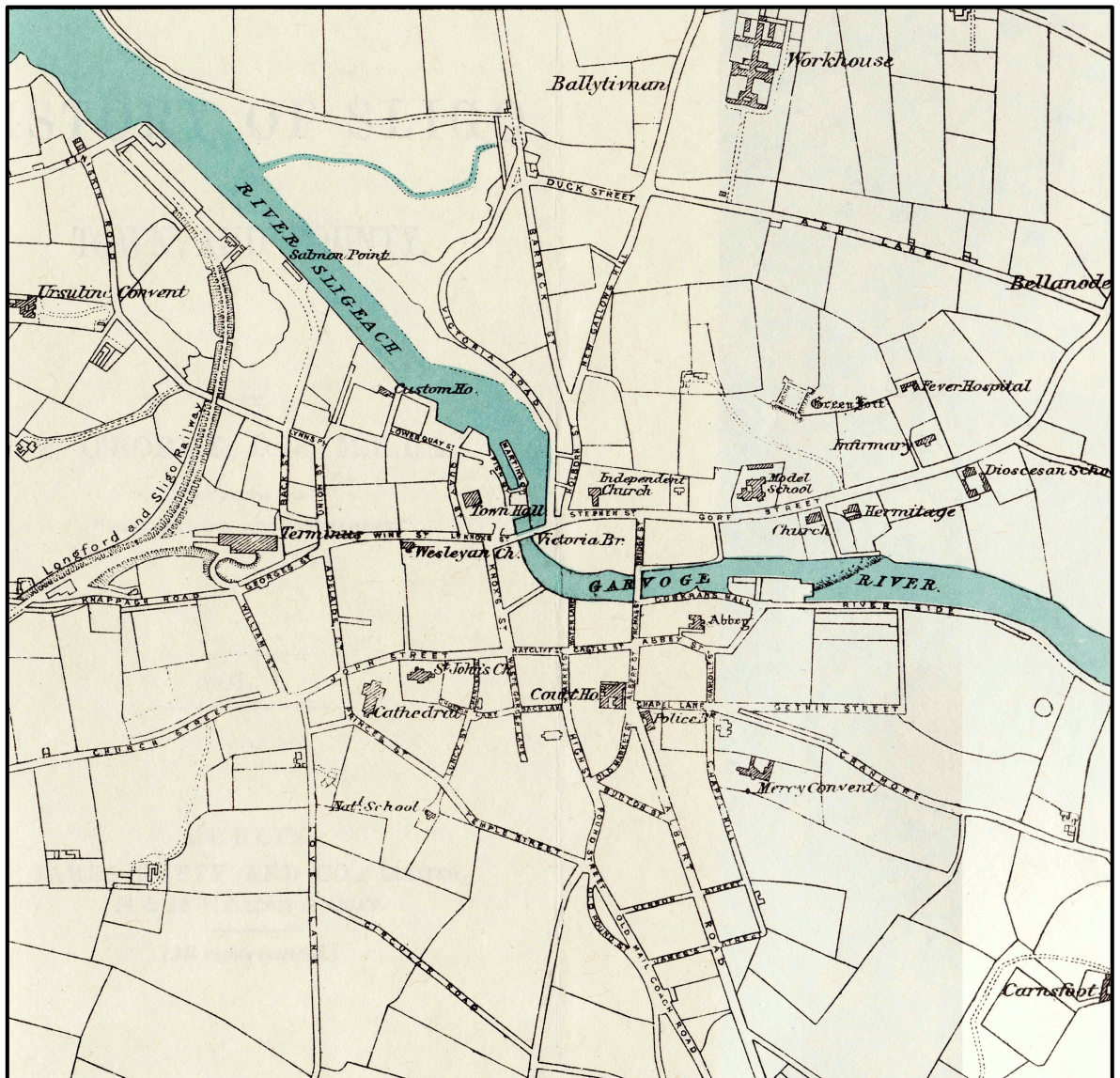


Fig. 4.1 Plan of Sligo town in 1881. Source: Terence O'Rourke, *History of Sligo, town and county*, (Dublin, 1889), vol. i, an insert map.

Between 1845 and 1866, 4 miles, 6 furlongs, and 7 perches of sewers were constructed by the Grand Jury within the borough of Sligo, at a cost of £4,782. At the Autumn presentment session in 1846, £1,600 was allocated for the construction of a main sewer from Connolly Street, through High Street and Market Street, and along Grattan Street.<sup>40</sup> A large main drain was later installed along Wine Street, and in 1880 a large intercepting sewer was laid out along the western bank of the river.<sup>41</sup> The sanitary condition of the town gave cause for concern to a royal commission on towns in 1877. Sligo was noted as having a 'shockingly polluted river' running through the centre of the town, arising from some of the sewers and a number of privies discharging directly into the river above the

<sup>40</sup> *Sligo Journal*, 25 Sept., 1846.

<sup>41</sup> Wood Martin, *History of Sligo*, vol. iii, p. 206.

high-tide mark, at a point where many of the poorer people drew their daily supplies of water.<sup>42</sup> The danger of this situation to the public health was of concern to the two sanitary officers of the borough. The state of affairs had been allowed to continue, due to a row between the former grand jury, (dis-empowered in 1869), which had responsibility for the drainage and sewerage of the town until that date. The grand jury had proposed a new system of intercepting drainage, and drawn up plans and tenders for it, but had been dissolved before finance for the works had been approved. After that that date, the corporation had done nothing about the situation. Previous to 1869, ‘good main sewers’ had been made by the grand jury along the principal streets, which were discharged below the high tide mark. Apart from the few sewers, mostly from poorer areas, which discharged directly into the fresh water of the Garavogue, Sligo was reported to have one of the best main sewage-systems of any town in Ireland.<sup>43</sup> In the two decades before 1869, the Sligo Grand Jury spent £20,000 on widening of the streets of the town, indicating their more efficient governance of the urban area.<sup>44</sup> Notably, all of Sligo’s major infrastructural projects took place between 1813 and 1880; it would not be until the housing drive of the 1930s that a comparable period of change would occur again. The centre of Sligo carried an air of affluence about it at the end of the Victorian age; ‘so many of the houses of the town are both lofty and spacious, the streets are wide in proportion, the centre well-paved, and the sideways neatly kept’.<sup>45</sup> However, there still remained the mass of small thatched cottages of the poorer labouring class on the periphery of the town, a situation which was to persist for another four decades.

### 4.3 Population, demography, and poverty

Sligo’s population can be ascertained with some accuracy from the 1750s onwards, and its growth exhibits many of the characteristics of Irish demographics of the period.<sup>46</sup>

Mechanisms of trade such as markets and fairs led to increased commercialisation of the

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<sup>42</sup> *Local government and taxation of towns inquiry commission (Ireland). Part III. Report and evidence, with appendices*, HC 1877 [C. 1787] xl 225, p. 38.

<sup>43</sup> *Local government and taxation of towns inquiry commission (Ireland), part III, report and evidence, with appendices*, HC 1877 [c. 1787] xl 225, p. 38.

<sup>44</sup> Wood Martin, *History of Sligo*, iii, p. 201.

<sup>45</sup> Terence O’Rourke, *The history of Sligo town and county* (Dublin, 1889), i, p. 408.

<sup>46</sup> See, William Macafee, ‘The pre-famine population of Ireland: a reconsideration’, in Brenda Collins, Phillip Ollernshaw, Trevor Parkhill, (eds.), *Industry, trade and people in Ireland 1650-1950* (Belfast, 2005), p. 72; Brian Gurrin, *Pre-census sources for Irish demography* (Dublin, 2002); Joel Mokyr & Cormac Ó Gráda, ‘New developments in Irish population history 1700-1850’ in *The Economic History Review, new series*, vol. 37, no. 4. (Nov.1984), pp 473-488; K. H. Connell, ‘The population of Ireland in the eighteenth century’ in *The Economic History Review*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1946), pp. 111-124.

economy and the growth of foreign trade over the period between 1750 and 1850.<sup>47</sup> Generally, Irish population studies suggest the Irish population may have doubled over the course of the seventeenth century, and that the increase continued in the following century.<sup>48</sup> Stability of food supplies, increased commercialisation, and subsequent higher fertility rates led to the burgeoning of the population of Ireland throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>49</sup> The decline of a subsistence economy, and the emergence of small home industries such as weaving and spinning, monetised a previously cashless society by the early 1800s.<sup>50</sup>

There appears to have been a remarkable acceleration in the growth of the national population, from the 1770s onwards. Several surveys suggest a national population for the period varying from 2.3 million to 3.2 million.<sup>51</sup> Calculations of population by K. H. Connell in particular, estimate an Irish ten-yearly increase of about nine per cent before 1780, followed by a decennial increase of about 17 per cent between 1780 and 1821.<sup>52</sup> More recent studies suggest that population growth averaged about 1.6 per cent annually between 1760 and 1820.<sup>53</sup> That rate increased to two per cent in the province of Connacht, leading to a provincial population of 1.1 million people in the 1821 census.<sup>54</sup> Population growth was uneven, with the greatest increases occurring in the poorer land of the west and north-west, where dramatic demographic increases of between 300 and 600 per cent ensued between 1732 and 1821.<sup>55</sup> The sudden onset of the famine resulted in over 985,000 deaths between 1841 and 1851, most of these occurring after 1845. The areas greatest affected were the western littoral and the densely populated areas of east Connacht and south Munster. The Sligo poor law union

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<sup>47</sup> William Macafee, 'The pre-famine population of Ireland: a reconsideration' in Collins, Ollernshaw, and Parkhill, (eds), *Industry, trade and people in Ireland 1650-1950*, p. 72.

<sup>48</sup> David Dickson, Cormac Ó Gráda, Stuart Daultrey, 'Hearth tax, household size and Irish population change 1672-1821' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. 82C (1982), p. 175.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 125-160, 162-181.

<sup>50</sup> William Macafee, 'The pre-famine population of Ireland: a reconsideration', in Collins, Ollernshaw, and Parkhill (eds.), *Industry, trade and people in Ireland 1650-1950*, pp 72-74.

<sup>51</sup> Joel Mokyr & Cormac Ó Gráda; 'New Developments in Irish population history 1700-1850' in *The Economic History Review, New Series*, vol. 37, no. 4. (Nov., 1984), p. 475.

<sup>52</sup> K.H. Connell, 'The population of Ireland in the eighteenth century, in *The Economic History Review*, vol. 16, no. 2. (1946), pp 111-124.

<sup>53</sup> Mokyr and Ó Gráda, 'New developments in Irish population history 1700-1850', p. 74.

<sup>54</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1821.*

<sup>55</sup> William J. Smyth, 'Mapping the People; the growth and distribution of the population', in John Crowley, William J. Smyth & Mike Murphy, (eds.), *Atlas of the great Irish famine, 1854-52*, (Cork, 2012), pp.13-22.

suffered in excess of 20,000 deaths between 1841 and 1851.<sup>56</sup> Most areas would never recover their population.

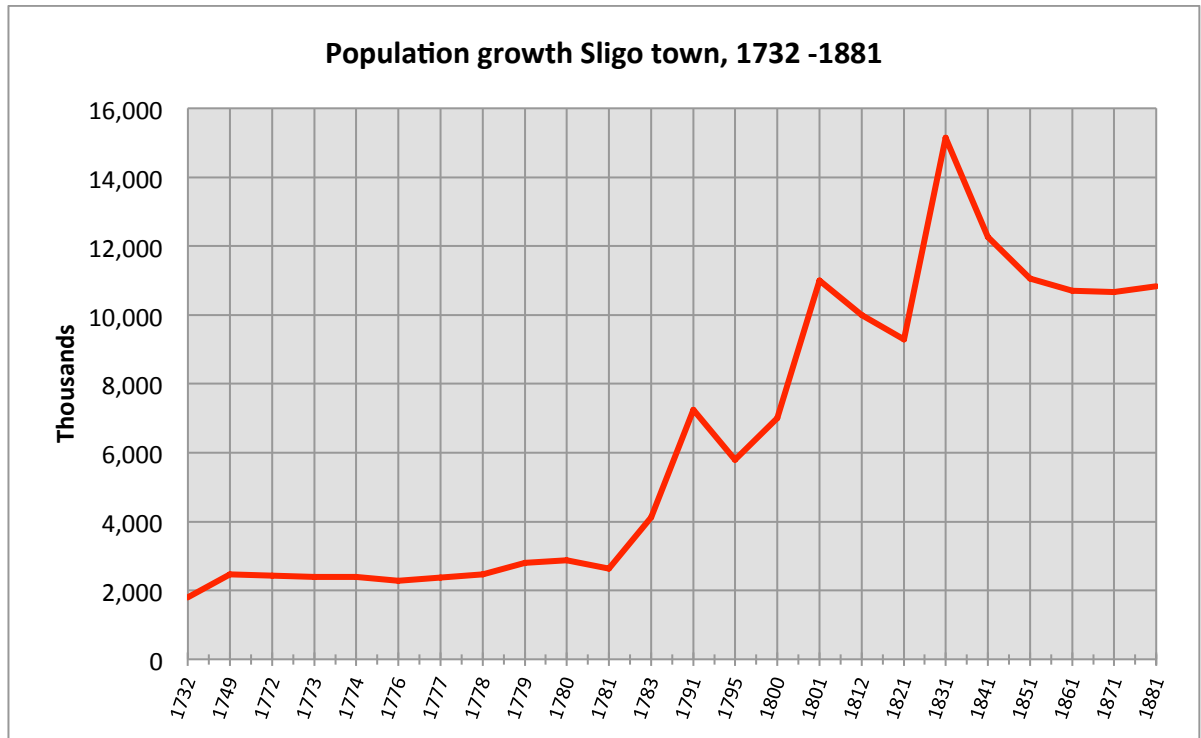


Fig. 4.2. Population growth in Sligo town, 1732 to 1881. Source: Compiled by Fíona Gallagher from the Parish of St. John's cess books, Sligo, and varying census returns, 1820-1881. See table in *Streets of Sligo; Urban evolution over the course of seven centuries*, (Sligo, 2008), pp 65-68.

Attempts to ascertain Sligo's population were discussed by social commentators in the early years of the eighteenth century. Returns from the hearth money rolls were used by the surveyor-general, Arthur Dobbs, (1689-1765), to calculate the number of houses in county Sligo around the year 1730.<sup>57</sup> Dobbs's figures show an average of 6,800 houses in the county, although the computation of demographic figures from the hearth money rolls is always problematic.<sup>58</sup> Hearth numbers for 1732 suggest total household numbers for the barony of Carbury, in which Sligo is situated, as 1,989. Using a multiplier of 4.5 per house, gives a total of just under 9,000 souls.<sup>59</sup> Sligo town, the only urban area in the barony, may have held up to twenty per cent of the baronial population, giving the borough a population of around 1,800 people.

<sup>56</sup> William J. Smyth, 'Born astride of a grave': the geography of the dead' in Crowley, Smyth and Murphy, (eds), *Atlas of the great Irish famine, 1854-52*, p. 108.

<sup>57</sup> Arthur Dobbs, *An essay on the trade and improvement of Ireland, part ii* (Dublin, 1731), p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> Stuart Daultrey, David Dickson, Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Eighteenth century Irish population: new perspectives from old sources' in *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 41, no. 3. (1981), pp 601-628.

<sup>59</sup> Based on the multiplier used by William J. Smyth, in the introduction to a reprint of Seamus Prender's original work (1939) *A Census of Ireland, Circa 1659* (Dublin, 2002), p. xl.

The religious census of the diocese of Elphin in 1749 allows a detailed demographic analysis of the Sligo town area, as well as its important hinterland to the immediate east and west.<sup>60</sup> It indicates that Sligo town was the largest urban area in the diocese, with 675 householders.<sup>61</sup> The entire population for the town of Sligo is computed at about 2,500, a reasonable number for a busy market town.<sup>62</sup> The town is returned as part of the united parishes of St. John's and Calry, stretching some ten miles from east to west, and which had an overall population of 5,068.<sup>63</sup> Therefore almost half of the parish's population lived in the small urban area, and an examination of the returns for the area considered as being urban reveals that catholics constituted just over 42 per cent of the total.<sup>64</sup> The estimated population of the county Sligo in 1749 may have been in the region of 60,000.<sup>65</sup> A sustained period of growth in the population of the town and indeed country seems to have occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century, in line with the national trend.

Regular tax surveys and deeds from the late seventeenth century make it clear that Sligo was a small town, with about 130 thatched cabins lining the few streets between the ruined Dominican friary and the Old Bridge.<sup>66</sup> Impressions from various sources indicate that Sligo had a small but varied housing stock by the start of the eighteenth century, with few houses on any substantial value. Local author and antiquarian, Archdeacon O'Rorke, surmised that owing to the lack of a protective wall around the town, 'costly houses were little built' before the nineteenth century.<sup>67</sup> Contemporary descriptions of the eighteenth century urban fabric are fleeting, but telling: 'the houses of Sligo were thatched cabins, with the exception, of two or three so-called castles or

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<sup>60</sup> Legg, *The Census of Elphin 1749*; Elphin diocese covers most of county Roscommon, and all of eastern county Sligo. Sligo town was the only port in the diocese.

<sup>61</sup> Brian Gurrin, 'An examination of the 1749 census of the diocese of Elphin', in Legg, (ed.), *The Census of Elphin 1749*, xxviii.

<sup>62</sup> *Elphin Diocesan Census, 1749*, (NAI, MS 2466, MFS 6); Figures calculated from manuscript of the original returns, including only the area considered part of the town.

<sup>63</sup> Legg, (ed.) *The Census of Elphin 1749*, p. 551.

<sup>64</sup> *Elphin Diocesan Census, 1749*, Figures calculated from manuscript of the original returns, including only the area considered part of the town.

<sup>65</sup> Estimates for county Sligo in 1749 are harder to come by, given that only about 35 per cent of the county is covered in the Synge census, but the figure for this portion (baronies of Carbury and Tirerrill), was given as 46,942. Conceivably therefore, the county's population may have been almost 60,000.

<sup>66</sup> *Survey of Houses in the Town of Sligo 1663, by virtue of a commission...for viewing and valuing the town of Sligo*, as reproduced in W.G. Wood Martin, *Sligo and the Enniskilleners* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Dublin, 1882), appendix, pp 189-209; also, *Rental of the estate in county Sligo of the Earl of Strafford, Madam Margaret Trapps and Mr. Josue Wilson, 1682 - 1684*. NLI, Ms. 10,223; also *Copy of a deed of partition of a Sligo estate, 1687*, Royal Irish Academy, Ms.14.B.4.

<sup>67</sup> O'Rorke, *A History of Sligo*, vol. i, p. 331.



stone- houses erected in Castle Street, in the early years of the seventeenth century, and four or five stone built and slated houses of the eighteenth century'.<sup>68</sup> In 1738, the agent for Lord Palmerston, (a major property owner in the borough), reported that Sligo was 'an improving town', where within the previous forty-five years, fifteen slated houses had been built, although 'not twenty men of business in Sligo could afford to lay out £50 for a house'.<sup>69</sup> Several slated houses are mentioned in the town at this time; Mr Knox's town house in Knox's Street; Mr Martin's in the same thoroughfare; DeButt's in Wine Street; Mr Everard's in Old Market Street, the residence of Provost Soden in Quay Street, along with Lungy House and the customs house.<sup>70</sup>

It is clear that from the late 1790s onwards, small, thatched cabins inhabited by some of the poorer sections of the population were already starting to proliferate in and around the town of Sligo. The housing stock midway through the eighteenth century consisted of lines of thatched, low, two- or three-storeyed houses along the main streets. Merchants most likely had more substantial houses, while shopkeepers would have lived over their premises. Artisans and casual labourers generally lived in thatched cabins on the outskirts of the town, and in the back lanes. While many inhabitants practiced home industries, others were drawn to Sligo by the expanding port and increase in market activity of the late eighteenth century.<sup>71</sup> People flooded to the town during the period 1780-1820, as is evidenced by the demographics, but the economic slumped during the downturn after the Napoleonic wars, and the much-hyped North American grain trade never materialized. Poverty became a way of life for many.

An invaluable source for calculating the population of Sligo town in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, are the St. John's parish cess-books covering the period 1772-95.<sup>72</sup> The number of ratepayers or households recorded in 1772 was 485, a figure that remained steady until 1779, when there was a notable rise to 561 households, rising again to 825 three years later. The total number of ratepayers in the town by 1795 was 1,157, indicating a period of intense development, primarily stimulated by the commercial development of the port. Using a multiplier of five persons per household, the population of the town rose from 2,500 to over 5,700 in two decades, which is

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<sup>68</sup> Legg (ed.), *The Census of Elphin, 1749*, notes. p. 554.

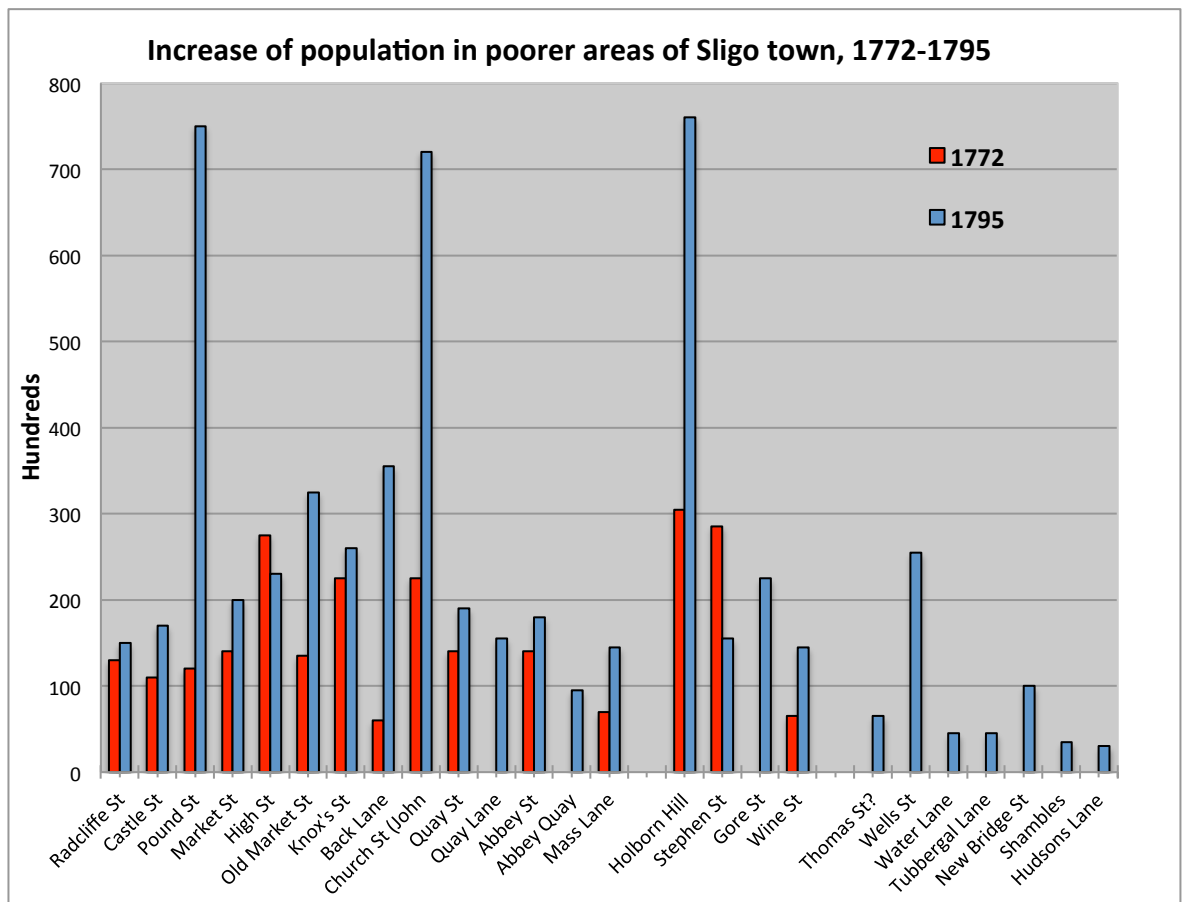
<sup>69</sup> *Letter of John Irwin to Palmerston*, 30 January 1739, Broadlands Papers (Southampton), BR 143/3.

<sup>70</sup> O'Rourke, *A History of Sligo*, i, p.331.

<sup>71</sup> Gallagher and Legg, *Sligo*, IHTA, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> *St. John's parish cess book, 1772-1795*, Vestry of St. John's cathedral, Sligo.

consistent with the growth in population nationally.<sup>73</sup> The more densely populated parts of the town seem to have been High Street, Holborn Street, John Street, and lower and upper Pound Street. By and large, the population in the poorer areas of the town seems to have increased sharply between 1783 and 1795. An examination of the valuations of the various properties confirms that the streets with higher valuations were Castle Street, Knox's Street, Stephen Street, Gore Street, and High Street/Market Street.<sup>74</sup> Conversely, streets with lower valuations were where the cabin-built suburbs of the poor proliferated.



**Fig. 4.3. Comparison between the available parish cess returns of 1772 and 1795, showing the increase in numbers of households eligible to pay the tax. Source: Compiled from the original cess books of St. John's parish, Sligo.**

The exceptional growth of households in these certain streets of Sligo can be clearly seen, (see figure 4.3), and these are readily identifiable as the areas which would later be home to the worst of Sligo's slums. However, some caution on the figures are

<sup>73</sup> Multiplier based on Brian Gurin's work, in *Pre-Census sources for Irish demography* (Dublin, 2002), pp 68-79.

<sup>74</sup> *St. John's parish cess book 1772-1795*, Vestry of St. John's cathedral, Sligo; see Appendix III for sample of the cess.

advised; this sudden growth in such a short period may also be due to a change in those liable for the cess tax. The appearance of several new streets by 1795 is indicative of urban expansion and economic growth. In 1775, the vestry levied the sum of £70 on the ratepayers of the town for paving and gravelling of the town's streets. The vestry continued to look after the streets of the borough until around the end of the century, when the job passed to the town and harbour commissioners, who apparently did not do as good a job; Wood Martin reports on a tourist who visited Sligo sixty years later, and 'thought that the bogs had been literally carried off the mountains into the streets, and had been deposited there in great depth'.<sup>75</sup>

Census Year	Borough Population	County Population	Percentage in Borough
1821	9,283	146,229	6.35
1831	15,152	171,765	8.82
1837	15,152	171,765	8.82
1841	12,271	180,886	6.78
1851	11,047	128,515	8.60
1861	10,698	124,845	8.57
1871	10,670	115,493	9.24
1881	10,823	98,013	11.04
1891	10,900	94,416	11.54
1901	10,900	84,083	12.96
1911	11,000	79,045	13.92
1926	11,400	71,388	15.97
1936	12,565	67,447	18.63
1946	12,700	62,375	20.36

**Figure 4.4. Population of County Sligo and Sligo borough at each census between 1821 and 1946, showing the increasing percentage of the county's population living in the urban area. Source: Census of Ireland, General Returns, 1841-1946.**

Early traveller reports give us an insight into what the well-travelled sort of eyewitness thought of the town in the 1790s. Sligo at that juncture was noted by one French visitor as being 'ugly, irregular and badly built'.<sup>76</sup> Another observer, James McPartlan, remarked in 1802 that Sligo consisted of about seven or eight streets, 'composed of tolerably decent houses, some very good'.<sup>77</sup> The town was considered 'unclean and

<sup>75</sup> Wood Martin, *History of Sligo*, iii, p. 205.

<sup>76</sup> Jacques Louis de Bougrenet Chevalier de La Tocnaye, *A Frenchman's Walk through Ireland 1796-7 (Promenade d'un François dans l'Irlande)*, translated by John Stevenson (Cork 1798; repr. Belfast 1917; Dublin 1984), p. 179.

<sup>77</sup> James McParlan, *A statistical survey of County Sligo, with observations on the means of improvement, drawn up in the year 1801, for the Dublin Society* (Dublin, 1802), p. 70.

unhealthy' but it was 'of no small importance' in the general export and import trade.<sup>78</sup> Dwellings in 1803, were reported as 'infrequently poor' but in a state of improvement. McPartlan remarked that the cost of one of these cabin 'hovels' was in the region of 30 to 40 shillings a year, at a time when cottiers wages were about one shilling a day, and labourers less.<sup>79</sup>

Sligo, then at the dawn of the nineteenth century, was the second largest urban centre in Connacht, a position it had held since 1603, but was small in comparison to the urban centres along the east and south coast, as well as the rapidly developing towns of the industrial northeast. McParlan described its population in 1801 as being 'upwards of 10,000 people', a respectable total.<sup>80</sup> Official census figures exist from 1821 onwards, and show that the town's population was around the 10,000 mark in that year, about seven per cent of the total county population of 146,000. A decade later in 1831, the inhabitants of the town numbered over 15,000, a fifty per cent leap, with a parallel jump in the county's population to over 171,000, an increase of 21 per cent. The census of 1841 saw the highest ever population recorded in county Sligo, over 180,000 people. The corresponding population within the municipal boundary of Sligo was just over 14,000 people.<sup>81</sup>

The great famine had a detrimental effect on the population of county Sligo, which had 180,886 inhabitants in 1841, and 67,447 in 1936, a depressing decrease of 62.6 per cent, as the population fell decade after decade. Emigration was most marked between 1841 and 1891, when the population loss was at least 120,000, of whom 60,000 left in the period immediately after the famine. The total loss of population in the half century between 1841 and 1891 was 45.6 per cent, and between 1891 and 1936 the decline was 28.5 per cent.<sup>82</sup> The only increase in the same period was recorded in the town of Sligo. The borough did not suffer anywhere near the same heavy loss of population as did the surrounding countryside in the post-famine era. In 1841, the population of the municipal borough was just over 14,000, a drop of about 800 in a decade. In the following decade, the population remained stagnant, but had dropped to 12,500 in 1861. It fell by over 1,800 in the next decade, but then recovered slowly reaching 10,900 by

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<sup>78</sup> Wood Martin, *History of Sligo*, vol. iii, p.128.

<sup>79</sup> McParlan, *A statistical survey of County Sligo*, p. 72.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>81</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1841*, vol. I, population.

<sup>82</sup> T. A. Freeman, 'Population distribution in county Sligo' in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, xvii, part 2 (1943/1944), p. 254.

the dawn of the twentieth century. In 1841, the town held just 8 per cent of the county's population; by 1901 that percentage share had increased to 13 per cent.<sup>83</sup>

Year	Sligo Town Population	No. of Houses	Average number of persons per house
1812	c. 10,000	c. 1,000	10
1821	9,283	1,335	6.9
1831	15,152	2,667	5.6
1841	14,318	2,183	6.55
1851	14,393	2,089	6.59
1861	12,565	1,887	6.65
1871	10,670	2,099	5.08
1881	10,828	1,883	5.75
1891	10,900	1,929	5.65
1901	10,900	1,902	5.73
1911	11,000	2,031	5.41
1926	11,400	1,908	5.61
1936	12,565	2,098	5.98
1946	12,926	2,215	5.83

Figure 4.5. Borough of Sligo, population and number of houses, 1821-1946. Source: Census of Ireland 1821-1946. The 1812 census is incomplete; the figure given is interpolated. The average number of persons per house is a simple calculation, arrived at by dividing the number of people by houses. The reality of overcrowding was much worse.

#### 4.4 Patronage, politics, and local government reform

Politically, after 1690, the patronage of Sligo borough and parliamentary constituency was dominated by a small number of ascendancy families. Property, its acquisition, maintenance, and the economic benefits accruing to it, 'largely, if not entirely, shaped the political landscape of eighteenth century Sligo'.<sup>84</sup> The borough of Sligo was essentially the property of the Wynne family from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, and they controlled the two parliamentary seats from the 1750s. The many new corporations created in the seventeenth century centralised civic authority in 'small self-

<sup>83</sup> *Census of Ireland*, General Abstracts, 1841-1946.

<sup>84</sup> David A. Fleming, *Politics and provincial people: Sligo and Limerick, 1691-1761* (Manchester, 2010), p. 23.

perpetuating oligarchies'.<sup>85</sup> This system has been rightly condemned as paving the way for the corruption and decay which 'infected virtually all boroughs' in Ireland and Britain by the early nineteenth century. All corporations unashamedly neglected municipal services, concentrating solely on the benefits of electing members to parliament.<sup>86</sup> Thus by the start of the Victorian era, many of the Irish boroughs were politically corrupt, and Sligo in particular suffered from lingering malaise by the 1830s. This was the culmination of a long state of political intrigue by several landed families, vying for the parliamentary seat and control of the corporation. The consequences for Sligo as an urban centre were not very positive.

By 1800, Colonel Owen Wynne owned the tolls and customs of Sligo, essentially controlling the corporation, and all new burgesses elected to the corporation were relations or friends of this prolific family, who had a large estate on Lough Gill, some three miles from town. The other prominent landowners in the borough were the Temple family, who had inherited and purchased the remnants of the vast O'Connor-Sligo estate. Sir Henry Temple (1673-1757) became the first Viscount Palmerston, and the affairs of his estate were to influence the development of the town over much of the 1700s. He was succeeded by his grandson, also Henry, (1739-1802), who was a largely absentee landlord, despite earning about £3,000 per annum from his Irish estates.<sup>87</sup> His affairs in Sligo were largely carried out by his land-agent, Thomas Cockran. His son, Henry, succeeded Palmerston in 1802, and took more interest in his Sligo estate. Lord Henry Palmerston, (1784-1865), was twice British prime minister, and owned almost 250 acres in and around Sligo town in 1813. The influence of both these families on the town's development, not necessarily for the good, was crucial for much of the century between 1740 and 1840.

Following a local act in 1803, town commissioners were established in Sligo. This body comprised the existing provost and twelve-member corporation, the two parliamentary representatives for Sligo, and 24 commissioners elected for life by the ballot of the £20 freeholders of the town.<sup>88</sup> A cumbersome body, it was almost entirely under the control of the Wynnes, and filled with their nominees, whose main interest lay in picking an

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<sup>85</sup> Desmond Roche, *Local government in Ireland* (Dublin, 1982), p. 33.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>87</sup> E. A. Smith, 'Temple, Henry, second Viscount Palmerston (1739–1802)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004); online edn, May 2015.

[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27111>, accessed 26 Feb 2016].

<sup>88</sup> Wood Martin, *History of Sligo*, iii, p. 97.

agreed candidate to represent the borough at the Irish Parliament in College Green.<sup>89</sup> Owen Wynne did duty on several occasions. Sligo was a typical ‘rotten borough’, and the town commissioners’ self-interest and conservatism did much to hold back development.<sup>90</sup>

In 1833, a royal commission on reform of the municipal corporations examined Sligo among other towns, in order to introduce some improvement into the system. It was quite scathing as to the state of affairs in the borough of Sligo. ‘The corporation, does absolutely nothing towards the municipal management of the town. The members of the corporation are either Mr Wynne’s family or his private friends; it is entirely Protestant, no Roman Catholic has been or would be admitted a member of it’.<sup>91</sup> The town appeared to be neglected, and the corporation did ‘absolutely nothing towards the municipal management of the town’.<sup>92</sup> Under a local act of 1830, during the reign of George III, the jurisdiction of the borough had been fixed at a distance of ‘one Irish mile in all directions from the Market Cross; it is a limit of taxation and persons living within it pay rates to the town, and we consider it ought to be adopted for the purposes of the Reform Bill’.<sup>93</sup> The commissioners ended on a promising note, praising Sligo as a place of ‘considerable trade; its communal dealings are said to be advancing though slowly’, but regrettably, its ‘streets are badly paved and have in many parts a neglected appearance’.<sup>94</sup>

Under the Irish Municipal Reform Act of 1841, the borough of Sligo was extended and divided into three wards, for voting and revenue purposes. Representation of catholics was increased, and this led to the development of a catholic merchant middle class. The commissioners also proposed a more compact municipal boundary, containing the entire urban area. Under the reform act, the office of provost was abolished and the forty-four burgesses replaced with an elected corporation of twenty-four members, eight from each ward, who would then choose a mayor. The new reformed corporation met on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1842, and first mayor was Martin Madden, a local merchant, and the

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<sup>89</sup> *Municipal corporations (Ireland), appendices to the first report of the commissioners*, HC 1835, xxvii, xxviii; also HC 1836, xxiv, p. 1271, (273).

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1271, (273).

<sup>91</sup> *Municipal corporations (Ireland), appendices to the first report of the commissioners*, HC 1835, xxvii, xxviii; 1836, xxiv, p. 1274.

<sup>92</sup> *Municipal corporation boundaries report (Ireland), reports and plans 1836*, HC 1837 (301) xxix, p. 143.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

first catholic to hold that office since 1612.<sup>95</sup> However, there still remained three overlapping authorities governing the town: the corporation, levying a rate of 3*d*, which amounted to about £200 per annum; the town and harbour commissioners, levying a 1*s* 10*d* rate, averaging about £1,550 per annum, and the grand jury of the county, levying an unlimited rate, which averaged about £2,000 per year.<sup>96</sup> None of this led to very efficient municipal governance. Sligo, on the eve of the famine, suffered from lack of infrastructure, poor regulation and political and sectional infighting.

Meaningful municipal reform only came after the famine, by way of the Sligo Improvement Act of 1869, which was passed by the House of Commons and House of Lords at its fifth attempt. This act dissolved the town commissioners and vested that body's powers in a twelve-man corporation.<sup>97</sup> A separate body, the Sligo Harbour Commissioners, was established to deal exclusively with the port and harbour. The 1869 Act empowered the corporation to take charge of all the affairs of the town, including the maintenance of roads, bridges, and to construct waterworks within the borough, duties had up until that date been the responsibility of the grand jury. In addition, the corporation was also empowered to strike a rate and to acquire the tolls of the markets and fairs. By the same act, the municipal boundary was finally extended to be co-existent with the parliamentary boundary. The result was an extensive municipal area 2½ miles in diameter, and covering an area of 3,143 acres or almost five square miles, with a large proportion of open countryside.<sup>98</sup>

Under the 1869 act, the corporation was empowered to strike a rate of no more than 5 shillings in the pound, a substantial increase from the old borough rate of 3*d* in the pound. This rate was however, dependent on the completion of a new waterworks to supply the town with fresh water, an important sanitary addition in the wake of the devastating cholera epidemic of 1832. By 1877 the waterworks had still not commenced, and the borough rate was 4*s* 6*d*; the annual rate collected in that year amounted to £3,540.<sup>99</sup> Financially, Sligo corporation was in no position to support the very poor. One consequence of this period of administrative reform was the disfranchisement of the

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<sup>95</sup> Gallagher and Legg, *Sligo*, IHTA, p. 5.

<sup>96</sup> *Local government and taxation of towns inquiry commission (Ireland), part III, Report and evidence, with appendices*, HC 1877 [c.1787] xl 225, p. 38.

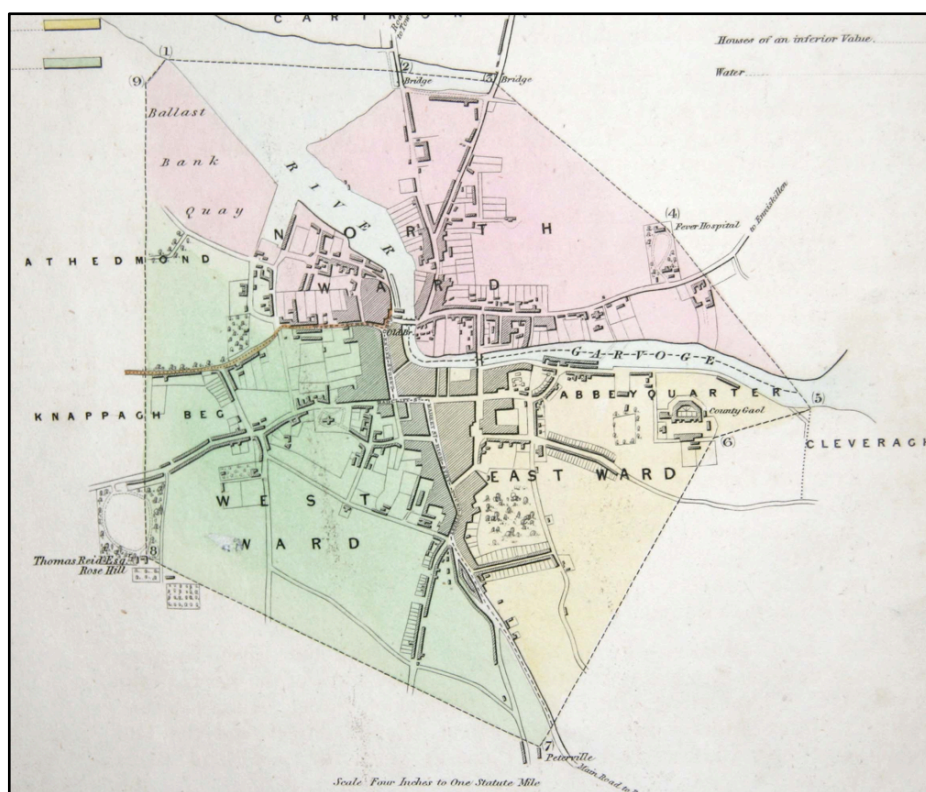
<sup>97</sup> Wood Martin, *History of Sligo*, vol. iii, pp 111-115.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 111-115.

<sup>99</sup> *Local government and taxation of towns inquiry commission (Ireland), part iii, report and evidence, with appendices*, HC 1877 [c.1787] xl, 225, p. 37.



parliamentary borough; Sligo town, described as ‘the most rotten Borough in the Kingdom’, lost its parliamentary seat in July 1870, following several decades of corrupt politics, electoral violence and vote-selling.<sup>100</sup>



**Figure 4.6.** The municipal boundary of Sligo as demarcated by the commissioners for the reform of municipal corporations in 1836. Source: Municipal corporation boundaries report (Ireland), reports and plans, 1836, HC 1837 (301) xxix, p. 142.

The stagnation and indeed decline of Irish provincial towns in the post-famine period, may have been part of the processes which saw smaller home industries disappear by the 1880s. This process can be seen in a detailed survey of traders in Sligo town in the nineteenth century.<sup>101</sup> Figure 4.7 shows the increase in the total number of traders in the town over the period under examination. Allowing for the limitations of the trade directories, which were somewhat erratic up until the start of *Slater's* series in 1846, some significant trends can be noticed. The overall number of trades seems to have

<sup>100</sup> *The Sligo Borough Improvement Bill*, 1869, (32 & 33 Vict.) c. cxlvii.

<sup>101</sup> Extracted from the following trade directories; J. Pigot's *Commercial Directory of Ireland 1820*, (Dublin, 1820); Pigot & Co's *City of Dublin and Hibernian Provincial Directory 1824*, (Dublin, 1824); *Sligo Directory 1839*, (New Directory series, published in Derry, 1839); Slater's *National Commercial Directory of Ireland 1846*, (Dublin, 1846); Slater's *Royal National Commercial Directory of Ireland 1856*, (Dublin, 1856); *Sligo Independent Almanac* (Sligo, 1865); Slater's *Directory of Ireland 1870* (Dublin, 1870); Slater's *Royal National Commercial Directory of Ireland 1881* (Dublin, 1881), Slater's *Royal National Commercial Directory of Ireland 1894* (Dublin, 1894). A database of over 3,900 individual entries was compiled, in order to provide the fullest coverage of the trades in Sligo over the period 1820-1894. See sample in Appendix IV.

decreased significantly between 1820 and 1824; the reason for this is unknown, but may have been the result of the collapse of small home industries. A substantial increase is noted in the decade and a half to 1839, with almost 600 traders recorded for the town. This is in line with the increase in the town's population to just fewer than 15,000 by the time of the 1841 census. The decrease in 1846 may be famine related, but in common with most urban centres in Ireland, Sligo weathered the storm of the Great Hunger and this is reflected in an increase in traders' numbers to 529 by 1856. Hat manufacturers in particular seem to have decreased rapidly after 1846,<sup>102</sup> and this may have been part of the processes which saw smaller home industries disappear by the 1890s, their goods no longer commercially profitable. The rise of the merchant and shop-keeping class in post-famine Ireland is well documented. Sligo was no exception to the national trend.

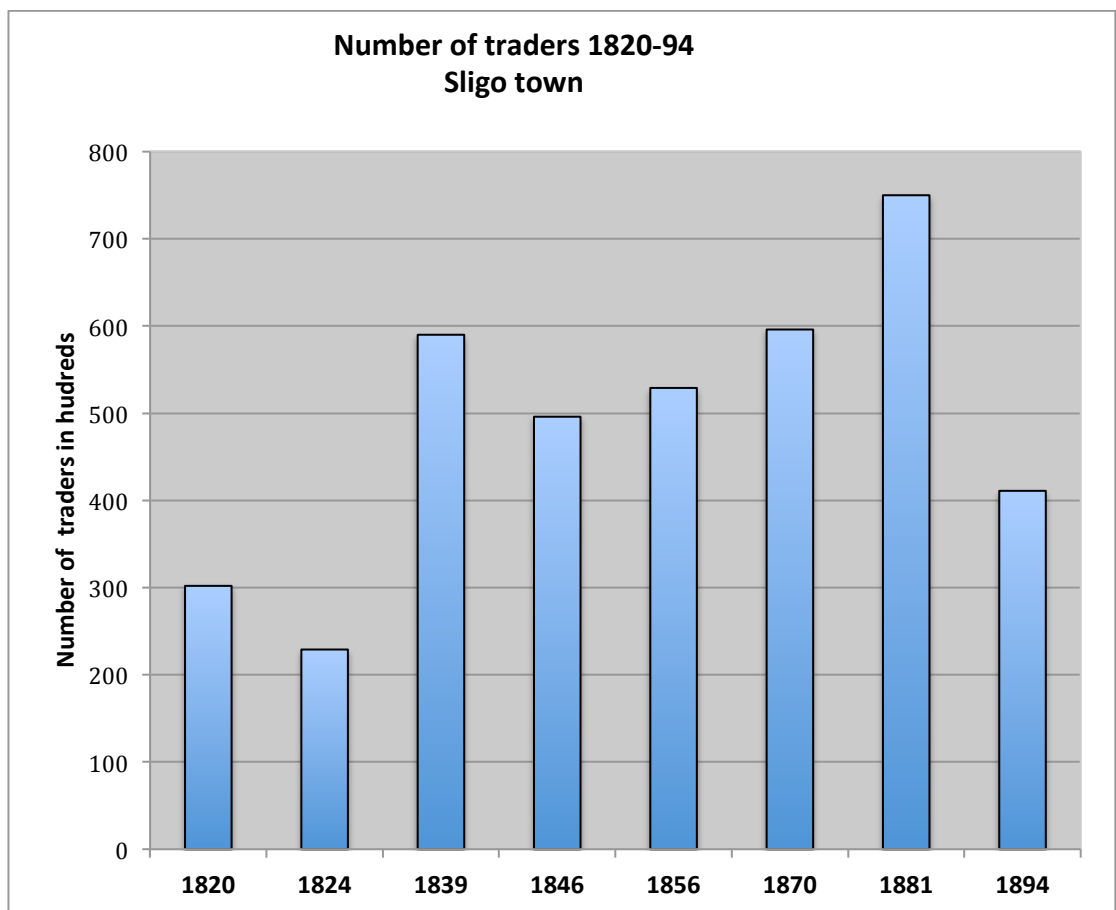


Figure 4.7 The rise and fall in the number of traders in Sligo town, 1820-1894. Compiled from the various trade directories, See sample in Appendix IV.

<sup>102</sup> Gallagher and Legg, *Sligo*, IHTA, p. 18.



Figure 4.8 An example of the type of two-storey thatched town house, which was probably typical of much of the better-class urban housing fabric of Sligo through the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These buildings, along the northern side of John Street, survived until about 1899. The dwelling to the right has already converted its thatch to slates. Source: NLI, Lawrence collection, STP. 1047, (extract).

#### 4.5 The poor, their homes and pauperism

The drivers for nineteenth century Irish poverty in general were the great population increases of the latter part of the eighteenth century, and the subsequent demographic shock of the famine. There was a pronounced growth in the provincial urban and village network in the latter half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century. Some of this was primarily driven by landlordism, but the factors behind this growth is complex.<sup>103</sup> By the early 1800s there was already a movement by the rural poor to this expanding urban network in the provinces, in the hope of a better life.<sup>104</sup>

The presence of homeless poor in Sligo is evidenced from 1739 onwards, when a ‘large workhouse for disorderly persons’ is noted along Mass Lane.<sup>105</sup> By 1768, this workhouse was converted into a county infirmary, following an act of parliament.<sup>106</sup> A multi-denominational charitable body, the Sligo Mendicity Society, was founded in

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<sup>103</sup> Stephen A. Royle, ‘Industrialization, urbanization and urban society in post-famine Ireland, c. 1850 - 1921’ in Brian J. Graham and L.J. Proudfoot (eds), *An historical geography of Ireland* (London, 1993), p. 260.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>105</sup> Henry, *Hints towards a natural and topographical history of the counties of Sligo*, p. 148

<sup>106</sup> *County hospitals act, 1765*, (5 & 6 George III Cha. 20).

1824 for the purposes of relieving the destitute poor in the town. This task it carried out until its dissolution in 1841 on the completion of the Sligo workhouse. The number of vagrant paupers helped during the first year of operation numbered about one hundred. They were mostly employed to sweep the streets of Sligo between 1824 and 1836, a task for which the town and harbour commissioners reimbursed the society. This income helped sustain the voluntary body. By the end of the first year of operation, the Mendicity Society had given out 50,507 meals to 29,753 persons.<sup>107</sup> The total amount of voluntary contributions was upwards of £500, but the expenditure was £547. A separate clothing fund was established, which enabled the society to issue sixty-four sets of clothes to the neediest poor. In 1824, the society took over the lease of the infirmary on Mass Lane, vacated since the building of a new hospital in 1819, and carried out its operations from here. Its existence was brief, but the society played a notable part in the relief of the poor before the famine.



Figure 4.9. The 'straggling cabins of the poor' in 1818. An illustration of poorer housing on Forthill, Sligo, showing the ruined Abbey tower, and the main section of the town in the foreground. Source: William Larkin's map of Sligo, 1818. (cartouche).

Passing through Sligo in 1834, Henry Inglis noted that he did not 'observe many symptoms in the town of a pauper population; with the exception of two or three months in the year there is employment for the people....In the general aspect of the population I perceived an improvement; I saw fewer tatters than I had been accustomed to and fewer bare feet on market day, when all wear shoes and stockings who can. I observed also that a large proportion of the men wore clean linen shirts'.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Sligo Infirmary Board of Governors, *Minute Book, 1828* (SLHC), Mss L 701.

<sup>108</sup> Henry D. Inglis, *Ireland in 1834: A journey throughout Ireland, during the spring, summer, and autumn of 1834* (London, 1836), ii pp. 122-135.

Entrenched poverty was a way of life for many in Sligo in the decades before the famine, as evidenced by the reports of the poor law commissioners in 1835. However, the influx of the poor, destitute and hungry was to challenge the institutions of the town during the period 1845-47. Sligo's population increased rapidly between 1841 and 1851 due to the number being supported at the workhouse and other temporary relief buildings. This was a common occurrence in all provincial towns which were home to a workhouse and other institutional buildings. The extent of destitution was enormous, and despite a decrease in Sligo's population after 1851, the proportion of poor, low-waged labours increased, and remained high for the rest of the century. The decline of what little industry it had, and the preponderance of casual-labouring jobs left Sligo with a substantial vulnerable population, inhabiting the 'straggling irregular and cabin-built suburbs' and insanitary lanes.<sup>109</sup>

Speculative building of small houses for the lower-waged may have commenced about 1800. The Ropewalk, developed by the wealthy merchant, William Vernon, was first mentioned in a deed of 1804, with small dwellings appearing there before 1824, when 'new-built houses' were advertised to let by Andrew Gillhooley.<sup>110</sup> The adjacent James's Street was laid out about 1828, and an advertisement in the *Sligo Journal* in February of that year announced the letting of plots along this new street and along the recently-constructed Mail Coach Road, in the 'most populous and improving part of the suburbs'.<sup>111</sup> This building of houses and leasing of plots would seem to point to a period of speculative development by a member of the landed gentry, who had spare capital and sufficient land. It also points to the emergence of a relatively wealthy Catholic merchant class, able to fund the leasing of houses, perhaps with a view to subsequent sub-letting.

Sligo streets were 'badly paved' in 1833, when a royal commission reported on the state of the municipal corporation. 'There is many parts a neglected appearance. Out a total number of 2,667 houses, only 816 were valued at above £10 per annum. A total of 1,851 houses were rated at below that valuation, and we can surmise that a significant proportion of that number was valued much lower, perhaps no greater than £2

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<sup>109</sup> *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland 1844*, vol. i (Dublin, 1844-46) p. 268.

<sup>110</sup> Registry of Deeds, 656/345/451254.

<sup>111</sup> *Sligo Journal*, 29 Feb. 1828.

annually.<sup>112</sup> Housing conditions in Sligo in the mid-nineteenth century were considered no better nor worse than those in other towns of a similar size. A description of Sligo in 1844 from *The Parliamentary Gazetteer*, illustrates the general state of affairs at the time.

The town itself, though contributing to form some beautiful landscapes... occupies too low and undiversified a site.... Previous to its been paved, cleaned and lighted, it was a comparatively filthy and unhealthy town....but all parts....of the town excepting those between the south side of the Enniskillen Road and the river are poor and consist in general of mere cabins.<sup>113</sup>

The gazetteer goes on to mention many ‘cabin-built outskirts’ on both the northerly and southerly approaches to the town, and a ‘straggling, irregular and cabin-built suburb’. Groups of lanes, alleys and short streets complete the picture of a substantial centre surrounded by the habitations of the poor. James Frazer, writing of Sligo just before the famine, states that ‘the streets in the older parts of the town were narrow, dirty, ill-paved, and badly suited to the bustle of an export trade’. However, he hoped that the extension of the town by regularly built wide streets’ would shortly make amends for the inconvenience and irregularity of the older parts. Sligo in 1839 had nevertheless, much more the ‘appearance of a business place than any other town in Connaught, a circumstance wholly owing to the spirit and enterprise of its traders’.<sup>114</sup>

Henry Inglis in 1834, noted that ‘Sligo has the look of a town of some consequence, more so I think than any town I had seen since leaving Limerick. In streets, houses, bustle and shops Sligo holds a respectable rank’.<sup>115</sup> Some years later in 1851, a German travel writer, Prof Adolf Heifferich, stayed in Sligo on a journey through Ireland and remarked, on the houses and streets at that time:

‘The trade in Sligo is very busy, in particular the retail trade, and though most districts appear narrow, dirty and badly surfaced, the warehouses are very spacious. Unsightly houses have often two or three chambers behind one another and are plentifully equipped with articles for sale’.<sup>116</sup>

The same opinion was held locally as well. In 1850, the local *Sligo Champion* reported that conditions on Barrack Street and North Gallows Hill were ‘wretched’; ‘... a high

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<sup>112</sup> *Municipal Corporations (Ireland), 1836*, vol. xxiv, part III, conclusion of the north-western circuit, p. 1274.

<sup>113</sup> *The Parliamentary Gazetteer for Ireland, 1844-1845*, iii, p. 268-269.

<sup>114</sup> James Frazer, *Guide through Ireland :Its scenery, towns, seats, antiquities, etc.* (Dublin, 1839), p. 327.

<sup>115</sup> Inglis, *Ireland in 1834: A journey throughout Ireland*, ii, pp 122-35.

<sup>116</sup> Peter Lang, *Poor Green Erin: German travel writers’ narratives on Ireland from before the 1798 rising to after the great famine* (2nd ed., Frankfurt am Main, 2012), p. 581.

hill upon which each side of is ranged the miserable cabins, the abodes of poverty and the crime of the town'.<sup>117</sup>

Despite these gloomy observations, there were some improvements in housing. Just after the famine, in 1848, a small development of workers' houses, known as the 'Snipefield Terrace' were erected in Sligo. This philanthropically driven development was the only attempt to construct industrial housing in the town until the 1880s. Financed by Peter O'Connor, the leading catholic merchant of the town, the row of twenty-two, two-storeyed houses were built along the northern side of George's Street, (now Lord Edward Street), to house the workers he employed in his adjacent sawmills. These slated houses were erected to a standard design, and comprised of two rooms upstairs and two downstairs. All were valued at £2 15s in the primary valuation of 1858. O'Connor also put forward an ambitious plan to extend the adjoining William Street (Wolfe Tone Street), northwards in the direction of the Quays and erect similar small workers' houses along it. However, the insistence of the railway company on erecting their station terminus on the same site put paid to these proposals, despite an offer of £500 if they would consider an alternative site.<sup>118</sup> In 1866, the water in the George's Street well was pronounced 'unfit for consumption', and this was a blow for the large number of people who lived in the Snipefield Terrace, as they had to travel a considerable distance across town to get clean water.

Housing stock was classified in the 1841 census, and at subsequent censuses. Between 1841 and 1861, the total number of houses in Sligo town fell by about 15 per cent, and interestingly the number of fourth-class houses dropped dramatically by almost 98%. However, the vast bulk of Sligo's urban housing was categorised as second and third class; 1,586 in 1841, over 72 per cent of total housing stock.<sup>119</sup> By 1881, the fourth class house had disappeared, and there was a general improvement in housing stock in the commercial core. Many of the two-storey houses and shops in the town centre had been replaced with more modern commercial premises, changing the face of the town. But the cabins of the poor remained unchanged to the end of the Victorian period.

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<sup>117</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 20 July 1850.

<sup>118</sup> Gallagher, *The streets of Sligo*, p. 401.

<sup>119</sup> *Census of Ireland*, 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881.

## The Poor Law Inquiry

The escalating number of destitute poor throughout Ireland in the two decades after 1810, and particularly the fear of disease following the cholera epidemic in 1832, resulted in the setting up of the Poor Law Inquiry Commission in 1835. This influential body investigated the level and causes of poverty throughout the country, with the commissioners concluding that three million people were eligible for some sort of state-funded relief. Despite several progressive recommendations by the commission, Ireland did not get a specific system to deal with its unique difficulties, and instead the unsatisfactory English Poor Law system was extended to Ireland.<sup>120</sup> This system resulted in the erection of large workhouses in the principal towns, where the destitute poor could apply for ‘indoor relief’, and where prevailing social thought presumed that the ‘firm and regular offer of the workhouse will convert the potential pauper into an independent labourer...manly independence follows in the wake of strict administrations’.<sup>121</sup> These workhouses were to be utterly overwhelmed during the famine.

The Sligo extracts from the report of the commissioners relating to the poor law inquiry in 1835, give an insight into the state of poverty and the ‘abodes of the poor’ just before the famine. Sligo town had a ‘great many widows with young children’, who were generally assisted by charity, without which they could not subsist.<sup>122</sup> Described as being in general, ‘very wretched’, with food of the worst kind, there was little employment open to them’. They were frequently driven to begging, particularly when old and infirm. Illegitimacy appears to have been treated with general acceptance in Sligo, according to the witnesses at the commission, and the numbers of illegitimate children were ‘small’, but not known. Such children were never supported by the parish, but were seldom deserted by the mother. Cases of infanticide were ‘unheard of’.<sup>123</sup>

The number of aged destitute persons in the parish of Sligo was ‘considerable, and estimated at over five hundred persons’. About half were reckoned to be supported by begging, and the rest by their relations. Many elderly persons considered they had a right to be supported by their family, and this support of the aged put severe pressure on

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<sup>120</sup> Virginia Crossman, *The poor law in Ireland 1838-1948* (Dundalk, 2006), pp 4-10.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>122</sup> Poor Law Inquiry, 1835, *First report from His Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland, with appendix and supplement, 1835* (369), p. 129.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.



the children who ‘can scarcely support themselves’.<sup>124</sup> The sense of overwhelming poverty is strong; in Sligo town there were estimated to be one hundred beggars, judging by the applications for admittance to the mendicity, which was not able to maintain any more people in 1833. The incidence of vagrancy was increasing due to the drop in employment, and stagnation of trade.<sup>125</sup> Many of the beggars were previously able-bodied labourers, but adopted vagrancy with advancing age, or lack of work. There were few child-beggars, but at some ‘seasons, up to 500 may be seen gathering shellfish to sell or live on’.<sup>126</sup> The state of health of vagrants is alluded to by the committee, which noted that diseases were often spread through the country by the custom of giving lodgings to them; ‘the cholera was almost certainly invariably introduced by beggars’.<sup>127</sup> The Mendicity Institute provided lodgings and regular food for about fifty of the town’s registered beggars.

The sick poor of Sligo town were a cause for great concern, as there was no fund for affording assistance to such families, according to the medical dispensary officer Dr James Kenny. The loss of a single day’s labour by the husband of a family ‘will very quickly cause the sale of some necessary article of clothing or furniture’. A week’s illness would result in the pawning of several articles, which were unlikely to be ever redeemed. The families of sick persons were mostly supported by begging or partly by the alms and the kindness of neighbours, who were often known, ‘unasked, to divide with the sick their own insufficient means of substance’. The importance of social ties among the poor as regards caring for the sick and dying was remarked upon by Dr Kenny, who noted that even though the poor had a great fear of disease and fever, in the case of a person without family the neighbours would take on the duty cheerfully.<sup>128</sup> It was impossible for the labourers or cottiers to put anything aside as a provision for unforeseen periods of sickness, and the destitution caused by even a short illness was very frequently ‘the cause of destroying the few comforts of the labourer’.

The cost of medicines and doctors was ‘most expensive, and least efficacious’. Illness was common, and ‘dropsy’ or oedema associated with heart-disease, was especially prevalent in Sligo in the 1830s, as a result of poor nutrition. The ‘want of a good meal’ was often the greatest barrier in restoring a moderately sick person to health and

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 207

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, p. 533.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 533.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 534.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 298.

usefulness.<sup>129</sup> The Sligo dispensary, operating from the county infirmary on The Mall, was established in 1818, and was joined by another dispensary on the western side of town in 1831. Dispensaries had been in existence since the later 1790s, and their role was to employ a doctor or apothecary who would give free medicine and medical advice to the poor.<sup>130</sup> Many of Sligo's poor flocked here, and between June 1831 and June 1833 – excluding the two months of the cholera epidemic – over 2,625 patients attended the St. John's dispensary alone.<sup>131</sup>

One of the occasions when we hear the voice of the poor themselves, the commissioner heard evidence from a local man, on the state of the labourers during the unemployed season. Mr R. Henry said, 'During the winter quarter, half the labourers get very little work.... in the last three weeks I got only three days, at 1 shilling a day. We often have but one meal, and must be content with whatever we can get; last summer I did not taste food some weeks oftener than five times'. He further stated that, 'I have a wife and three children; from November to August I was sick; I caught cold while working in a store; I pledged every piece of clothing that I had, and sold every piece of furniture; when all was expended, my sister assisted me, and my family went to our friends and neighbours, who used to give us a basket of potatoes; I have now only a wisp of straw to lie on'.<sup>132</sup> This was the reality for a large segment of Sligo's labouring families.

The able-bodied poor were numerous in Sligo in 1835. A great number were out of work between December and March, a period that was 'very wretched' on the labourers.<sup>133</sup> The want of employment in the town was 'caused in some measure by the great influx of persons from the country'. One labourer testified that he got 'but two days' work a week in winter', and that half of the town's casual labourers were in the same position.<sup>134</sup> There was in general a great want of employment in Sligo. The 1841 census returns for the town show that almost three-quarters of the male population were involved in the 'direction of labour', which was paid, regular labouring. The five per cent of families who were dependent on their own labour includes families without

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>130</sup> Ronald D. Cassell, *Medical charities, medical politics: the Irish dispensary system and the Poor Law, 1836-1872* (St. Edmonds, 1997), pp 8-10.

<sup>131</sup> Description of dispensaries in county Sligo, *Poor Law Inquiry, 1835, appendix B*, in Patrick J. Henry, *Sligo: Medical care in the past 1800-1965* (Sligo, 1995), p. 98.

<sup>132</sup> *Poor Law Inquiry, 1835, First report from His Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland, with appendix and supplement, 1835* (369), p. 393.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 392.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 393.

capital, land or education, such as labourers, and persons who obtained their income from employment which required ‘little or no education or instruction’.<sup>135</sup> These figures indicate clearly the degree to which entrenched poverty in provincial towns was largely dependent on access to a regular wage.

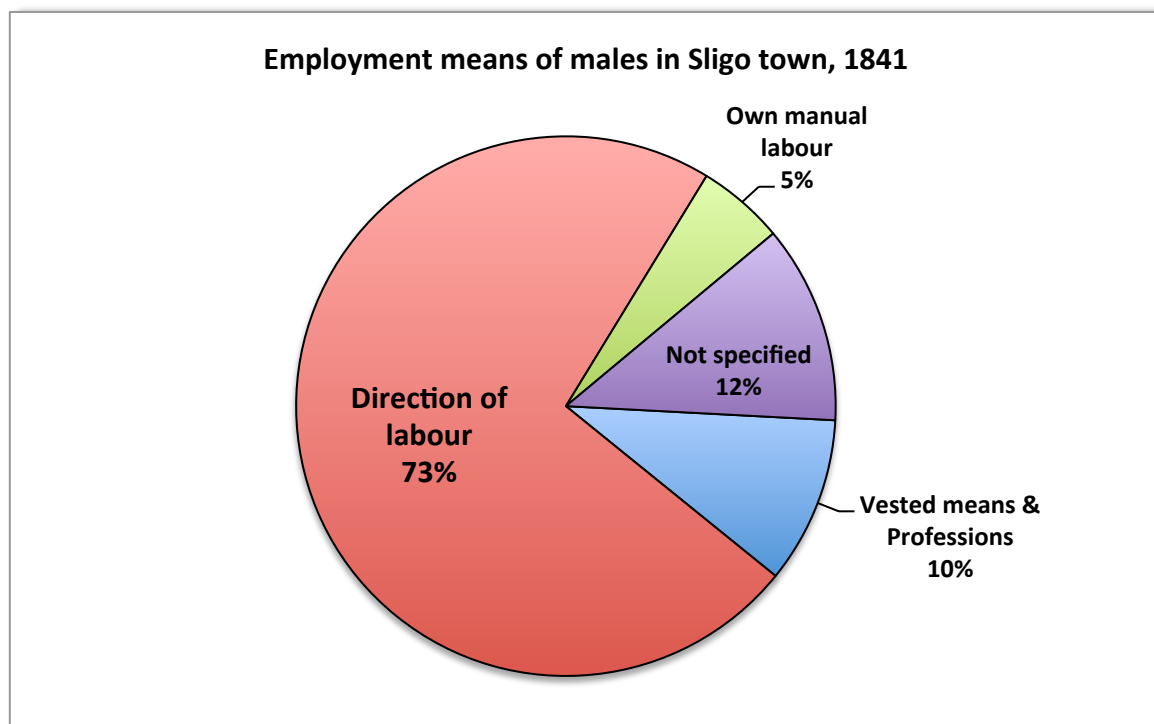


Figure 4.10. The employment means of the male population of Sligo town, 1841. A large proportion of the male workforce was employed in casual labouring. ‘Direction of labour’ was generally seen as regular employment. Source: *Census of Ireland, 1841*, H.C. 1843, xxiv, (504), p. lix.

Stephen Royle posits that Ireland’s ‘failure to industrialise, (outside the north-east), could not have been foreseen’, from the vantage point of the pre-famine era.<sup>136</sup> Over 27 per cent of the Irish workforce, as returned at the 1841 census, were engaged in manufacturing, mostly in the linen and flax industries, and in spinning, weaving and food production for the export market. However, following the trauma of the famine, the percentage of the workforce employed in industry fell dramatically in all three provinces outside of Ulster between 1821 and 1841. Connacht, the westernmost and least urbanised area, had a drop of 14.5 per cent in the proportion of those in industry in those two decades; county Sligo’s segment of its population participating in industry experienced a fall from 46.5 to 30.7 per cent in the same period and by 1881 it had

<sup>135</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1841*, lix.

<sup>136</sup> Royle, ‘Industrialization, urbanization and urban society in post-famine Ireland, c. 1850 -1921’, p. 260.

fallen again to 15.2 per cent.<sup>137</sup>

#### 4.6. Property valuations – the geographical extent of poor housing

Rateable property valuations are a key indicator of the extent of poor housing, and of building quality generally, as they were payable by the occupier, not the owner. Poor quality buildings were generally rated low. High rates often forced out the poorer tenant, unable to pay increased charges. An overview of the condition of Sligo's housing stock is gained from the borough valuation lists of 1842. This lists all the ratepayers in each house in each street of the municipal area, along with its valuation and rate.<sup>138</sup> In line with the Municipal Reform Act of 1842, the setting of annual rates was legislated for the borough, to finance the municipal work of the corporation. These rates became the main source of income for Irish municipal authorities after the 1828 Lighting of Towns Act, but not all towns legislated for rates immediately. The modern system of rates was set out in the Poor Relief Act of 1838, which defined the parameters of rates for different premises.<sup>139</sup>

Sligo's rates were set by the corporation members, themselves property owners, who were reluctant to impose high rates on themselves or other businessmen in the town. This was a similar situation to other towns, and the Irish rates system was quite flawed as a means of raising local revenue for most of the nineteenth century.<sup>140</sup> There was also a noted reluctance on the part of the corporation to provide sanitary services that would result in increase rates. The rates for 1842, are tabled by street, showing that the commercial streets have, as expected, a high valuation and annual rate. Knox's Street, the main street is valued at over £1,500, while the poorest lanes, such as Ramsey's Row are valued at just £26 per annum. Often the street rate does not reflect the true extent of poor housing in a thoroughfare, as its rateable valuation could be higher due to the presence of warehouses, shops, or one or two better-class houses. It is more meaningful to take a snapshot of one street and break it down by individual properties in order to see the extent of low rates and valuations, as is done in figure 4.11.

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<sup>137</sup> See table sourced from Cormac Ó Gráda in, Royle, 'Industrialization, urbanization and urban society in post-famine Ireland', p. 263.

<sup>138</sup> Corporation of Sligo, *Minute book listing the ratepayers of the borough, with addresses and rateable valuations, 1842-1848*, (SLHC), LGOV 768.

<sup>139</sup> William L. Feingold, *The revolt of the tenantry; the transformation of local government in Ireland 1872-1886* (New York, 1984), p. 16.

<sup>140</sup> Matthew Potter, *The municipal revolution in Ireland* (Dublin, 2011), p. 96.

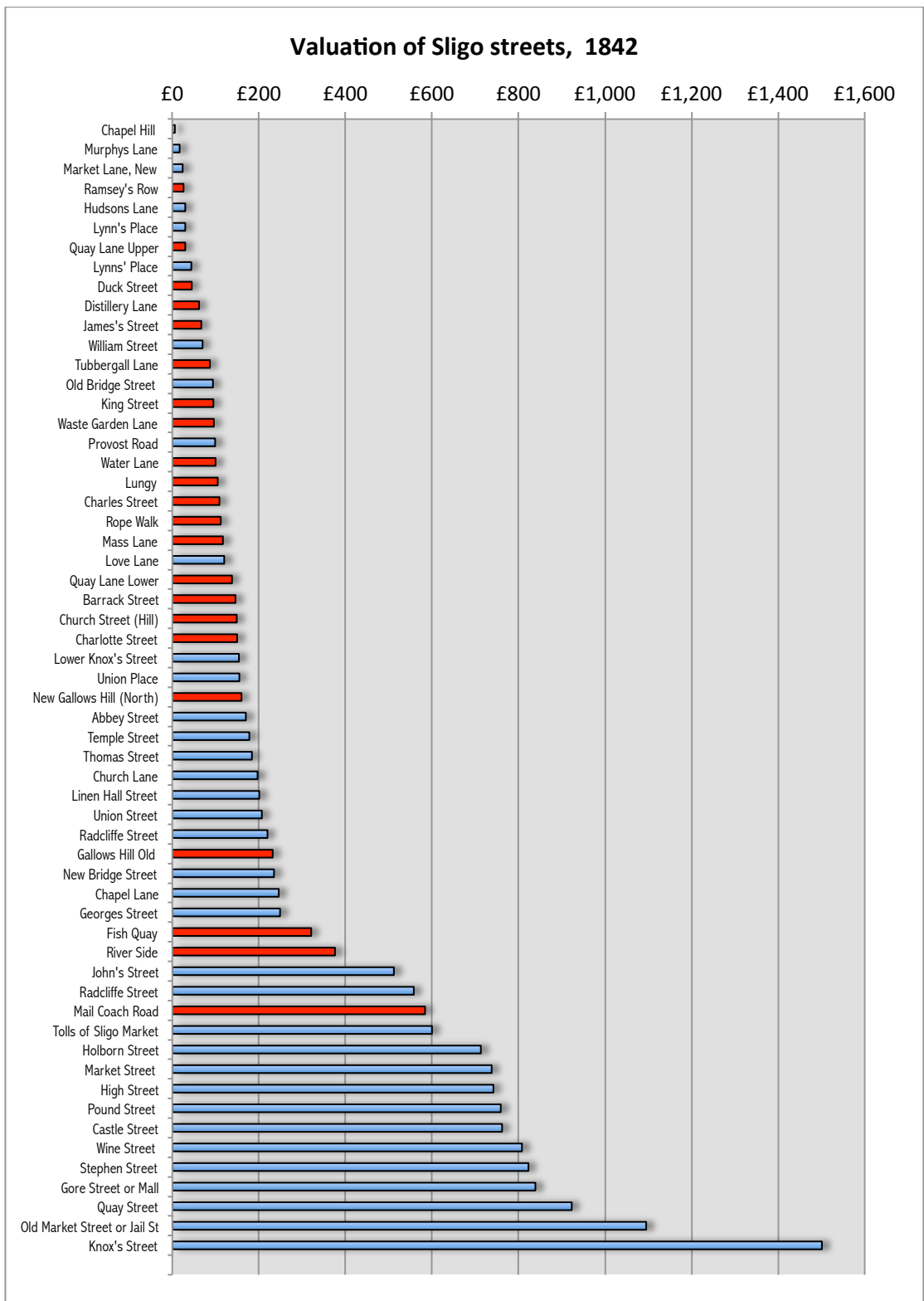
<b>Street</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Rate</b>
Abbey Street	£170	£2-2-6
Barrack Street	£146	£1-16-6
Castle Street	£762	£9-10-6
Chapel Hill	£6	£0-1-6
Chapel Lane	£246	£3-1-6
Charles Street	£109	£1-7-3
Charlotte Street	£150	£1-17-6
Church Lane	£197	£2-9-3
Church Street (Hill)	£149	£1-17-3
Distillery Lane	£62	£0-15-6
Duck Street	£45	£0-11-3
Fish Quay	£321	£4-0-3
Gallows Hill Old	£232	£2-17-2
Georges Street	£249	£3-2-3
Gore Street or Mall	£839	£10-9-9
High Street	£742	£11-15-6
Holborn Street	£713	£8-18-9
Hudsons Lane	£30	£0-7-6
James's Street	£67	£0-16-9
John's Street	£512	£6-8-0
King Street	£95	£1-3-9
Knox's Street (p/o)	£1,501	£18-7-5
Linen Hall Street	£201	£22-10-3
Love Lane	£120	£1-10-0
Lower Knox's Street	£154	£1-18-6
Lungy	£105	£1-6-3
Lynn's Place	£30	£0-7-6
Lynns' Place	£44	£0-11-0
Mail Coach Road	£584	£7-0-6
Market Lane, New	£24	£0-6-0
Market Street	£738	£9-4-9
Mass Lane	£117	£1-9-3
Murphys Lane	£17	£0-4-3
New Bridge Street	£235	£2-18-9
New Gallows Hill (North)	£160	£2-0-0
Old Bridge Street	£94	£1-18-9
Old Market Street or Jail St	£1,095	£13-13-9
Pound Street	£759	£9-8-9
Provost Road	£99	£1-4-9
Quay Lane Lower	£138	£1-14-6
Quay Lane Upper	£30	£0-7-6
Quay Street	£923	£11-10-9
Radcliffe Street	£558	£7-7-0
Radcliffe Street	£220	£2-15-6
Ramsey's Row	£26	£0-6-6

River Side	£376	£4-14-0
Rope Walk	£112	£1-8-0
Stephen Street	£823	£10-5-9
Temple Street	£178	£2-4-6
Thomas Street	£184	£2-6-0
Tolls of Sligo Market	£600	£7-10-0
Tubbergall Lane	£87	£1-1-9
Union Place	£155	£1-18-9
Union Street	£207	£2-11-9
Waste Garden Lane	£96	£1-4-0
Water Lane	£100	£1-5-0
William Street	£70	£0-17-6
Wine Street	£808	£10-1-0

**Figure 4.11. The valuation and annual rates of the streets in the Borough of Sligo, 1842. Some streets are notable for their low valuation, but some have large concentrations of houses valued under £1 annually, which are disguised by the presence of one or two larger or commercial buildings in a street. Source: Minute book listing ratepayers of the Borough, with rateable valuations, 1842-1848. Sligo LHC.**

The Forthill area is classic study case. Home to much of the ‘cabin-built’ suburbs in 1844, it was composed of three streets, Barrack Street, New Gallows Hill, (also called Holborn Hill), and Holborn Street, at the bottom of the hill. In 1842, there were 143 houses listed for Holborn Street, and ninety-one for New Gallows Hill, and about 28 for Barrack Street, indicating the mass of small cabins.<sup>141</sup> The total valuation for New Gallows Hill was £160, returning a total rate of £2 per annum. The vast majority of the houses were valued at only £1 or £2, signifying the poor condition of the housing stock. Barrack Street’s valuation is skewed by the presence of the military barracks and associated buildings, which were valued at £110 per year. The twenty-nine houses on the street in 1845, had no higher valuation than £2 annually, the whole street was valued at no more than £45. Holborn Street’s valuation was much greater at £576, returning a rate of £7 4s annually. The individual value of the houses in this lower part of Forthill is higher, as it contained more two-storey dwellings of better quality and several small shops.

<sup>141</sup> The returns for Barrack Street for 1842 are missing; data is interpolated using the next valuation from 1845.



**Figure 4.12. Graphing the rateable valuation of the streets of the borough of Sligo, 1842. There is a distinct bulk of streets valued at below £200 annually. The streets in red are those which had high concentrations of poor housing. The high value of individual streets often disguised the poor quality of the housing in it, due to the presence of higher rated buildings.**

Helene Bradley has explored the idea of ‘mapping the geography of an underclass’, by using the valuations under £1 to spatially illustrate where the lower classes lived in Irish urban centres of the nineteenth century.<sup>142</sup> While the valuation maps in the fascicles of the Irish Historic Town Atlas record the valuation of all premises above £5 annual valuation, this disguises the extent of the mass of slum housing permeating most towns. The concentrations of high and low valuation in Sligo are illustrated in figure 4.12, showing the street valuation arranged in order of value. Streets which contained a higher number of poorer houses are coloured red. About two-thirds of the streets are valued under £220 per annum, with a noticeable jump where the street valuation exceeds £250. The fourteen streets which range in total between £400 and £1,000 per annum are all in the core of Sligo, and home to many of the commercial concerns.

## Conclusions

The origins of Sligo’s urban poverty and poor housing may be found in the dramatic population increases of the late eighteenth century, with the subsequent drift of poorer, landless labourers to Irish towns, where they were all too soon forced into poverty due to the paucity of regular paid work. There was a pronounced growth in the provincial urban and village network in the latter half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth; some of this was primarily driven by landlordism, but the factors behind their growth is complex.<sup>143</sup> Middlemen speculation and long tenurial leases may have played a significant part in the spread of sub-urban cabins around Sligo in the period between 1750 and 1790. In any case, it is clear that by the early 1800s there was already a steady movement of people to provincial towns in the hope of a better life.<sup>144</sup>

Urbanisation can take place without industrialisation, but without matching growth in employment to soak up this excess migrant labour, difficult social, economic and infrastructural problems result.<sup>145</sup> This is precisely the process that took place in Sligo and other Irish towns in the period following the Act of Union in 1801. Coupled with the end of the Napoleonic war in 1815, there was a drop in economic demand, and urban growth slackened with the exception of the towns of the northeast. This process of ‘de-industrialisation’ has been attributed in part to the penetration of the Irish market with mass-manufactured English goods, and the demise of handicraft industries.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Dr Helene Bradley, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, ‘Valuation maps’, a paper given at IHTA annual conference, *Maps and Texts, using the Irish Historic Town Atlas: Georgian and Victorian towns*, Royal Irish Academy, 23 May 2014.

<sup>143</sup> Royle, ‘Industrialization, urbanization and urban society in post-famine Ireland’, p. 260.



It has also been suggested that Ireland was ‘overstocked with underemployed labourers, with too little cash’ to generate any significant domestic industrial demand.<sup>147</sup>

Sligo experienced rapid population growth from 1750 onwards, and much of this population increase was in the poorer classes, and was not matched by any significant increase in the number of quality dwellings. Sligo’s narrow thoroughfares, the preponderance of small cabins, the overcrowding, insanitary living conditions, and the high death rate, particularly among young children, struck observers throughout the following century. Despite the catastrophic decline of the county population after 1851, Sligo town maintained its somewhat decreased population, with a higher proportion of the county population than before the famine.

Until the far-reaching municipal reforms of the 1840s, Irish towns and cities were governed and developed by a partnership of wealthy landed patrons and rent-paying merchants, with attendant nepotism and corruption. Sligo was no exception to this pattern, and improvement was focused almost singularly on the merchant and shop keeping class. The presence of several over-lapping urban bodies in Sligo led to inaction, waste and stagnation, and it was not until municipal reform was enacted in 1869 that Sligo was to benefit from modern sanitary infrastructures. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, poverty continued to grow and become more entrenched in Sligo. Speculative building of labourer’s houses took place on a small scale, but there was no recognition of the housing needs of the labouring class, or their inability to pay high rents until the 1880s. The ‘straggling irregular and cabin-built suburbs of the poor’ proliferated in Sligo town right up to the modern age.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>146</sup> L. A. Clarkeson, ‘Armagh town in the eighteenth century’ in Collins, Ollerenshaw, and Parkhill (eds.), *Industry, Trade and People in Ireland*, p. 64.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>148</sup> *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland, 1846*, iii (Dublin, 1844-46.), p. 268.

## Chapter 5

### Sligo's primitive housing- the slum geography and housing conditions 1880-1930

#### Introduction

The poor housing that characterised Sligo town from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1930s had its genesis in the late eighteenth century and the pre-famine decades, as discussed in chapter four. After 1880, and more particularly after 1900, the debate on the continuing decay and spread of the poorest type of housing became a key public issue. The far-reaching findings of the Dublin Housing Inquiry of 1914 endorsed the idea that in order to improve the housing of the poor, the state must in some way subsidize the rents of the poorer working class, or indeed to undertake to house the very poorest itself.<sup>1</sup> However, the elected local officials in provincial towns still dragged their feet on the issue, and while they took on the responsibility of catering for the public well-being in the form of modern sanitary works, clean water, new sewers and health dispensaries, they were notably slow to take the initiative on housing.

Despite the gloomy picture painted at the start of the nineteenth century, and the disparaging comments by contemporary travellers on the cabin-built suburbs, much improvement had been effected in Sligo by the 1890s. The *Royal Commission of Inquiry on the Housing of the Working Classes*, 1885,<sup>2</sup> contained no specific mention of Sligo, although it does deal with cases in other towns. This report was the most important and comprehensive statement on the reform of public health and housing to emerge from Parliament in the late nineteenth century. Its findings led directly to the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890. A small number of artisans' dwellings were erected in Sligo under this act, and a cleaner and a more sanitary town was emerging by the end of the century, with a new piped water supply and extensive sewerage scheme. Piped gas was made available, and a comprehensive public health system was in place by 1900.<sup>3</sup> But for a substantial proportion of the townspeople, mainly relegated to the periphery of the town and the back streets, courts and alleys, the struggle of daily life

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<sup>1</sup> *Departmental Committee appointed to inquire into the housing conditions of the working classes in the City of Dublin* HC 1914 [C.7273] 1961, pp 29-30.

<sup>2</sup> *Third report of Her Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the housing of the working classes Ireland*, H.C. 1884-85, [C.4547] [C.4547-I], [C.4402-III].

<sup>3</sup> See, W. G. Wood-Martin, *History of Sligo, county and town* (Dublin, 1892), iii, pp 184-90; also, P. J. Henry, *Sligo, medical care in the past: 1800-1965* (Sligo, 1995).

continued untouched by any of these progressive changes. With no substantial financial incentives from central government, and great reluctance to increase municipal rates among town councillors, no significant slum clearance was to happen before the passing of the Housing Act (Finance and Miscellaneous) in 1932.

This chapter will look at the geographical situation and extent of poor housing in the Borough of Sligo between the Report of the Royal Commissions of Inquiry on the Housing of the Working Classes in 1885 and the passing of the 1932 Housing Act by a new Fianna Fáil native government. The period is one of great political and economic upheavals caused by the Great War and the fight for independence. Issues examined include the role of the local authority, Sligo corporation, in relation to appalling housing conditions, public health concerns, sanitary conditions, and overcrowding. It will also examine the evidence from various reports outlining the nature of the town's poor housing, and the reasons behind its persistence. The attitude of the municipal authorities will be evaluated, and it will be asked if the transition to a nationalist-majority corporation in 1899 led to any substantial changes. How did gradual legislative changes affect the housing conditions of the poor in Sligo over the period? What was the spatial geography of Sligo's slum housing? What exactly were the conditions of their homes? How many persons lived in squalid conditions, and what percentage of the population did they form? What was the impact of the creation of the new Irish Free State in 1922?

### **5.1 Sligo in context; 'slums and splendour'**

Sligo's spatial development, notably the growth of population in the eighteenth century that led to the proliferation of small cabins on the outskirts of the town, has been examined in chapter four. The existence, until about 1860, of large numbers of small home industries, such as haberdashery, hat making, saddlery and harness making, skinning and glove making, tailoring, tallow chandling and soap boiling, small coopering, cabinet making, and boot and shoe manufacture, probably provided a steady if meagre income for the poorer classes.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See: J. Pigot *Commercial Directory of Ireland*, 1820; J. Pigot, *City of Dublin and Hibernian Provincial Directory* 1824; *Sligo Directory*, published in Derry 1839; *Slater's National Commercial Directory of Ireland*, 1846; *Slater's Royal National Commercial Directory of Ireland*, 1856; *Sligo Independent Almanac*, 1856; *Slater's Directory of Ireland*, 1870; *Slater's Royal National Commercial Directory of Ireland*, 1881, 1894.

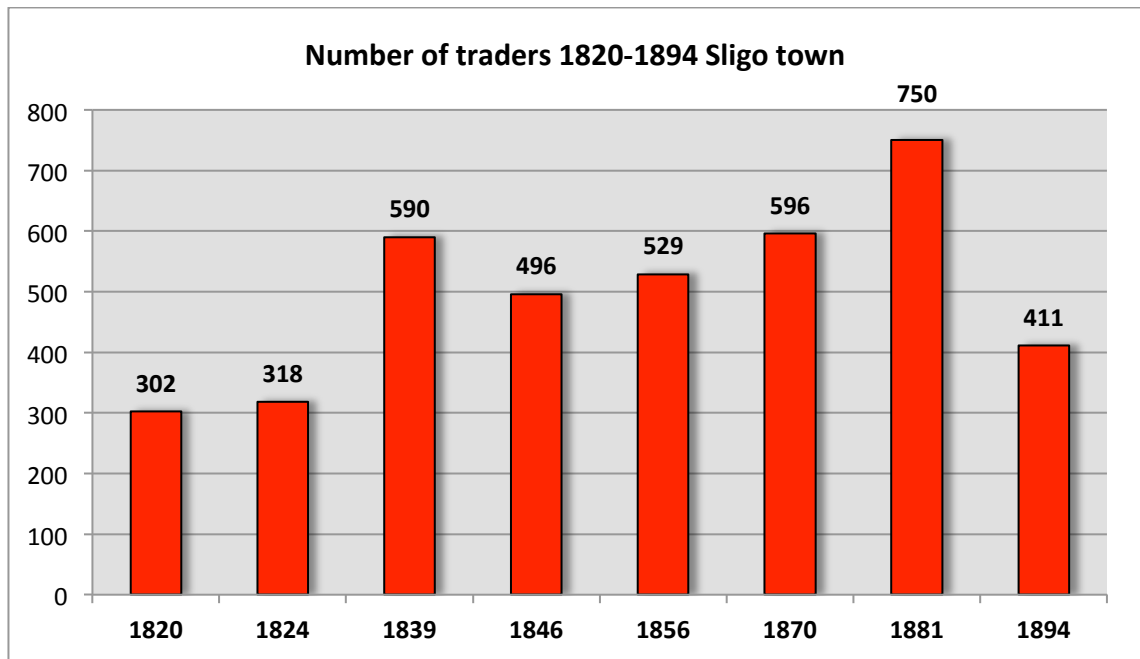


Fig. 5.1: Number of traders in Sligo town by year, 1820-1894. Source: Various trade directories of the period as noted in bibliography. The actual numbers are approximate, based on a simple count of each entry in the relevant trade directory.

However, the arrival of the railway to Sligo in 1862<sup>5</sup> resulted in easy access to mass manufactured goods from England, and as happened in other Irish towns, may have hastened the disappearance of these smaller home industries in Sligo. By 1894, there were about 400 traders in Sligo, a sharp drop from the 750 listed in 1880, and the trade directories illustrate a consolidation of shops and businesses into larger concerns. The sudden collapse in the number of bakeries in Sligo between 1870 and 1894 was due to the imposition of local sanitary by-laws, and the emergence of larger commercial bakery firms.

In stark contrast to the straggle of cabins which ringed Sligo, and the insanitary lanes which penetrated its commercial core, the centre of the town exhibited a bustling and attractive face in the late Victorian age. It was characterised by long streets lined with large shops, churches, banks and hotels, the essential components of a prosperous Irish market town of the period. <sup>6</sup> The attractive streetscapes captured in the Lawrence photos of the late 1890s, (see figure 5.2), remained essentially unchanged until the early 1960s.

<sup>5</sup> *Sligo Chronicle*, 5 Dec. 1862.

<sup>6</sup> Fíona Gallagher and Mary-Louise Legg, *Sligo*, Irish Historic Towns Atlas, no. 24, (Dublin, 2012), p. 5.



**Fig. 5.2 High Street 1899, showing the affluent shops and neat street lines of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century townscape. Source. NLI, Lawrence collection, 3561.**

The emergence of Sligo in the 1870s as a regional market and distribution centre, as well as the single administrative hub of the county, led to the growth of a sizable commercial class. Notable is the expansion of the Catholic middle and shop-keeping class after the famine, evident from the trade directories of the period.<sup>7</sup> There is a steady presence of lawyers and solicitors, as well as physicians, apothecaries and surgeons. All these professions were indicative of an expanding market and administrative centre. Large shops appeared, woollen and furniture warehouses opened, as did hotels, especially after the arrival of the railway in 1862. Five large hotels were operating in the town in 1901.<sup>8</sup> Banks were an important part of this growing prosperity. Savings banks were set up in the early years of the nineteenth century; the larger Irish banks followed, constructing opulent banking halls along the main streets.<sup>9</sup> Despite many false starts and a prolonged legal dispute,<sup>10</sup> the corporation managed to erect an impressive new town hall in 1865, at a time when many Irish towns outside Ulster struggled to build a civic

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<sup>7</sup> Details from a database I created of all existing trade directories for Sligo, as part of previous project, further detailed in footnote number 4, and appendix IV.

<sup>8</sup> Gallagher and Legg, *Sligo*, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> John C. McTernan, in *Sligo long ago: aspects of town and county over two centuries* (Sligo, 2001), p. 427-28.

headquarters.<sup>11</sup> All these new buildings were evidence of the growing self-confidence of Sligo, independent of its former landlords. The shipping business was expanded, steam ships improved the trading links with Scotland, Liverpool and North America, and large warehouses and emigration agencies lined the expanding quays, which by 1900 were over a mile long.<sup>12</sup>

By 1871, emigration had reduced the population of Sligo town to 11,047; however, the population recovered slowly after that, reaching 11,000 in 1901. In 1841, the town held just 8 per cent of the county's population; by 1901 that percentage share had increased to 13 per cent.<sup>13</sup> Sligo was distinctive in Connacht, in that it had a substantial number of protestants, most of them middle-class merchants and shopkeepers, as well as larger businessmen and industrialists. In 1861, when the population of the town stood at about 10,500, seventy-eight per cent of the population was Catholic, fifteen per cent Church of Ireland, with the remainder being divided amongst the smaller non-conformist denominations.<sup>14</sup> By 1911 Sligo had the largest urban concentration of protestants in Connacht, the majority members of the Church of Ireland.<sup>15</sup> Along with the catholic merchant-class, which had emerged after the 1840s, this social mix led to a dynamic and vibrant town, with a religiously mixed population.

Sligo was to benefit from the economic expansion of the late 1890s. The centre of the town had an air of affluence about it at the end of the Victorian age; 'so many of the houses of the town are both lofty and spacious, the streets are wide in proportion, the centre well-paved, and the sideways neatly kept'.<sup>16</sup> As a result of several acts, and subsequent legislation particularly in the area of public health, a more affluent and cleaner town was emerging. A modern sewerage scheme was completed by the 1880s (although it did not extend to the slum areas), and piped water was brought to the town from the Kinsellagh reservoir, three miles to the east of the town. The contaminated wells and street pumps that had supplied the town for much of its history had been closed or connected up to the new water mains.<sup>17</sup> Pumps were set up on the corners of

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew Potter, *The municipal revolution in Ireland; a handbook of Local Government in Ireland since 1880* (Dublin, 2011), p. 158.

<sup>12</sup> John C. McTernan, *Memory harbour: the port of Sligo: an outline of its growth and decline and its role as an emigration port* (Sligo, 1992), p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Census of Ireland*, extracts, 1841-1911, vol. 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Census of Ireland 1861*, vols. 1-4.

<sup>15</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1911*, vol. i, Population.

<sup>16</sup> Terence O'Rourke, *History of Sligo, town and county* (Dublin, 1898), ii, p. 408.

<sup>17</sup> Wood Martin, *History of Sligo*, iii, p. 184.

several streets, to supply this fresh water to the growing population. A large main drain was installed along Wine Street, and in 1880 a large intercepting sewer was laid out along the western bank of the river, which eliminated much of the filth and sewerage being flushed into the Garavogue, both domestic and industrial.<sup>18</sup> Despite all these improvements in infrastructure, at the dawn of the twentieth century many of the houses in the poorer areas of the borough remained every bit as bad as they had a half a century earlier. Sligo's primitive housing was to prove a headache for the corporation for the next three decades.



Fig. 5.3: Fish Quay Sligo, ca. 1900, showing the thatched houses typical of the time. One of these houses was home to the mayor, Ald. John Lynch in 1934. Source: NLI, extract from Lawrence collection print, LCAB 02014-15602.

The Local Government Act of 1898 was truly revolutionary and it ushered in an era of unprecedented change, both socially and municipally. The old grand juries were abolished, and in 1899 a vastly expanded electorate - which included women for the first time - elected new county councils and rural district councils, which replaced the grand juries. Sligo corporation, elected in January 1899, elected 24 members, all but two of them Nationalists, and several with strong labour-movement backgrounds.<sup>19</sup> The *Sligo Champion* of the day, declared that 'a town council composed of Nationalists was prepared to do what is fair and right....'<sup>20</sup> That optimism was to be well tested over the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., iii, p. 206.

<sup>19</sup> Pdraig Deignan, *Land and people in nineteenth century Sligo: from union to local government* (Sligo, 2015), p. 450.

<sup>20</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 21 Jan. 1899.

next three decades by families desperate to be rehoused. The absence of any major industry in Sligo after the collapse of the linen trade, and the intervening famine and mass emigration, (the total loss of population in county Sligo in the fifty years between 1841 and 1891 was 45.6 per cent),<sup>21</sup> meant there was a notable lack of any significant industrial development in Sligo town in the period between 1880 and 1922. However, the port of Sligo continued to be the major source of employment, which encouraged the growth of a low-waged casual labouring class who were in many cases resistant to social mobility. The irregularity of work for the dockers, – ‘tuckers’, ‘trimmers’ and ‘carters’– led to inconsistency in wages, which worked against security and the renting of a better place to live. The predominance of port-related work opportunities was a major factor in the creation of an urban underclass, without any real prospect of upwards social mobility.

## 5.2 Sligo’s primitive housing 1900-1930 – Reports and reactions

Sligo town lies in a hollow, with most of the compact commercial core arranged around the river, between the two bridges.<sup>22</sup> While the centre of the town could be said to be free from slum-dwellings of a ‘bad-type’ in 1914, the desperate conditions endured by the poorer classes on the town’s periphery, strikingly illustrate how pressing the housing problem was by that date.<sup>23</sup>



Fig. 5.4. The Riverside, Sligo. Example of the type of cottages common in Sligo, c. 1900, showing the differences in the states of repair. Source: *Lawrence Collection*, NLI, LCab 03562-13417.

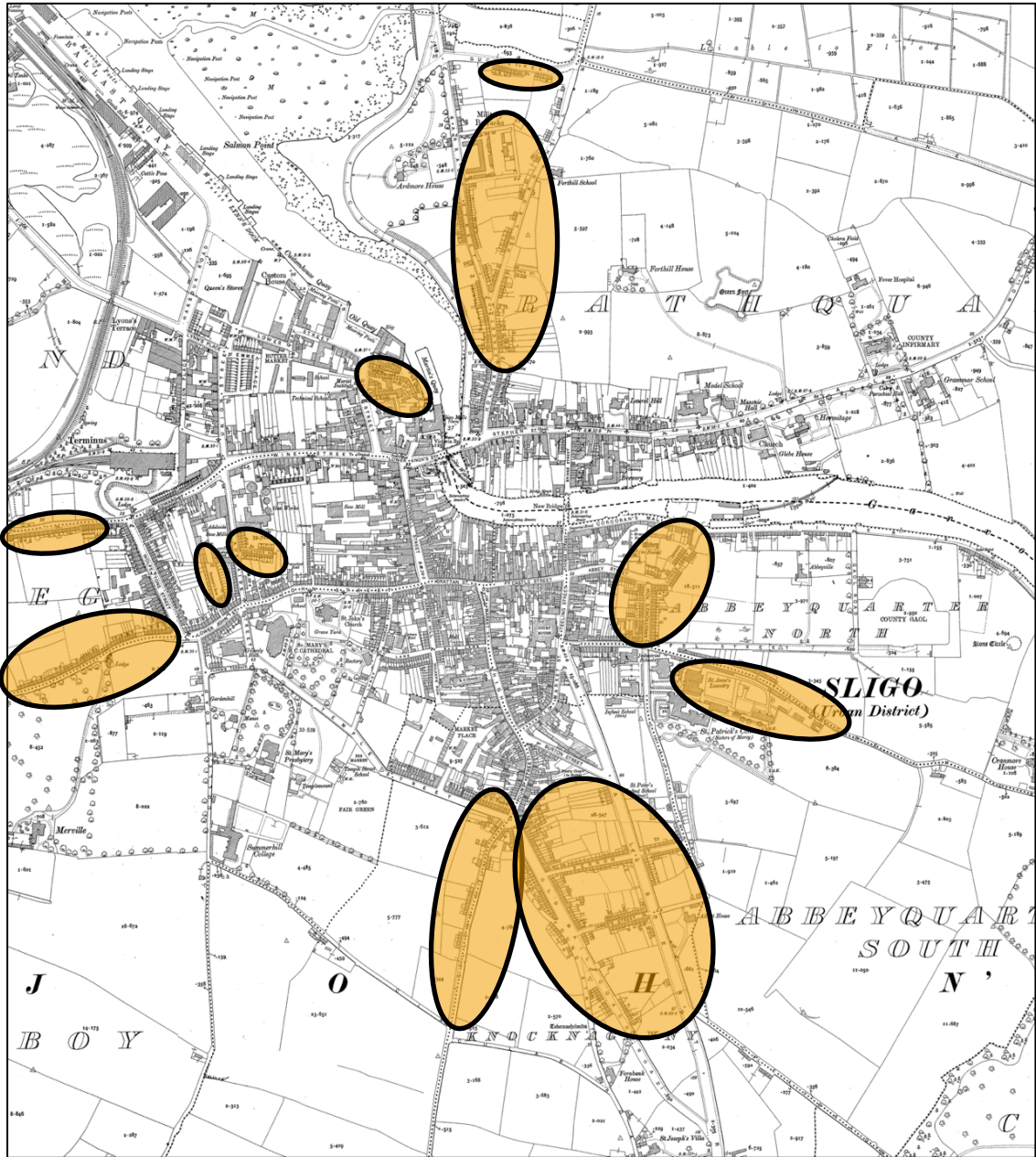
Figure 5.5 is an over-view of the geographical distribution of the slum housing in Sligo up to 1922. Most of the poorer quality dwellings are located on the periphery of a compact town core, with large concentrations on the two hills to the north and south of the river. Important too are the concentrations in small alleys and back lanes to the west

<sup>21</sup> T.W. Freeman, ‘Population distribution in county Sligo’ in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Society of Ireland*, vol. xvii, part 2 (1943/44), p. 254.

<sup>22</sup> Gallagher and Legg, *Sligo*, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Appendix to the report of the departmental committee appointed by the Local Government Board for Ireland to inquire into the housing conditions of the working classes in the city of Dublin. (Minutes of evidence, with appendices)* H.C. 1914 [Cd. 7317], appendix xxxvii, p. 382-393. [494-505].





**Fig. 5.5: Overview of Sligo town, showing the areas with concentrations of slum housing as they existed up until 1930. The peripheral nature of much of this housing is to be noted. Base Map, OS, Six inch, Sligo, Sheet XIII (1910).**

of the historic core, and around the old quays, the site of the medieval castle of Sligo. The long lines of ‘straggly cabins’ in the areas of Abbeyquarter to the east of the town, and along the roads leading westwards were the subjects of comment throughout much of the nineteenth century. It is the absence of change, and the persistence of this spatial distribution of poor housing up to 1932 that is most remarkable. If anything, conditions had worsened. Despite the construction of a small number of local authority houses in the period between 1923 and 1930, the housing situation in Sligo town remained moribund between the Housing Report of 1914 and the Housing of the Working Classes Act 1932.

Areas which were recognised as slums in the nineteenth century had improved little by the dawn of the twentieth century, when a detailed housing report was carried out by an inspector from the Local Government Board in 1901.<sup>24</sup> This early survey allows the identification and mapping of the areas of poorer housing, and indicates the scale and structure of the slum problem. These areas, which were generally peripheral to the core of the town, were to be problematic right up until they were condemned and cleared in the 1930s.

The majority of the houses occupied by the working class in 1901 were one-storey, generally with only one or two rooms. The dwellings were old, damp, badly lit, poorly ventilated, and needed much repair. There were few proper back yards, houses instead having a common outdoor space, with a cesspit or latrine toilet, shared between several houses. Most water supplies came from on-street pumps, which, positively, carried fresh water from the Kinsellagh reservoir. The birth and death rates for Sligo Borough in the previous five years were listed in the 1901 report, showing a decline in deaths from 21.8 per thousand in 1886 to 17.8 per thousand in 1900. The number of live births had risen over the previous five years, from 25.2 to 25.0 per thousand.<sup>25</sup> The inspector commented on the fact that Sligo was relatively free of typhoid because of the pure water supply, in contrast with other towns, which had reported outbreaks in 1901. The streets of Sligo were gas-lit, but these lamps were sporadic in the poorer areas.

Commenting on some of the worst housed areas of the town, the report was a clear condemnation of the housing conditions in Sligo. Many of the smaller dwellings had no drains; slops were thrown on to the ground, sometimes in front of the house. Sligo's substantial modern sewerage system<sup>26</sup> did not extend fully to the poorer areas, and raw sewage continued to discharge freely into the river Garavogue. Excrement and house refuse was disposed of mostly through the 'privy-midden' system. Many of the privies were constructed of wood, and infrequently cleaned. These were considered to be a serious danger to the public health.

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<sup>24</sup> 'Sligo's primitive housing', *Sligo Champion Sesquicentenary edition*, 1836-1986, p. 37. This report was apparently originally published in the *Sligo Champion* in 1901. The original report has not been located, despite much searching in the microfilm versions of this local publication.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> Fíona Gallagher, *The streets of Sligo* (Sligo, 2008), p. 61, 38; Also Gallagher and Legg, *Sligo*, an extract of town plan of 1861 by Robert Young, showing sewers.

One of the areas that the inspector focused on was Forthill and the adjacent Holborn Street. One of the poorest parts of Sligo, and located to the north of the town centre, atop a steep hill, it had long been the location of a multitude of small houses, the ‘straggling, irregular and cabin-built suburbs’ of the 1840s.<sup>27</sup> In 1901, it was full of ‘houses thatched, with earthen floors, no toilets; yards not walled in, and no proper drains. Two pigs and a donkey kept in yard of thatched shop’.<sup>28</sup> In the contemporary 1901 census, this area was returned under the title ‘Gallows Hill North and Holborn Street’, and lists forty-nine dwellings, which housed 243 people. Over 30 of the houses, 72 per cent were thatched, and most were categorised as ‘3rd class’, with several dwellings having very large families living in them, a common situation at the time. The return for Holborn Street gives a total of sixty-five houses for the street, with 372 inhabitants, of whom 184 were female. In contrast to the houses further up on Gallows Hill, only five of the dwellings in Holborn Street were thatched, and for the most part they were ranked as ‘2nd class’, indicating a bigger and superior type of house than the cabin-variety. There were eight public houses and eleven shops on the street, a substantial number relative to the number of dwellings and the small area.



**Fig. 5.6** The King Street houses, ca. 1899, also showing the houses on the east side of Holborn Hill.  
 Source: *Lawrence collection, NLI, extract from LCAB 05637-15602.*

King Street, a short lane off Holborn Hill, drew scathing comments from the inspector in 1901: ‘Two toilets are for the use of six houses; an open drain at back of row, thatch on five houses was letting in rain; a slated house in the same row condemned as not fit for human occupation’.<sup>29</sup> King Street was the remnant of a long-notorious slum, dating from at least the mid-nineteenth century. In the borough valuations of 1842, there were fifty-four houses in King Street and Lane, with rateable valuations ranging from 10s 9d

<sup>27</sup> *The Parliamentary Gazetteer for Ireland, 1844-1845* (Dublin, 1846), vol. ii, p. 67.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Sligo’s primitive housing’, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

per year to over £1-0-0.<sup>30</sup> By 1858, only ten houses remained, which may point to a deliberate clearing of the houses, perhaps by the landlord. In 1901 ten houses were to be found in the lane, five of them thatched, and all with two rooms. Half of the houses were classed as third class dwellings, the rest as second class. Two of them had nine occupants, and the remainder varied from two to five occupants; the total number of people in the street was thirty-nine.<sup>31</sup> By 1911 there were only three houses still occupied, all of them two-roomed and thatched.<sup>32</sup>

The wide-ranging 1901 inspector's report covers other areas of the town, with much repetition as regards the condition of the poorer areas. Duck Street was, 'home to several houses, similar to those on Holborn Hill, with a large drain running under them'. Murphy's Lane, off The Mall had 'Three houses without toilets, one unfit for human habitation, a fourth used as a store, and a fifth used a stable'.<sup>33</sup> The keeping of small animals in or around the cabins was remarked on. Lower Abbey Street, adjacent to the old Dominican abbey, was described as, 'a row of ten one-storey thatched houses, very old, no yards, open space at the rear, no toilets, no proper ash-pit, no drainage, pigs kept within six or eight feet of the houses'.<sup>34</sup>

Smith's Row, another narrow lane running off John Street, had a slaughter house at one end, where the 'yard was not levelled or properly drained, and manure pit is not properly constructed'. 'Several pigs kept here, offal boiled in yard, very objectionable to the residents. Premises not suitable for a slaughterhouse, road surface in bad repair, with accumulation of filth'.<sup>35</sup> There were eleven houses in this row, with no toilets whatsoever. In the census of 1901, there were 43 persons returned for this lane, living in 11 dwellings, all categorised as 2<sup>nd</sup> class, and with only two rooms in each dwelling. The houses were slated, with two windows to the front lane, and remarkably, one dwelling contained 11 people, five of them lodgers.<sup>36</sup> Conditions were little changed a decade later and the medical officer reported numerous pestilence outbreaks, right through the 1920s and 1930s.

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<sup>30</sup> Gallagher, *The streets of Sligo*, p. 395: extract from *Ratepayers' Book of the Borough of Sligo, listing ratable valuation, 1842-1848*. Copy in author's possession. Original (SLHC/LGOV/768).

<sup>31</sup> 1901 Census, Sligo North Ward ED., Kings Lane, Form B1. <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>. Also, 1901 Census, (NAI, MFGS 1-32).

<sup>32</sup> 1911 Census, Borough of Sligo, North Ward ED, Kings Street. Form B1.

<sup>33</sup> 'Sligo's primitive housing', p. 37.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> 1901 Census, Sligo West Ward ED., Smiths' Row, Form B1. <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>. Also M/F of originals, 1901 Census, (NAI, MFGS 1-32).



Fig. 5.7. The Riverside, Sligo, c. 1900, showing poorer houses, occupied until 1930s. Source: *Laurence Collection*, NLI, LCab 03562-13417.

The keeping of *banbhs* or small pigs in back yards was very common in Sligo town as late as the 1930s. Similar to hens, they provided an extra source of income, and could be reared in small spaces. The piglets consumed left-over food scraps, and were often fattened up before being sold on or slaughtered. The keeping of pigs in domestic gardens was to remain a matter of concern to the sanitary officers right up until the 1950s.

Widespread criticism over the failure to deal with the urban housing crisis, continuing agitation on the housing scandal nationally, and the Church Street disaster in Dublin in 1913, led to the Royal Commission on housing, which sat in late 1913, and published its report in 1914.<sup>37</sup> Though mainly concerned with Dublin, the report has an unexpected appendix.<sup>38</sup> This is a detailed survey including a number of photographs showing the slum houses in Sligo town. Sligo corporation made the most comprehensive submission of all the provincial towns to the commission. The 1914 report also contains briefer descriptions of housing from several other provincial towns, allowing some comparisons to be made between several provincial towns and Sligo.

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<sup>37</sup> Christiaan Corlett, *Darkest Dublin: the story of the Church Street disaster and a pictorial account of the slums of Dublin in 1913* (Dublin, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> *Appendix to the report ... into the housing conditions of the working classes ...* HC 1914 [Cd. 7317], appendix xxxvii, p. 382-393. [494-505].

The motivation behind Sligo's detailed submission may have been the political make up of the corporation – largely home-rulers and of the small-merchant or labouring class – who perhaps hoped for a sizable input of state monies under any future housing acts. The local election of 1898 had returned a body that was overwhelmingly nationalist, (only two of the councillors were Unionist), and also some with a strong labour background. Thomas McCarrick in particular was a noted Labour advocate. The other representatives encompassed many of the merchants, publicans and grocers of the town, others of a working class background, as well as two MPs.<sup>39</sup> By 1913, when the detailed report was submitted to the Dublin Housing Committee, nine of the 24 members of the corporation were Labour supporters, and had run on a trade union ticket. One, John Lynch, was a dock-stevedore, and leader of the recent dock strike. The remainder were all members of the United Irish League, with the exception of one Unionist, but locally very popular councillor, the journalist Robert Symlie.<sup>40</sup> By January 1914, the trade union representation on Sligo Corporation had increased to thirteen, which was over half of the body. There were also eight large merchants on the council. The effect of the acrimonious Sligo dock strike of 1913 – led by John Lynch, and supported by the mayor, Alderman O'Donnell – must have been on the minds of the councillors, when they made this detailed report on the condition of the houses of the labourers.

The particulars, statements and photographs in the 1914 housing report are given as examples of the conditions in which the poorer classes in Sligo were housed. As graphic as they are, the reader was advised that they were not to be regarded as a 'comprehensive review of the existing conditions', the extent of the housing problem 'locally being much greater than would appear from the report alone'.<sup>41</sup> Tellingly, by 1914, only thirty houses had been provided by Sligo corporation under the 1890 Housing Act. Drogheda had built 116 by the same date, Clonmel 49, Kilkenny 140, Tralee 88, and Wexford 149.<sup>42</sup>

Sligo town is singled out for the abysmal condition of its houses in the 1914 report. The

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<sup>39</sup> Pdraig Deignan, *Land and people in nineteenth century Sligo, from union to local government* (Sligo, 2015), pp 449-450. The names of those returned were; John Connolly, Thomas McCarrick, Thomas Scanlon, Francis Higgins, Michael Milmoie, Edward Connolly, John O'Kelly, John Mulligan, John Keenan, Denis McLnn, Patrick McGuire, Bernard Collery MP, Micheal Keane, Thomas Haney, and Edward J. Tighe, Patrick McHugh MP, Peter Costello, Thomas Kilfeather, James Nelson, Francis Nelson, and John O'Shea.

<sup>40</sup> Pdraig Deignan, *The protestant community in Sligo, 1914-1949* (Dublin, 2010), p. 53.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388/500.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 382-393, [494-505].

areas of slum housing are very clear: the entire Forthill area to the north of the river, Gallows Hill South, Vernon Street, James's Street, and Mail Coach road in the East Ward, Knappagh Road and Church Hill in the West Ward, and the Quay Lanes near the Town Hall. In addition there were the half-dozen small lanes at the centre of town, which contained some exceptionally poor housing. The poorer classes in the borough were housed under 'very bad conditions'. While the centre of the town was free from slum-dwellings of the 'bad-type', these were found in great number on the fringes of the town, and were notorious for high rates of infection, disease and infant death. The photographs of these dwellings illustrate strikingly how pressing the housing problem in Sligo was by the start of the First World War. None of the dwellings of the poorer classes were considered fit for human habitation. 'They would appear to have been built purposely to exclude the elements essential to health, light and air. They are neither healthy, cheap, nor comfortable; the earthen floor, the sodden thatch, the fixed windows, the lack of proper sanitary accommodation, all conspire against the health and well-being of the unfortunate occupant'.<sup>43</sup>

This negative view was echoed by the borough medical officer, Dr Patrick Quinn who noted in 1915 that the 'housing accommodation in the town is in every way bad'. There were several streets where there was 'scarcely one house fit for human habitation, - roofs, walls and floors are at fault, lighting and ventilation are deficient, and in most cases there is absolutely not sanitary accommodation'. Overcrowding was rampant; the doctor had made enquiries, and 'found that there is not one unoccupied dwelling house in Sligo', such was the demand for housing. The majority of houses gave grave concern for the public health, 'and every effort should be made to clear them away at whatever cost'. In 1915, there was an epidemic of measles in Sligo, which caused 27 deaths, mostly in the poorer type of house. There was also a significant number of deaths from TB in the urban district of Sligo, with 38 people dying from the disease. This gave Sligo an annual death rate of 3.4 per thousand, compared to 1.8 per thousand in the rest of the country.<sup>44</sup> In 1913, the superintendent registrar's district of Sligo, (same boundaries as the Poor Law Union), reported the number of deaths as 808 persons, 107 of whom were under five years of age.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388/500.

<sup>44</sup> *Sligo's primitive housing?*, p. 37.

<sup>45</sup> *Fiftieth detailed annual report of the Registrar-General (Ireland) containing a general abstract of the numbers of marriages, births and deaths registered in Ireland during the year 1913*, HC. 1913, [C. 7525], xv, p. 1.

The typical slum-dwelling in the 1914 report contained two rooms: a kitchen and a bedroom, although there were many houses with just one room, and these were ‘altogether unfit for habitation’. The ‘bedroom’ in many cases was simply part of the kitchen partitioned off to ‘preserve the decencies of life’. There was a window in each room generally, but so ‘fixed that they could neither be opened or closed’. The kitchen measured about 12 feet by 9 feet, and the height where the house had a ceiling was seven feet. In a great number of cases the houses were un-ceilinged, the rough timber supporting the thatch being exposed. In many houses the ceiling consisted of simply a number of flour-sacks sewn together and whitewashed. Most of the poorer houses were thatched, with earthen floors. The houses typically were home to a man and wife, with three or more children. The rent was on average 1s 6d per week; the average weekly wage of the breadwinner would be 12 shillings. One tenant, living on Cranmore Road, had two rooms for himself and his wife and five children; in the bedroom ‘There is no space for anything, but a bed and small table’. The roof was in such a wretched condition that bags were used to keep the rain out. ‘The windows do not open’.<sup>46</sup> There was no alternative however for the low-waged labouring class; ‘there are no suitable dwelling houses in Sligo to let at any rent which the occupants of slum-dwellings could afford to pay. To condemn any of the slum dwellings would be to give the occupant the alternative of the workhouse’.<sup>47</sup>

The 1914 housing report from the corporation goes into some detail regarding rents and conditions of individual streets, and supported by various testimonies from tenants residing in the houses. Cranmore Road, a lane on the eastern side of town, an area which had also been condemned in the sanitary inspector’s report of 1901, was singled out for the squalor of its dwellings. Several tenants gave statements to the mayor of Sligo in November 1913, regarding the scandalous state of the houses in the lane:

Thomas Foley says he is a tenant of a house in Cranmore. He is married, [with a] wife and five children. The house he occupied consists of kitchen and bedroom. Some of his children sleep with himself and his wife, the remainder in the kitchen. There are three windows in the house, one of them only can be opened. The public roads run at the front and back of the house. His rent is 2s per week.<sup>48</sup>

These depositions from Sligo offer an insight into the perilous situation of the labouring

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<sup>46</sup> *Appendix to the report* ..... HC 1914 [Cd. 7317], appendix xxxvii, p. 388/500.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387/499.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388/500.



poor. The lack of employment was the over-riding cause of destitution, and the dividing line between destitution and mere poverty was very thin. In 1913 the wages of a skilled worker or artisan ranged from 25s a week upwards. In contrast the weekly earnings of an unskilled labourer in the western towns would seldom exceed 13s.<sup>49</sup> This unskilled labourer-class was at the mercy of a turbulent employment market, which had a profound effect on access to housing of an acceptable standard. In Sligo, with its significant community of dockers, a particular acrimonious dock-strike in 1913 polarised the corporation members - mostly those who were employers- along social and ideological grounds, and highlighted the poorly-paid and temporary nature of the work of the bottom-tier of the labouring-class.<sup>50</sup> The leader of the dockers union, John Lynch, was elected mayor of Sligo in 1913, and led the strike using his position on the corporation to their advantage. It was a major and bitter dispute which ran for over 56 days. The town was swept by riots, tension between employers and employees and internecine battles between different factions of dock-worker's families. Affairs came to a head after the death of one of the striking dockers, following a fight at the quays in late March 1913.<sup>51</sup> Despite attempts by the local MP and the Catholic parish administrator to negotiate a settlement, the strike continued into May. Nevertheless, little obvious poverty was reported in the working-class families in town due to the steady payment of strike-pay. The strike ended on the 6<sup>th</sup> May 1913, with the complete cave-in of the employers and shipping companies to the wage demands, and the ITGWU became the undisputed union at Sligo port for the next half century.<sup>52</sup>

A basic wage for a labourer or docker in 1912 was described as being 'three shillings a day'.<sup>53</sup> Taking into consideration the cost of food, rent and other necessities, a married man with three children might earn up to 4s or 5s a day, depending on the class of work, but with no guarantee of six full days' work. With a weekly wage little more than 13 shillings or 14 shillings, it is easy to see how hard it was to feed and clothe a family, and how little was left for rent. Thus the homes of the poor were inevitably the cheapest available accommodation.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 384.

<sup>50</sup> John Cunningham, *Labour in the west of Ireland; working life and struggle, 1890-1914* (Belfast, 1995), pp 17-25.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 158

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with William O'Halloran, secretary of Galway Workers' and General Labourers' Union, March 1913, in *Connacht Tribune*, 22 Mar. 1913.



Fig. 5.8. Photo of houses at Duck Street, Sligo, 1913, south side. Source: *Appendix to the report ..... HC 1914 [Cd. 7317], appendix xxxvii, p. 388/500.*

The North Ward of Sligo, the Forthill area, had an abysmally high rate of poor housing overcrowding and disease, with all of the houses in Duck Street regarded as ‘3<sup>rd</sup> class’, while 60 per cent of those on North Gallows Hill and 30 per cent on Barrack Street were also returned as ‘3<sup>rd</sup> class’ in the 1911 census. (See figure 5.20). While average overcrowding seems relatively low, this is disguised somewhat by several houses having just one occupant. The B1 form returns from 1911 show at least one house on Gallows Hill with 11 occupants in just four rooms, and Callaghan’s house, (which was photographed in 1914), with 10 occupants in just 2 rooms. Next door to Callaghan’s the family of James Somers had seven people living in just one room. This house was also thatched, with one window only, in the front of the dwelling. In all, 18 houses out of the 43 on Gallows Hill had more than 6 persons living in them.<sup>54</sup> The several dwellings of just two-rooms, on ‘The Hill’ contained 65 inhabitants in 1911.

James Callaghan’s house, pictured in the 1914 report, (Fig. 5.9) shows exactly how bad the conditions on ‘The Hill’ were at the outbreak of the Great War. James, a general labourer, was 57 years old, his wife, Anne, 43, and they had been married for twenty-five years. She had borne fourteen children in that period, of whom only nine were still living.<sup>55</sup> In 1911, four of their children still lived with them in the tiny cabin, which had

<sup>54</sup> See Appendix VIII for details of survey, Form B1, 1911 Census of Ireland.

<sup>55</sup> *1911 Census of Ireland*, House no. 29, Gallows Hill North, Sligo North Ward, accessed online at [www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai003262012/](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai003262012/).

two rooms, each room 8 foot by 10 foot, and un-ceilinged. There were only two windows, one in front, one rear, the floor was earthen, and the roof thatched. In the 1911 census, the dwelling was classified as 3<sup>rd</sup> class, but the reality is much starker, as can be seen from the photo (figure 5.9). The family had been living there for over a decade, appearing in the 1901 census, as well as that of 1911.



**Fig. 5.9. Photo of poorer-class houses at Gallows Hill North, Sligo, 1913, west side, occupied by James Callaghan and family.. Source: *Appendix to the report .....* HC 1914 [Cd. 7317], appendix xxxvii, p. 391/501.**

Another cluster of poor housing was to be found in 1911, in the East Ward of Sligo, particularly in the south-eastern quadrant of town, at the foot of Gallows Hill South, and along the Mail Coach Road. This steep muddy hill was one of the areas noted in the borough rate valuations of the 1840s as having an immense number of poor dwellings. In 1842 there were 95 houses, rising to 108 five years later.<sup>56</sup> The valuation for the entire street was low, never exceeding 35 shillings, an indication of the poor nature of the dwellings. Most of the houses were rated at less than sixpence per annum. Given the number of houses on the hill, an estimated total population would be in the region of three hundred people. A decade later, in the Primary Valuation of 1858, there were 110 houses on South Gallows Hill, most of them small, thatched, one-storey dwellings,

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<sup>56</sup> *Valuation summary of the streets and lanes of the Borough of Sligo, 1842, 1845 and 1848* (SLHC, LGOV 762), copy in author's possession.

winding their way down the steep hill into Pound Street. By 1875, the number of houses on North Gallows Hill had decreased to about sixty-five, mainly located on the lower stretch of the steep hill.<sup>57</sup> The average valuation was low, 15 shillings per annum.<sup>58</sup>

<i>1911 Census Gallows Hill North – persons in dwellings by room</i>	
Rooms in dwelling	Persons
<b>1 room</b>	18
<b>2 rooms</b>	65
<b>3 rooms</b>	36
<b>4 rooms</b>	71
<b>5 rooms</b>	6
<b>6 rooms</b>	3
<b>Total persons</b>	<b>199</b>

Fig. 5.10. The number of persons living in dwellings, categorised by number of rooms, Gallows Hill North, 1911 Census. For example, 18 people lived in 1-roomed dwellings in the street, and 65 people occupied dwellings which had just two rooms. Source: 1911 census, calculated from Form B1 of the returns.

North Gallows Hill was singled out in the corporation's submission to the Royal Commission in 1914, as an area of 'wretched hovels'. The houses had been condemned in 1901 by the medical inspector, as 'not fit for occupation', but by 1913 they were in even worse condition. There were eight dwellings examined by the corporation. Most of the houses had wooden roofs, which were felted and tarred, a poor roofing material, needing annual repair. All were two-roomed, earthen floored, with just small windows front and rear, and the rents did not exceed 1s. 4d. per week. Two of the houses were home to seven occupants each. The Sligo borough medical officer inspected four of these homes, and stated that; 'I visited the houses named, and find them wretched hovels'.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Primary Valuation of Ireland*, County Sligo, Union of Sligo, 1858, p. 153.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>59</sup> *Appendix to the report* ..... H.C. 1914 [Cd. 7317], appendix xxxvii, p. 389/501.



**Fig. 5.11. Photo of poorer-class houses at South Gallows Hill, Sligo, 1913, west side. Source: *Appendix to the report .....* HC 1914 [Cd. 7317], appendix xxxvii, p. 391/501.**

In the 1911 census returns, there were 30 dwellings returned for South Gallows Hill, on the opposite side of Sligo. Some houses at the bottom of the hill were in better condition, returned as ‘second class’. One of these was a ‘boarding house’, run by Widow Henry, and was home to 22 people, in 13 rooms, many of them older single men, engaged in casual labour. Twenty-one of the houses were categorised as ‘third class’, and comprised the bulk of the cottages which straggled up this steep hill. All had slated or wooden roofs, most had only two rooms, with occasionally cottages having three, all held large families, in excess of four people. Two of the two-roomed dwellings held families of eight, and one two-roomed dwelling had ten people, of whom eight were children. One house, home to the Loftus family, had four rooms, occupied by eight adults and three children, which was an alarming rate of over crowding.<sup>60</sup>

The voices of the poor themselves are infrequently heard, but in the 1914 report one resident of James Street reflected on the squalor of the area. In a sworn statement, Martin Kerr, a widower with six people living in his four-roomed cottage, stated that ‘there are twenty-four houses in this street; there are thirteen with only one room’. Mr Kerr calculated that there were 111 people living in forty-two rooms, throughout the twenty-four houses. ‘There are no water-closets to any of the houses; eighteen of the houses are

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<sup>60</sup> 1911 Census, Sligo West ED., Gallows Hill South, Form B1. <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>  
Also M/F of originals, Census 1911 (NAI, MFGS 33).

not provided with windows that can be opened, neither are they properly kept in repair. The doors are very bad'.<sup>61</sup>

Urban slaughterhouses were very unhygienic environments, where animal offal and blood frequently ran into the street gutters, or directly into the river. During warm weather any discarded remains would rot and smell; dung and putrid matter would often be washed into the small laneways, and block any sewers. There were several slaughterhouses in Sligo town in the 1911 census, many of them near the river. They were a constant source of public nuisance, and though frequently inspected, there was little actual improvement in the nature of drainage and cleansing. They were a recurring source of infection.



**Fig. 5.12. Photo of insanitary houses at Cranmore Road, Sligo. 1913. House No. 1 on first left. Source: *Appendix to the report .....* HC 1914 [Cd. 7317], appendix xxxvii, p. 388/500.**

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<sup>61</sup> *Appendix to the report .....* H.C. 1914 [Cd. 7317], appendix xxxvii, p. 392/504.



Fig. 5.13. Photo of houses South Gallows Hill, Sligo, c. 1900. Source: NLI, *Lawrence Collection*, LCAB 3271. (Enlarged extract).

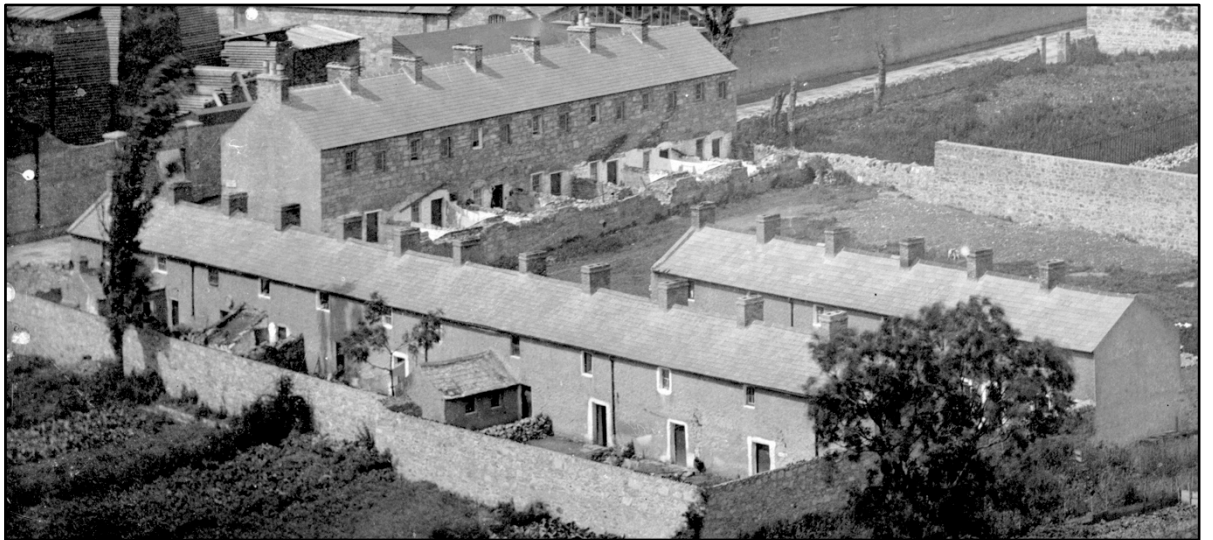


Fig. 5.14. Photo of smaller private-built labourers houses at Middleton's Row, and Adelaide Street, Sligo c. 1900. Source: NLI, *Lawrence Collection*, LCAB 3558. (Enlarged extract).

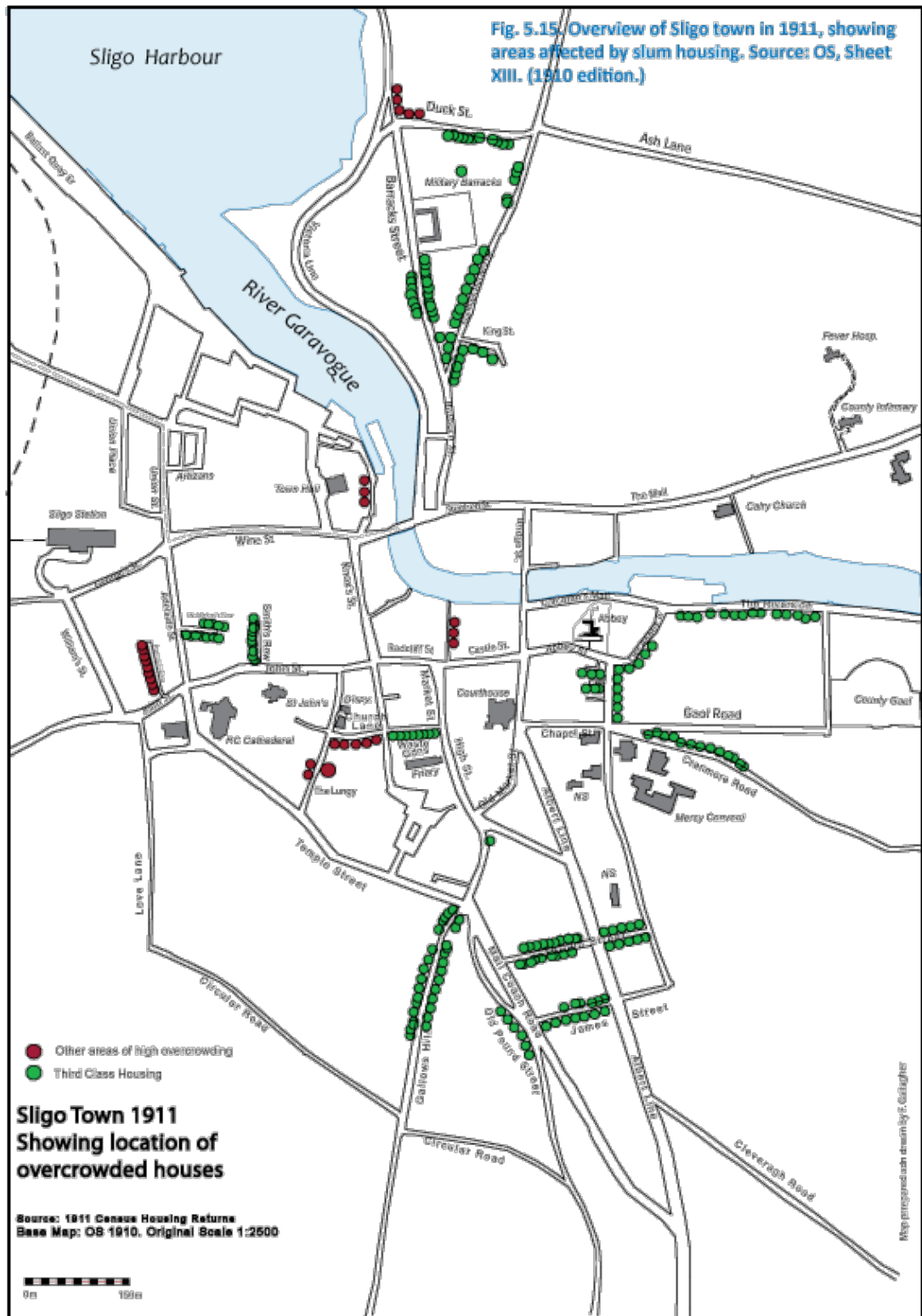


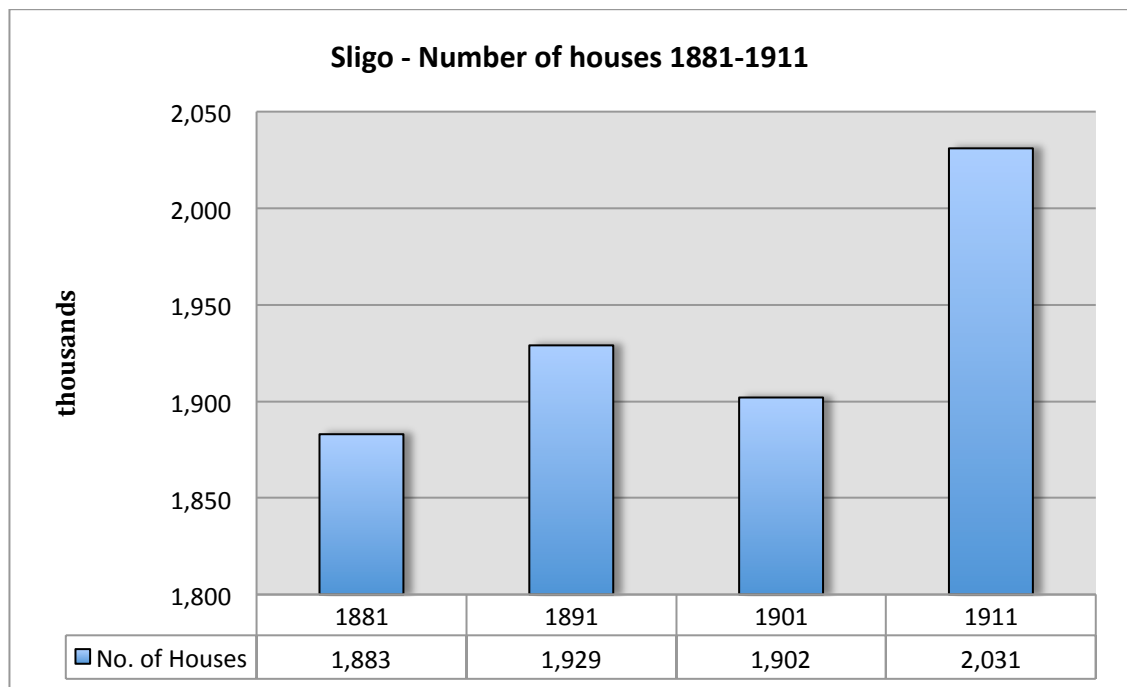
Fig. 5.15. Overview of Sligo town in 1911, showing areas affected by slum housing. Source: OS, Sheet XIII. (1910 edition.)

Fig. 5.15. Overview of Sligo town in 1911, showing areas affected by slum housing. Source: OS, Sheet XIII. (1910 edition.)



### 5.3 Mapping the geography of homes of the poor in Sligo, 1900-1919

The areas occupied by poorer housing in Sligo town had remained the same throughout the nineteenth century, and this situation persisted into the early decades of the twentieth century. The poor still lived on the peripheral hills to the north and south of the mercantile core of Sligo, and along the approach roads from the east and west. In common with most Irish provincial towns, small insanitary lanes permeated the centre of the town, often only yards from affluent shops and houses. The actual physical conditions of these homes has already been examined, and the various reports and photographs give us a much more visceral feel for the squalid nature of the slums than any dry statistics. However, it is useful to map and graph the geography of poor housing as an indicator of poverty in Sligo in the first decade of the new century.



**Fig. 5.16. The number of houses in Sligo borough, 1881-1911. Source: Censuses of Ireland 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911.**

What was the percentage of Sligo’s population which lived in poor housing? We can define poor housing by the contemporary standards, and use the number of rooms as an indicator. There was a sharp decline in the number of third and fourth-class houses between 1841 and 1891, and an increase in the number of second-class houses. However, this should not be seen as indicating an improvement in housing quality. Very often the inclusion of an extra window on the front of a house, or one extra room could propel a

dwelling a class upwards with no real improvement in quality.<sup>62</sup> While the number of houses in Sligo increased marginally between 1881 and 1911, the population remained almost static, at 10,828, and 11,000 respectively. Approximately 43 per cent of Sligo's population in 1881 lived in third and fourth-class accommodation, and this proportion declined slightly by 1891 to around 37 per cent.<sup>63</sup>

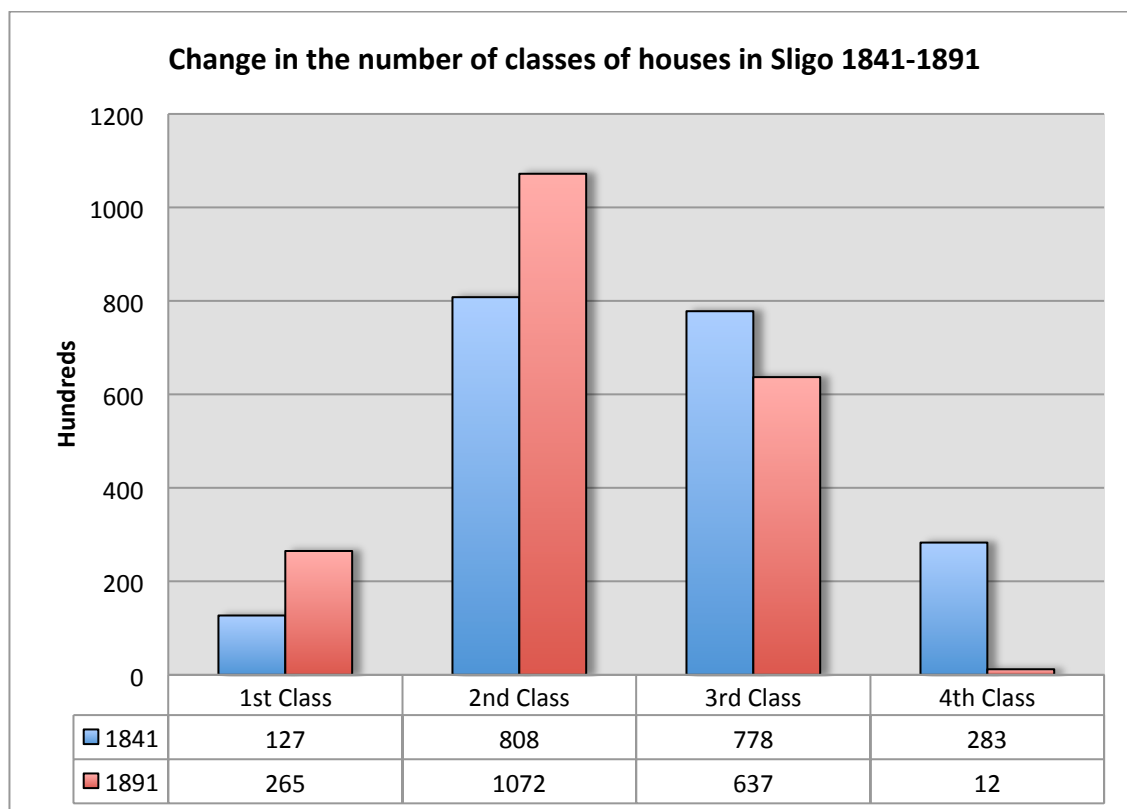


Fig. 5.17. Decline in the number of 4<sup>th</sup> class and 3<sup>rd</sup> class houses in Sligo town, 1841-1891. Source: Census of Ireland, 1841 and 1891.

However, it is difficult to accurately judge the actual condition of housing from the 'accommodation classes' in these censuses, as this measurement was obtained from a classification based on the quality of the dwelling, and the number of families resident in that house. Thus a second-class house with two or three families living in it was

<sup>62</sup> See Form B1 of the 1911 census. A sample is provided in appendix VIII. A house with between two and four rooms was given '2 points' in col. 6 of the returns. But each window in the front of the house was also worth '1 point', so two windows, irrelevant of the number of rooms, could change the class of the house.

<sup>63</sup> See *Census of Ireland, 1881* and *Census of Ireland 1891*, vol. iv, Province of Connaught, table VIII, classes of housing, etc., p. 566. Actual figures for Sligo town are hard to arrive at for 1881 and 1891, due to the aggregation of all totals for the 'civic districts' (i.e. urban areas over 2,000 persons) for Co. Sligo. The eastern side of Ballina, which was part of Co. Sligo until 1898, was returned with the 'civic districts' for Co. Sligo in both censuses. There were 311 houses in this part of Ballina, and 824 houses in the Co. Mayo section of the town; this extra number skews the percentage slightly. There were no other urban areas in Co. Sligo large enough to be returned as 'civic districts'.

classified as third-class accommodation. This measurement may have been significant in the larger cities where tenement houses were common, but Sligo had only one or two buildings of this type. The vast bulk of Sligo's third-class accommodation was single storey houses occupied by one family, with perhaps three generations under one roof. So, second-class housing was frequently at the very bottom of its class. By the time of the 1911 census, Sligo had a very large stock of persistently poor quality housing, with noticeable levels of overcrowding in slum areas. Over 1,500 families lived in second and third class accommodation, a figure not significantly changed since 1881, when about 1,700 families lived in such accommodation.<sup>64</sup> In the 1911 census 38 families, or 121 persons were living in one-roomed dwellings in Sligo.<sup>65</sup>

<b>Class of Accommodation</b>					
<i>Year</i>	<i>1st Class</i>	<i>2nd and 3rd class</i>	<i>4th class</i>	<i>Total Families</i>	<i>Total Houses</i>
<b>1901</b>	241	1,546	26	1,813	1,902
<b>1911</b>	254	1,601	9	1,864	2,031

**Fig. 5.18. Comparison of classes of housing accommodation Sligo town, 1901 and 1911. Note the insignificant change in the figures during the decade, indicating little housing activity, and also the similarity between total number of families, and total number of houses, indicating few tenement buildings. Source: *Censuses of Ireland 1901 and 1911, Co. Sligo, Table VIII.***

In order to establish the geography of slum housing in the Borough of Sligo, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, it is necessary to map the number of third class houses by street. Interestingly there was only one fourth-class houses returned for the urban area; by 1911 there were about 5,000 dwellings in Ireland returned as fourth class, the vast majority in the countryside.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, information is gleaned from the 1911 census, using Form B1, which details the quality of a house, the number of rooms, the number of occupants, and the class under which is it returned. The aim of mapping the extent of low-quality housing is to determine the location of these areas, and to place them within the framework of Sligo town as a whole, and in relation to wealthier areas. The base map used is the 1910 six-inch OS map of Sligo.<sup>67</sup> The streets chosen for the purposes of the survey are those that have been clearly identified over a period of time as

<sup>64</sup> Census of Ireland 1881, p. 566. Approximation is due to the inclusion of part of Ballina in the aggregate total for civic districts in Co. Sligo. See footnote no. 58 above. The figure for 1871 census is approximately 2,700 families in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> class accommodation for Sligo borough.

<sup>65</sup> *Census of Saorstát Éireann 1926*, vol. iv, *Housing*, Table 13b, p. 54, 'Number of private families... in occupation of tenements of one room... showing also comparative figures for 1911.

<sup>66</sup> William J. Thompson, 'The census of Ireland, 1911' in the *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. xiii, part xciii (1912/1913), pp 46-59, at p. 52.

<sup>67</sup> *Ordnance Survey of Ireland, Six-inch, Sligo town, Sheet XIII (1910).*

areas of poor-quality housing and with low-income families. High Street, one of the main trading streets of the town, with large three-storey shops and homes, is added to this survey as a control element, to act as a comparison.

Mapping the lower-class houses accurately has proven to be somewhat problematic. It is difficult to match every single enumerated house with the OS 1910 map, so there are some inaccuracies. However, enough information can be extracted from the census returns to identify the streets and portions of streets with poor quality housing. Sligo town is divided into three electoral wards, North, East and West, and by using the census returns for each of these wards it is possible to identify the percentage of second and third class housing in each. One result of the preliminary investigations is that the bulk of 'third-class housing', was in fact at the very bottom of the parameters used to categorize it. The same anomaly is to be seen in the classification of 'second-class' houses in some obviously poor and squalid lanes; the insertion of tiny attic rooms into these dwellings, along with a larger number of windows, leads to the upgrading in classification, which disguises the reality. Therefore it may be more accurate to categorise the houses of the poor by column 14 on Form B1, - the number of rooms occupied by each family. No attempt has been made to examine housing under the 'class of accommodation', a measure that was more applicable to tenements.<sup>68</sup>

Two different methods of illustrating the degree of poverty in Sligo's slums were used during this survey. The first was the measure of overcrowding, and the second was ascertaining the percentage of third-class housing in each of the selected streets.

The most common measure of overcrowding is expressed as persons-per-room in an individual dwelling unit, (PPR). A modern rate of PPR of  $\leq 0.50$  is considered the standard at which such wide-ranging health indicators as respiratory conditions, mental health, and infant mortality do not pose a threat.<sup>69</sup> Applying this rate to the conditions of a century ago, might not be ideal in terms of equivalent standard of houses, but it is nevertheless a long-standing and widely-used measurement of overcrowding, and was used as a statistical unit in the 1926 Census of the Irish Free State.

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<sup>68</sup> Thomas P. Linehan, 'History of the development of Irish population censuses', in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, xxvi, part iv (1991), p. 103.

<sup>69</sup> The United Kingdom office of the deputy Prime Minister, 'The impact of overcrowding on health and education: a review of evidence and literature, 2004', in *Measuring overcrowding in housing*, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (Bethesda, 2007).

In the 1911 census returns, houses were graded according to ‘class’, (first-class, second-class etc.,) which was calculated from a variety of elements, including the roof and walls, the number of windows, and the number of rooms. Thus a broad ‘class’ was arrived at. However, this system did not take into account the number of persons per room, per dwelling, and so a house graded as ‘second- class’ could in fact be so overcrowded and insanitary as to be at the very bottom of its classification. In order to more correctly gauge the conditions of Sligo’s poorer areas in 1911, a method is used whereby houses are re-classified according to the definitions of overcrowding as in the 1926 census-data analysis. The definition of ‘overcrowding’ in this census is given as ‘a dwelling with more than two persons per room (a density ratio of 1.00), is considered overcrowded’.<sup>70</sup> So from 1926 onwards, ‘class of housing’ was dropped in favour of overcrowding data, using the census data and relating size of family to the number of rooms in a dwelling.<sup>71</sup> This particular statistic is stated as ‘housing density’, or more correctly ‘ratio of occupation’, and in the 1926 census, the percentage of dwellings with more than 2 persons per room was 27 per cent. In the same census, 75.2 per cent of all one-roomed houses were considered as ‘overcrowded’, indicating that a large number of one-roomed dwellings had more than one occupant. In the 1926 census, attention was focused on dwellings of four rooms or fewer, as there was considered to be little real ‘overcrowding’ in larger dwellings.<sup>72</sup> Tables 12a and 12b in this census show the number of dwellings having one, two, three, and four rooms, for both 1911 and 1926, but no direct comparison for overcrowding is possible.

Therefore, using the data for each of the streets having poor housing in Sligo in the 1911 census, I have divided the number of persons by the number of rooms for each individual dwelling.<sup>73</sup> Then an average for each street was calculated from all the houses in that street, and plotted in a graph. A house with four rooms, but two occupants will have a PPR rate of 0.50 which is considered an acceptable density, but a house with three rooms and 10 occupants will have a PPR ratio of 3.33, an obviously overcrowded rate. The graph, figure 5.19, thus illustrates the average ratio of overcrowding in the poorer streets, but does not indicate the actual conditions of the

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<sup>70</sup> *Saorstát Éireann 1926 Census of Population*, vol. iv, *Housing*, p. vii.

<sup>71</sup> Linehan, ‘History of the development of Irish population censuses’, p. 104.

<sup>72</sup> *Saorstát Éireann 1926 Census of Population*, vol. iv, *Housing*, p. vii.

<sup>73</sup> Approximately 1,000 individual B1 forms were entered into a data-base using 14 fields, and a sample of this survey can be examined in Appendix VIII.

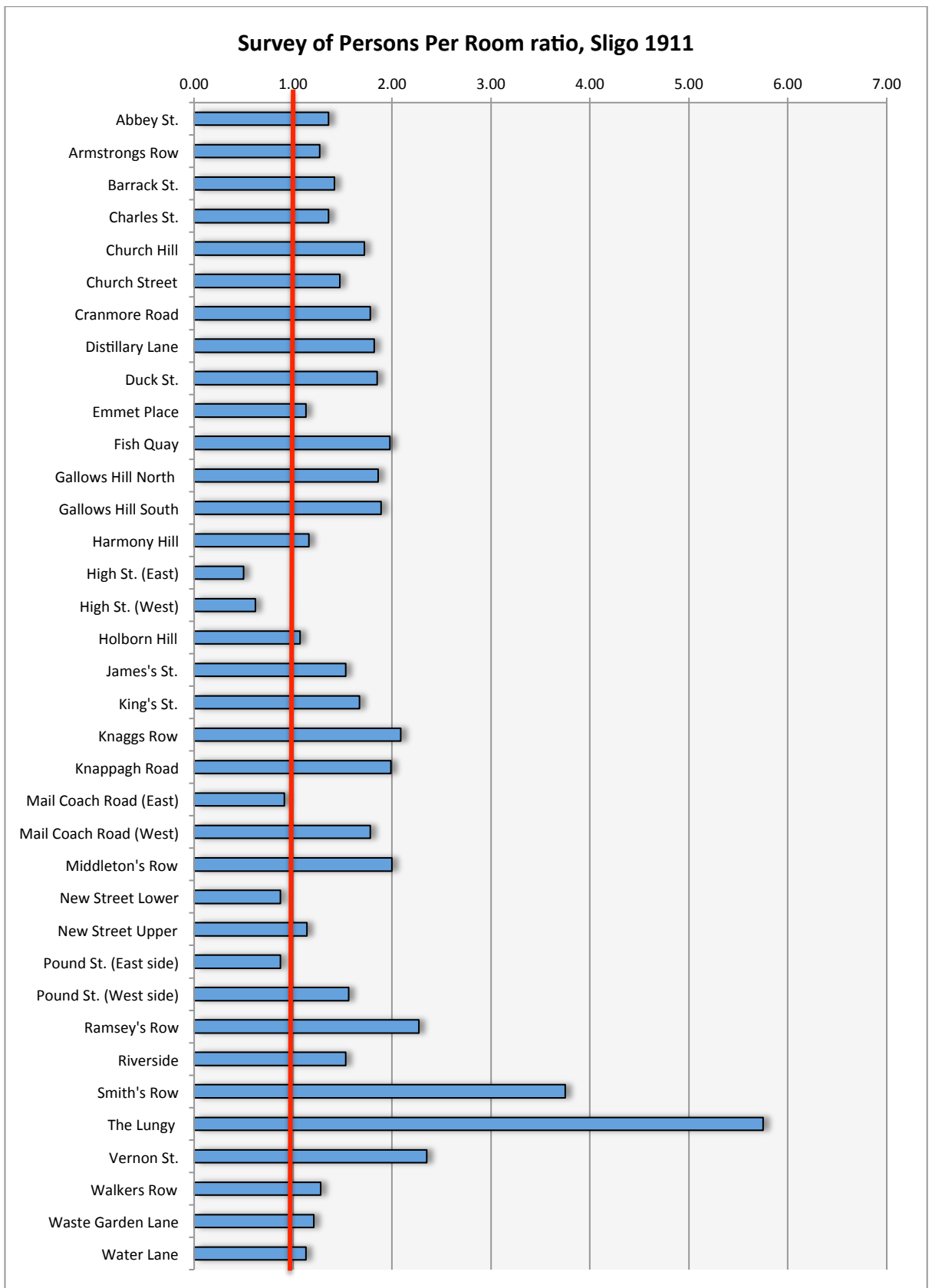
houses. However, this data can be compared with the percentage of third-class houses in each street (see Figure 5.20).

For example, Barrack Street has an average PPR ratio of 1.42, but 30.5 per cent of all its houses were categorised as third-class, and were probably at the lowest end of that category. Using this twin-pronged approach, namely, quality and overcrowding, it is possible to build up a clear picture of the extent and size of the slum housing in Sligo using the B1 form.<sup>74</sup> There is little to indicate that the conditions of 1911 had improved in any significant way by the time of the 1926 census. Anecdotal evidence from newspapers suggest that some of the worst cabins illustrated in the 1914 report had simply been abandoned, but most still remained, in various states of repair, and were still occupied.

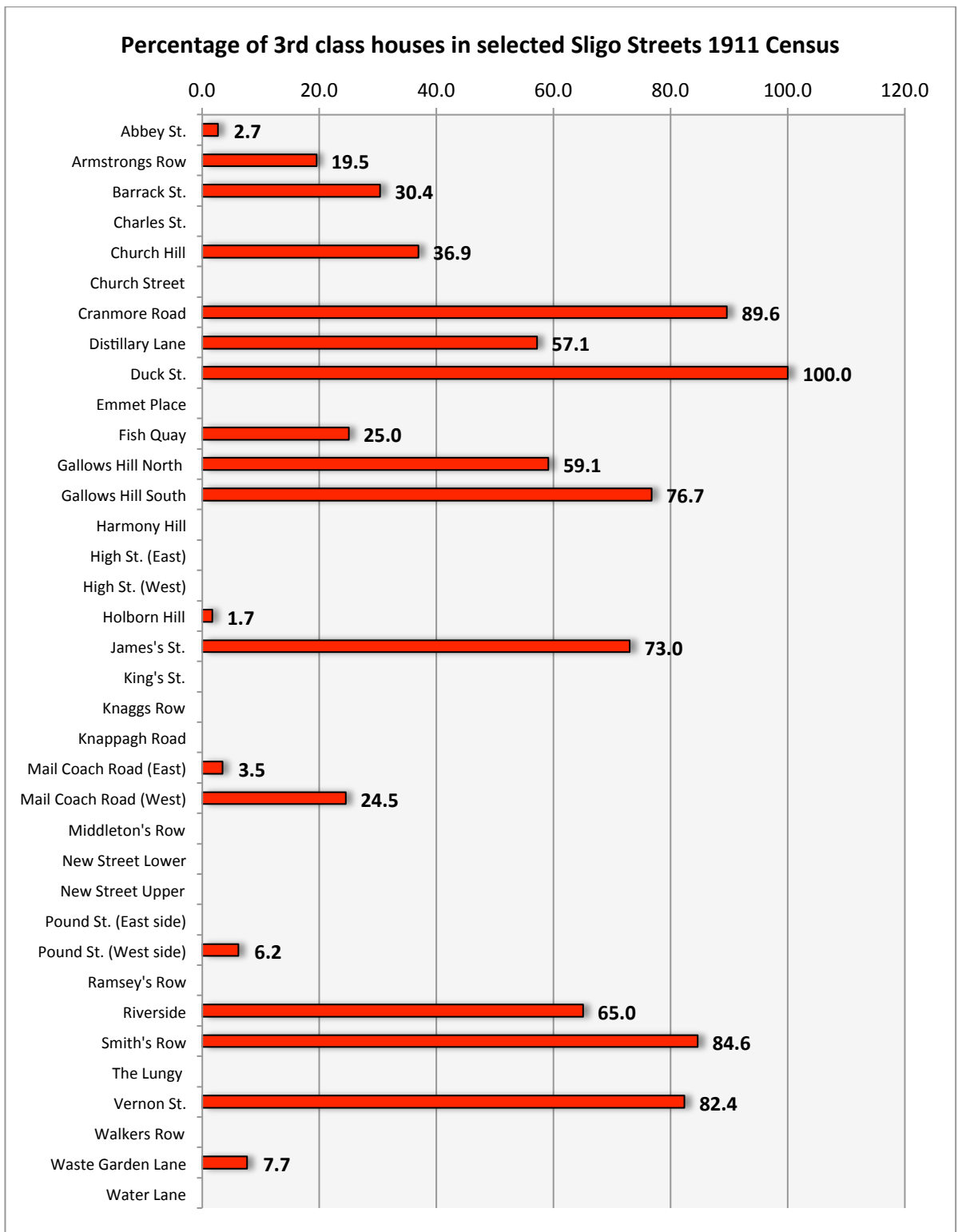
Figure 5.20 shows the percentage of third-class housing in the streets selected for study, which are home to the poorer houses. Streets and lanes, which by previous reports on housing conditions, would be expected to have high levels of third-class housing – such as Middleton’s Row – had all their houses graded as second-class. Other areas, such as Vernon Street, where over 80 per cent of the housing was third-class, lived up to the expectation. King Street, the notoriously insanitary lane on Forthill, returned all its houses as second-class in 1911. But these figures often mask the actual conditions of an individual dwelling, as is clear from the sanitary reports of 1914, where the terrible conditions of the housing stock can be seen.

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<sup>74</sup> By comparison the CSO returns for the 1971 census indicate that the PPR index in Sligo town was in the region of 0.87. By 2011 it was 0.49, a decrease of almost 56 per cent in 40 years.



**Fig. 5.19. The ratio of PPR (Persons Per Room) in the study streets in Sligo town, as returned in the 1911 Census. The inclusion of High Street- the main trading area - is to offer a comparison. Source: Calculated by F. Gallagher using a database of the returns of Form B1 of the 1911 Census, Sligo town. See appendix VIIIa for details.**



**Fig. 5.20. Percentage of third-class houses in the streets of Sligo considered to have poor quality housing. The inclusion of High Street- the main trading area – is to offer a comparison. Source: Calculated by F. Gallagher using a database of the returns of Form B1 of the 1911 Census, Sligo town. See appendix VIIIa for details.**



#### 5.4 The experience of the people – Overcrowding, health and work

Between 1880 and 1930 there were many changes in the political landscape and physical fabric of Sligo town. The physical infrastructure of the town improved significantly during this period, as open sewers, drains and polluted wells were removed and replaced with more modern systems. A native Irish government and a local corporation with a strong working-class element were elected by 1922. Nevertheless, by 1930 it is arguable that the socio-economic profile of the poorer classes remained unchanged, as did their homes and living conditions.

The desperate need among the working class for access to housing is demonstrated by the increase in the number of people living in one-roomed houses in Sligo town between 1911, and 1926. There were just 38 such dwellings in the Borough in 1911, but this had increased to 242 a decade and a half later. But the number of persons inhabiting such dwellings in 1926 was 466, with a high rate of overcrowding in dwellings with between two and five people. This section of the population also contained the smallest number of men with secure jobs. Men who did not have a steady income could not always put food on the table, so malnourishment was not uncommon in slum areas.<sup>75</sup>

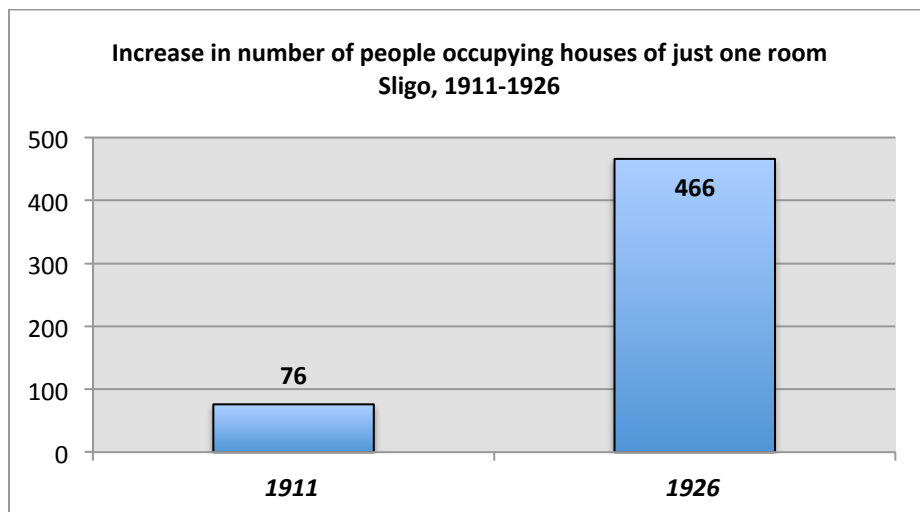


Fig. 5.21. Increase in the number of persons occupying dwellings of one room in Sligo Borough, 1911-1926. Sources: Census of Ireland 1911 and Census of Saorstát Éireann 1926.

<sup>75</sup> Mary E. Daly, 'Social structures of the Dublin working class, 1871-1911' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 23 (Nov. 1982), p. 131.

			<i>Sligo: Number of one-roomed dwellings containing x number of people 1911-1926</i>											
<b>Year</b>	<i>Total number of Families</i>	<i>Total number of persons</i>	<i>1 Pers</i>	<i>2 Pers</i>	<i>3 Pers</i>	<i>4 Pers</i>	<i>5 Pers</i>	<i>6 Pers</i>	<i>7 Pers</i>	<i>8 Pers</i>	<i>9 Pers</i>	<i>10 Pers</i>	<i>11 Pers</i>	<i>12 or More Pers</i>
<b>1911</b>	<b>38</b>	76	15	4	6	2	1	6	1	3	0	0	0	0
<b>1926</b>	<b>242</b>	466	31	54	43	37	28	17	6	2	2	2	1	1

**Fig. 5.22. Number of families and persons occupying one-roomed dwellings in the Borough of Sligo in 1911 and 1926. It indicates that in 1926, there were 28 one-roomed houses with 5 people living in them, evidence of extreme over-crowding. Source: Extracted from the *Annual report of the Sligo County Medical Officer for Health, 1936*. p. 40.**

The introductory note of volume four (housing), of the 1926 census, using an international standard, considers that families with more than two persons per room were ‘overcrowded’.<sup>76</sup> In the first Free State census for 1926, there were 793,000 persons in families living in dwellings of three rooms.<sup>77</sup> Over a quarter of the population of the state lived in three-roomed dwellings, and two-thirds lived in two, three, or four-roomed houses. That made a total of 1.856 million people, or 62.5 per cent out the total population of 2.97 million inhabiting dwellings of four rooms or less. Of persons in ‘private families’, (as opposed to those in institutions, convents, and hospitals), the total was 71.5 per cent. How did this compare with other neighbouring countries? In Wales, only 39.2 per cent of the population lived in dwellings of four rooms or less; in England it was 50 per cent, and in Scotland, which had its own housing crisis in the cities along the Clyde, it was 81.5 per cent.<sup>78</sup>

<i>Percentage overcrowded</i>	<i>No. of rooms</i>
73.2	1
59.3	2
36.9	3
17.2	4
5.3	5

**Fig. 5.23. Percentage of dwellings in the Irish Free State, which were overcrowded in 1926, categorised by number of rooms. For example, 73.2 % of all one-roomed dwellings were considered overcrowded, as were 36.9% of all three-roomed dwellings. Source, *Census of Ireland, 1926*, vol. iv, *Housing*.**

<sup>76</sup> *Saorstát Éireann, Census of Population, 1926*, vol. iv, *Housing*, p. vii.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Five per cent of the population of the Free State lived in dwellings of one room in 1926; this compared with only 1.5 per cent in Northern Ireland, 1.8 per cent in England, 0.5 per cent in Wales, and 8.4 per cent in Scotland.<sup>79</sup> The percentages of persons living in statistically ‘overcrowded’ housing in the Irish Free State in 1926, are given in figure 5.23, and illustrates the scale of the housing crisis.

When considering the question of overcrowding, it is preferable to concentrate attention on the dwellings which had between one and four rooms, as there was very little statistical overcrowding in the larger dwellings.<sup>80</sup> The tolerance of overcrowding is affected by custom and social usage.<sup>81</sup> The sharing of beds with multiple siblings, which is considered undesirable in the present day, was generally acceptable among both poor and middle-class families up until the 1950s. The number of beds per family is likely to have been low by modern standards, with a resulting lack of privacy for the married couple and children of young-adult age. Thus the sexual aspect of overcrowding was a matter of concern for the Carrigan Committee in 1930, when the Commissioner of the Garda Síochána, Eoin O’Duffy, suggested that that there was strong opportunistic link between poor housing conditions and the sexual vulnerability of young girls. The ‘...wretched housing conditions such as where large families sleep in one or two beds in a common room, clothes barely sufficient to cover their nakedness, and no consideration possible as regards dressing, undressing, sleeping and complying with the demands of nature’.<sup>82</sup>

By 1926 overcrowding and poor quality housing had reached a critical point. The census of that year shows that Sligo had almost 13 per cent of its population living in dwellings of just two rooms, the second lowest of all the provincial towns (see figure 5.24). But what really demonstrates the urgency of the housing crisis was the figure for the one-roomed dwellings: Sligo had over 9 per cent of its population – in excess of 770 people inhabiting sub-standard dwellings of just one room, the highest percentage in all the provincial towns.<sup>83</sup> This was in comparison with Limerick, (population, 35,000) a city notorious for tenement slums, which had just 13 per cent of its population

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., *Housing*, p. 64.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., *Housing*, p. 64.

<sup>81</sup> Edith Gaudie, *Cruel Habitations* (London, 1974), p. 91.

<sup>82</sup> Moira J. Maguire, ‘The Carrigan Committee and child sexual abuse in twentieth-century Ireland’ in, *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, vol. 11, no. 2 (Summer 2007), pp 79-100.

<sup>83</sup> It should be noted that some provincial towns not included in this study, such as Athlone and Mullingar, also had a high number of people occupying one-roomed dwellings in 1926. See table 16, pp 93-132, *Census of Saorstát Éireann, 1926*, vol. iv. *Housing*. Mullingar had 353 persons living in one-roomed houses in 1926, and Ennis had 238.

occupying one-roomed dwellings.<sup>84</sup> Overall, Sligo had 22 per cent of its population in private families living in dwellings of one and two rooms in 1926 a total of 1,874 persons, a figure not exceptional in comparison with the other study towns.<sup>85</sup>

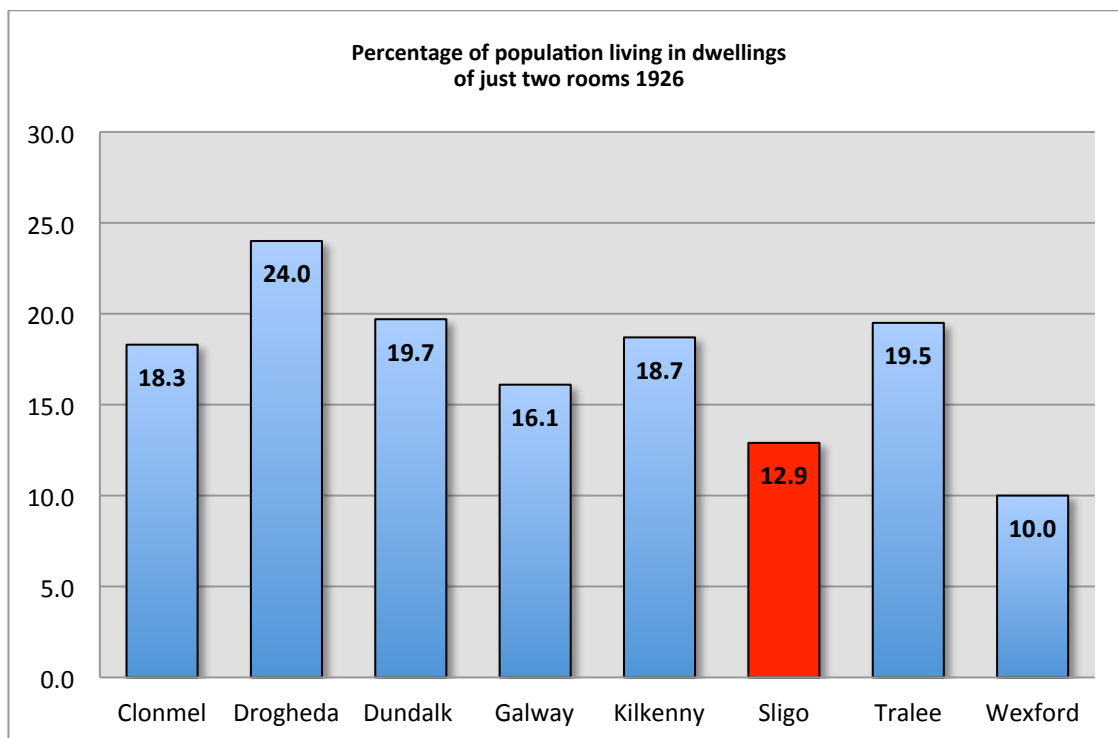


Fig. 5.24. Percentage of persons in private families living in dwellings of just two rooms, 1926, in the provincial towns under study. Source, *Census of Saorstát Éireann 1926*, vol. iv, *Housing*, pp.93-132.

	Clonmel	Drogheda	Dundalk	Galway	Kilkenny	Sligo	Tralee	Wexford
Persons in 1 & 2 rooms 1926	1,741	3,362	2,600	2,680	1,744	1,874	2,337	1,448
Percentage 1926	23.7	28.7	21.0	23.1	20.7	22.0	25.2	13.5

Fig. 5.25. Number and percentage of people living in one and two-roomed dwellings, 1926, comparing Sligo with the other study towns. Source. *Census of Saorstát Éireann, 1926*, vol. iv, *Housing*.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp 93-132.

<sup>85</sup> *Census of Irish Free State, 1926, Housing*, vol. iv. Calculated from table 208, Sligo town, p. 126. Percentage is based on population in private families, and not the total population, which includes those in institutions, boarding houses, etc.

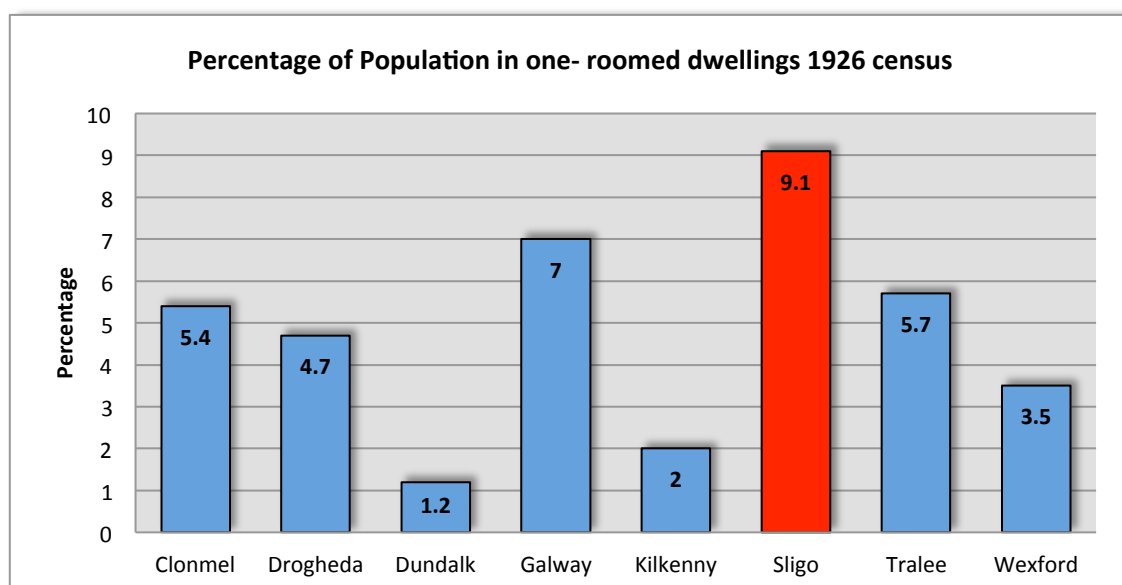


Fig. 5.26. Graphed percentage of population living in one-roomed dwellings, 1926, comparing Sligo with the other study towns. Source. *Census of Saorstát Éireann, 1926, vol. IV, Housing.*

The other indicator of poor housing, infant mortality, continued to be a concern in the Sligo slums right up to 1930. Statistics returned for the registrar general in 1913 show that over 13 per cent of all deaths in the borough in that year were of children under five years of age. Seventy-seven infants died before their first birthday, an infant mortality rate of 95 per thousand.

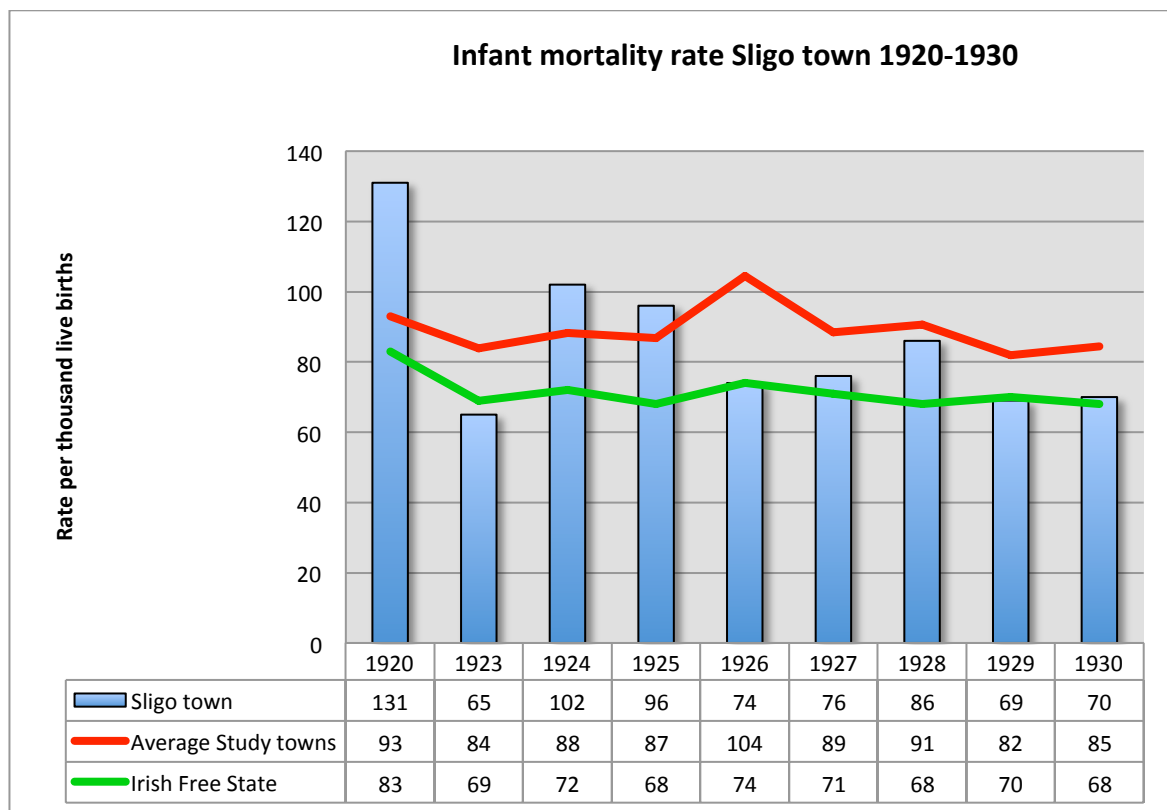
<i>Year: 1913</i>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Total births	402	406	808
Total Deaths	356	389	745
Deaths ≤ 1 Year	53	24	77
Deaths ≤ 5 years	70	37	107

Fig. 5.27. Death rates in Sligo superintendent registrar’s district 1913. Almost 13.2 per cent of all deaths involved children under 5 years of age. Source: HC. 1913, [Cmd 7525], vol. xv, (1).

The Sligo infant mortality rate spiked a number of times between 1920 to 1930, in line with outbreaks of fever. There were 131 deaths per thousand births in 1920, far above the average for the Free State area, and well above that for the rural areas of the county.<sup>86</sup> In 1922, the average mortality rate amongst children under one year old in the new Irish Free State was 68.89 per thousand. However, in the ‘Twelve town districts’ (the

<sup>86</sup> See various *Annual reports of the Registrar General, 1920-1930.*

provincial study towns, plus the county boroughs) of the Free State, it was 100.33 per thousand, with males having a higher mortality rate than females.<sup>87</sup> High infant mortality rates were clearly an urban problem, as identified in many of the health studies of the time.<sup>88</sup>



**Fig. 5.28.** Rate of infant mortality in Sligo town 1920-1930, against the average rate for the Irish Free State and the average of the other study towns. Source: Calculated from the reports of the Registrar General, 1920-1930.

### **Social segregation of the poor and the social background of labourers**

Spatial segregation of the classes happened to a greater extent in the bigger cities than in the provincial towns, where the very poor and middle class merchants frequently lived adjacent to each other. In Sligo the latter was true, with wealthy and affluent streets such as High Street being but a stone's throw from the huddled cottages on Gallows Hill. Nevertheless, there were some boundaries in Sligo between the continuous areas

<sup>87</sup> *Annual report of the Registrar General of Saorstát Éireann, 1922*, xx-xxii. The town districts were defined as ; Drogheda, Sligo, Clonmel, Tralee, Dundalk, Galway, Kilkenny, Wexford, Cork, Dublin, and Limerick.

<sup>88</sup> Ruth Barrington, *Health, medicine and politics in Ireland 1900-1970* (Dublin, 1987), p. 131. See also, Liam Delaney, Mark McGovern, James P. Smith, 'From Angela's ashes to the Celtic tiger: Early life conditions and adult health in Ireland', in *Journal of Health Economics* vol. 30(1) (January 2011), p. 4.

of poor housing, and the better-off merchant streets and affluent areas. Forthill (Barracks Street, and Gallows Hill North), in particular, due to its elevated site was almost self-contained. Inter-marriage between families within the streets was common, and the area was heavily influenced by the long-term presence of a military barracks on Forthill, which was not closed until 1922. The building of a new primary school on 'The Hill' in the 1860s fostered a certain sense of isolation, and the school had 130 pupils by 1891.<sup>89</sup>

Religious background in the area had polarised by 1911; the census shows that 92 per cent of the inhabitants on Forthill were Catholic, with 7 per cent Church of Ireland. There were 163 houses in the area, with a total population of 773. However, despite this sense of isolation, the residents of the Forthill area had much in common with their fellow townsfolk. There was little segregation in public life, and a common religious background ensured that most met for mass in either the Cathedral or the smaller Dominican church, both located in the core of the town. Virtually all the shops, markets and services were also in the town centre, ensuring a daily mix of all classes. Anecdotal evidence from the papers of the 1930s and 1940s indicates that many social and religious organisations visited the very poor in Sligo, notably the Legion of Mary, particularly focusing on families that had a deceased father or a father working in England.<sup>90</sup> These were often the very poorest of the poor, and needed the greatest help, not just financially, but in persuading mothers to send children to school, and to avail of the public dispensary and school milk services.

An analysis of the 1911 census household return form for Sligo borough, which lists the occupation of each head of household, is revealing in the demographic picture it paints. There were 1,200 men (single and married), returned as general labourers of one sort or another. Almost 400 male labourers were returned who were heads of households and whose employment was classed as 'general labourer, labourer, docker or carter', according to the returns.<sup>91</sup> This meant that these were the main earners for their family. The average age of these men was 45.5 years, at a time when average life expectancy was about 57 years (although this was a somewhat skewed figure, due to high infant

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<sup>89</sup> *Sligo Independent*, 17 July 1875; also Gallagher, *Streets of Sligo*, p. 332.

<sup>90</sup> Social notes in *Sligo Champion* of the 1932-1940 period; also informal conversation with Phyllis McGee, member of Sligo Legion of Mary from 1940 to 2016.

<sup>91</sup> Census of Ireland 1911, Online data from NAI, at <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>. A search was conducted using the data, and the results copied to an Excel file and further analysed there. See appendix VIII for sample, and methodology.

mortality rates). Married men comprised the greatest portion of these household heads, with 347 having dependent wives, and 12 being widowed. Between them all, the married labourers supported 400 children, and 350 wives. Literacy was moderate, with just under thirty per cent being unable to read or write. These labourers were overwhelmingly Catholic, with just 11 professing various Protestant denominations. Spatially, equal numbers lived in all three electoral wards of the town, but with expected high concentrations in the poorer areas, such as Forthill, Vernon Street, and the Mail Coach Road area.

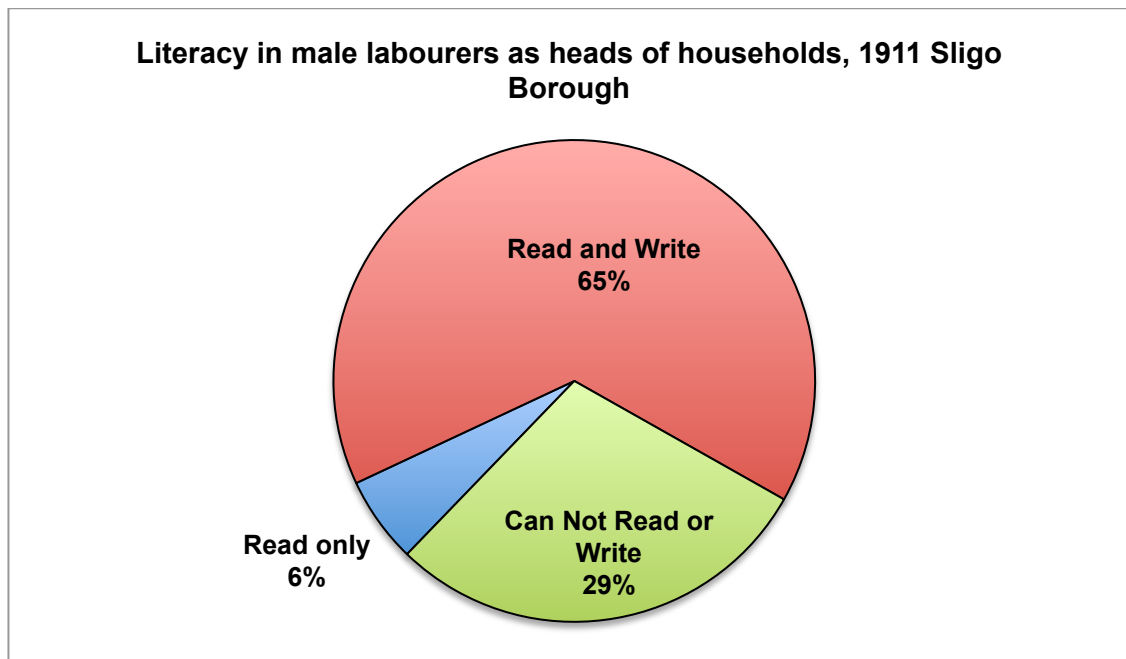
<i>Residence</i>	<i>No. of Labourers</i>
Barrack Street	37
Vernon Street	26
Mail Coach Road	21
Gallows Hill North	20
Armstrong's Row	17
Church Hill	15
James Street	14
Riverside	14
Abbey Street	13
Emmet Place	11
Holborn Street	11
Mail Coach Road, East Side	11

**Fig. 5.29. Sample extract showing streets of residence of male labourers who were heads of households in Sligo borough in the 1911 census.**

Referring these findings back to the 1911 household survey, it is clear that in 1901 and 1911 many of the families occupying low-quality homes were employed in manual and casual trades, but experienced different levels of poverty depending on the house size and family size. It is also evident from a cursory comparison of both censuses, that there were inter-generational occupational patterns at play. The son of a docker was likely to be a docker himself, and only with education and opportunity could he experience any occupational mobility. Poor economic prospects led to poor job mobility. By the eve of the First World War the average labouring wage was £1, though some men received more, while skilled wages averaged 35 shillings (£1-15s).<sup>92</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Mary Daly, 'Social structure of the Dublin working class 1871-1911' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 23, no. 90 (Nov. 1982), pp 121-133.





**Fig. 5.30 . Literacy levels of married general labourers, Sligo town 1911. Source: 1911 census database online at <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Sligo> Retrieved 8 Oct 2015.**

The 1911 census shows occupational returns for the Sligo urban area, here there are 5,430 males (married and single), both over and under 20 years of age. Of this total, almost 850 or 15.5 per cent are general or unspecified labourers.<sup>93</sup> The percentage of general labourers over 20 years (and likely to be the sole breadwinner in a family), is 13.6 per cent. A further 5 per cent of men are working in the building and construction trades, including furniture making and carpentry, and 5.5 per cent work in ‘conveyance of men, goods, and animals’, which include railway workers, harbour-board employees, carters, drivers, and merchant seamen.

There were 5,733 females in Sligo town in 1911, and 1,274 or 22.3 per cent of these were recorded as being in employment, with over one-third of that total being domestic servants. A further 21 per cent were working in the dressmaking trade, another traditional female area.<sup>94</sup> There were 126 nuns returned in the census, belonging to the three large convents, the Mercy, Ursuline and Nazareth orders. A further 55 women were returned as working in connection with the medical profession; these appear to have been mostly ward-maids and staff in the workhouse and hospital. In 1911 the

<sup>93</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1911*, table xxi, Area, houses, and population: also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religions, and education of the people, H.C. 1912-13, cxvii [Cd.6052]. p. 56.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.63.

mean age of marriage in Ireland was 29 for women and 33 for men, and couples married for 20 years or more averaged 6.29 children born.<sup>95</sup> The participation of women in the formal workforce was low, with little opportunity afforded for the clerical or industrial jobs to be found for women in the bigger cities.<sup>96</sup> In all, about 26 per cent of the Sligo male workforce in 1911 was involved in work that could be highly seasonal and with irregular levels of income. There was, as Mary Daly has indicated in her Dublin labourers study of the same period, ‘an overcrowded realm of casual labouring’,<sup>97</sup> with the obvious repercussion of erratic earnings.

In 1930, 34,700 tons of coal was imported through Sligo port, along with 28,000 tons of maize, and 2,600 tons of timber. Exports for the same year were 17,800 pigs, 13,800 sheep, and 3,000 head of cattle.<sup>98</sup> By 1932, coal imports had increased to 87,800 tons, with maize up to 41,500 tons, while vessels of up to 6,000 tons could discharge at the quays. Exports of livestock had increased rapidly; 25,000 pigs, 15,800 sheep and 2,900 cattle were shipped through the port of Sligo in the same year.<sup>99</sup> There was clearly a substantial amount of work for the casual and general labourer. However, the unexpected advent of the ‘Economic War’ in late 1932, with the imposition of tariffs from both British and Irish governments, drastically curtailed trade at the port. Its sources of revenue were taxed to the limit, and the employment of dockers suffered greatly. Tonnage for coal had dropped to 30,000 tons by 1938, and pig and cattle exports struggled to reach 4,000 head combined.<sup>100</sup> The decline of Sligo port accelerated during WWII, when shipping ceased almost totally.

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<sup>95</sup> Daly, ‘Social structure of the Dublin working class’, pp 121-33.

<sup>96</sup> Catriona Clear, *Social change and everyday life in Ireland, 1850-1922* (Manchester, 2007), pp 25-51.

<sup>97</sup> Daly, ‘Social structure of the Dublin working class’, p. 133.

<sup>98</sup> John C. McTernan, *Memory Harbour; the port of Sligo* (Sligo, 1992), p. 140.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23, p.137.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 142-43.



**Fig. 5.31. Dockers at work on Sligo Quay, c. 1947. Unloading cargo was a physically demanding job, which had a huge impact on men's health. Photo courtesy of the Hunt family, Sligo.**

Manufacturing had sporadic success in Sligo during the 1930s and 1940s; small shoe factories and shirt factories were established, and provided some employment. Other manufacturing concerns included a mineral water factory, sawmills, bakeries and an iron foundry. However, by the mid-1940s these industries had collapsed due to the War, economic depression, and the emigration of many young people to the cities and factories of Britain. All of these changes had an impact on the lower-waged class over the period. The repercussions for the progress and prosperity of the town, and its labouring classes, were profound.

At the time of the 1936 census, Sligo was ranked as the eighth largest town in the Free State, with a population of 12,565, which was almost 20 per cent of the total population of the county, which then stood at 67,400.<sup>101</sup> This maintenance of a core urban population can be seen as an indicator of the perceived benefits to be derived from living in an urban centre, as opposed to attempting to make a living off the land; while jobs might be scarce and erratic, the potential for betterment was there, and this was enough to draw in unskilled labourers.

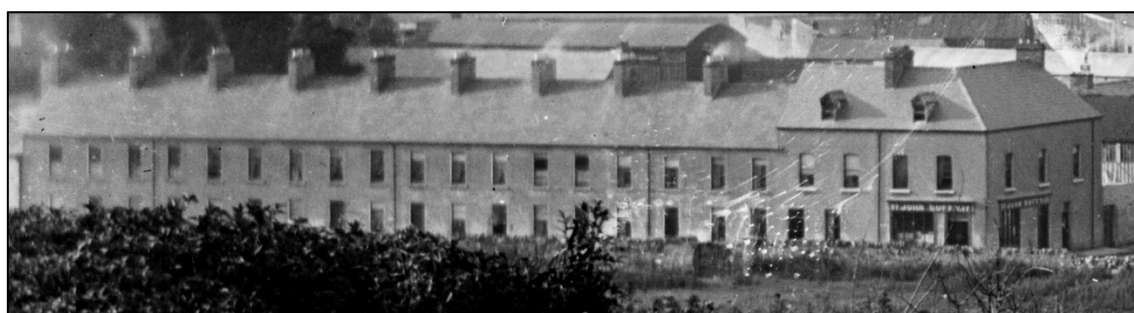
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<sup>101</sup> T.W. Freeman, 'Population Distribution in county Sligo' p. 255.

## 5.5 Early housing initiatives, 1880-1929 – a slow response

Between 1880 and 1920, little housing development took place in Sligo due to the economic dictates of the Great War, and the upheavals of the 1919-1923 period. Legislation for subsidized urban housing was enacted for under a series of housing acts commencing with the 1890 Act, and applied to Britain and Ireland together. It 'empowered urban local authorities to secure slum clearances, repair or demolition of insanitary houses, and to provide working class dwelling houses'.<sup>102</sup> A fundamental aspect of the housing acts was the granting of the power to borrow money to the local authorities. This meant that large schemes could be supported through the municipal finance system; however, if income from rents were not sufficient to meet the loan repayments, then the loss would have to be met out of the rates. The 1890 Housing Act did not offer very favourable terms to the various town authorities, and as a result only a small number of houses was built by Sligo corporation under this legislation.

Private builders had made some small progress in Sligo town between 1890 and 1930. In 1881, Clarence & Sons of Ballisodare built nine houses for business man Patrick Murray along the northern edge of Temple Street, between the entrance to the Market Yard and Hanley Terrace. Several years later in 1887, Denis Mc Lynn, contractor, of Pound Street, erected a fine terrace of eleven houses faced in stone along the northern side of Temple Street. A number of older houses on the corner of Pound Street were demolished to make way for this attractive terrace.<sup>103</sup>



**Figure 5.32.** The new terrace of nine houses erected in Temple Street in 1881, by Clarence and Sons. Source: Enlarged extract from Lawrence Collection print, LROY 3271, National Library of Ireland.

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<sup>102</sup> M.G. Ellison, *Papers on the law in Ireland relating to the housing of the working classes* (Dublin, 1913), pp 1-5.

<sup>103</sup> Gallagher, *Streets of Sligo*, p. 648.

A row of nine stone-cut terraced houses, Colleary Terrace, with red-bricked window surrounds, were erected at the eastern end of John Street in 1899, by the mayor, Bernard Colleary, as a private enterprise.<sup>104</sup> Several terraces of houses were also constructed on empty sites along Albert Line (Bell Terrace, McLynn's Terrace, Cairns View), in the opening decade of the twentieth century. Hanley Terrace, eleven houses along the northern side of Temple Street, were commenced in 1914 to a unique and attractive design. Erected by the mayor, Dudley Hanley, they were designed to resemble a seaside Victorian villa-terrace.<sup>105</sup> He also built a similarly-named terrace on the outskirts of town, at Maugheraboy, along with the more modest 'Mountain View' terrace.<sup>106</sup> The Catholic bishop of Elphin Dr Edward Doorly financed a short terrace of workers houses, St. Michael's Terrace, in 1930, on Forthill. In all there were only 88 dwellings in Sligo constructed under private-assisted grants between 1922 and 1947.<sup>107</sup>

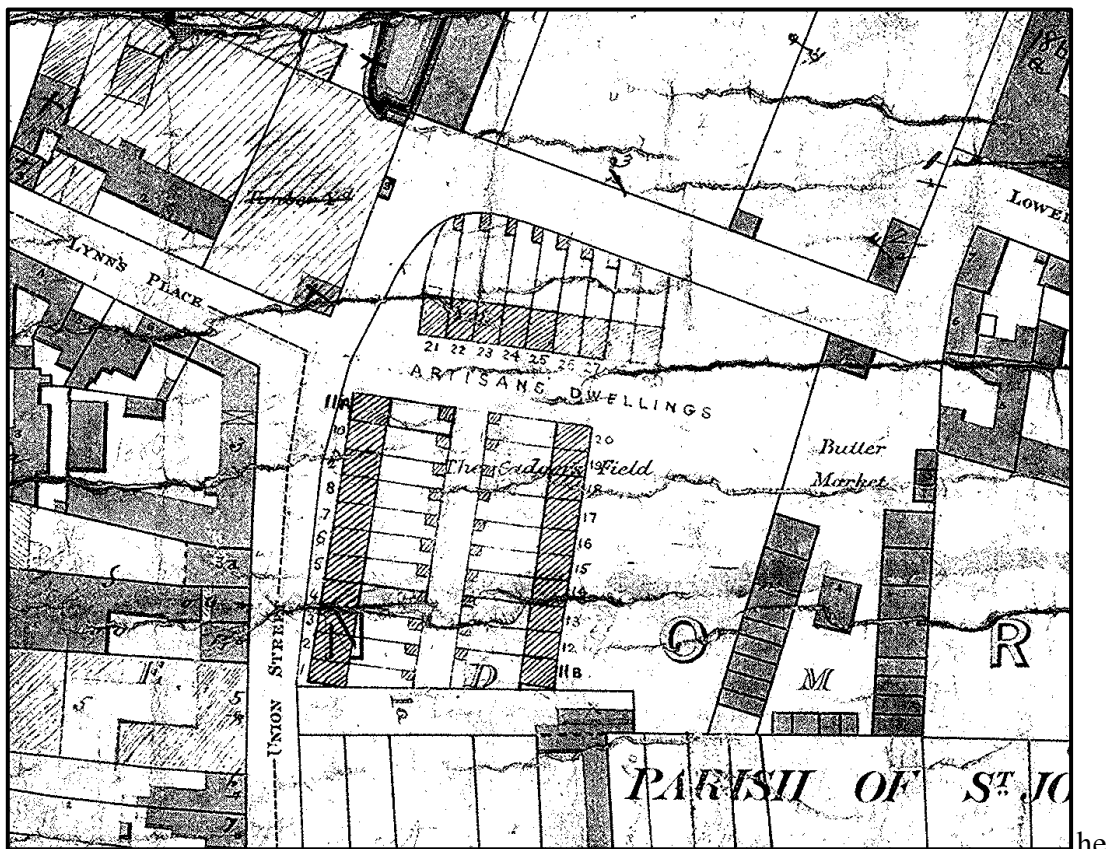


Fig. 5.33. Map showing the location and layout of the Artizan's Dwellings, 1888. Source: Valuation Office urban map, Sligo town, (overwritten). VO, 1:1056, Sligo town, sheet 13 (1836).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pp 648, 365.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 674.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>107</sup> DLG, *Housing review 1948*, p. 26.

In 1885, the corporation appointed a committee to examine the possibility of erecting artisans' dwellings, for the purposes of housing skilled craftsmen and workers, and to be financed under the new Cross Act.<sup>108</sup> Erected along the east side of Union Street, on the site of the old 'Cadger's Field', a place earlier used for slaughtering cattle and adjoining the docks, they today remain a fine example of well-built workers houses of the period.

The committee proposed the construction of sixty residences, (later reduced to thirty-one), and on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1886, they also recommended the purchase of the 'Cadgers Field' from the Hon. William Ashley, successor to the Palmerston estate, for £500. In March of the same year, the Commissioners for Public Works proffered a grant of £3,000, and the plot was formally acquired on 11th August 1886. William Cochrane, the borough surveyor, drew up the plans for the scheme, and also the contract for the roads and sewers. Three further dwellings were added to the scheme in 1888, bringing the total to 31, a little more than half of what was originally planned. The houses were of good quality, two-storeyed, with running water and proper sanitary facilities. They were two bed-roomed, and were finished in cut-stone, forming a pleasant unified terrace. Each house cost £75 to £85, to construct. Laid out in a rectangular plan, part of the scheme faced onto Union Street, part on to the Buttermarket, and an alley between the houses provided access to small, enclosed yards. This layout prompted objections from some members of the corporation, as it was felt that all the houses should face onto the main street, and not be hidden behind the front row. However, in the end, the builders proceeded with the original plan. In February 1888, the corporation re-named the Artizans' Dwellings to 'Emmet Place', in honour of the insurrectionist of 1803. In the 1901 Census, all these houses were graded as 'second class', and all had four rooms. There were ninety-two inhabitants.<sup>109</sup> Of these, eleven dwellings were rented at 3 shillings, 18 dwellings were rented at 3s 6d, and one was a shop.<sup>110</sup>

The 'Artizans' Dwellings' were the first publicly-funded houses built in the borough, but after this initial push for workers' housing, there appears to have been no impetus or

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<sup>108</sup> The original 'Cross Act', the *Artisans and Labourers' Dwelling's Improvement Act 1875*, was extended to Ireland in 1879, and in 1882 it was amended so that Irish towns with a population of 25,000 could qualify for the financial incentives in the act. See Fraser, p. 70-71.

<sup>109</sup> Also M/F of originals, 1901 Census (NAI, MFGS. 1-32).

<sup>110</sup> *Appendix to the report ... into the housing conditions of the working classes ...* H.C. 1914 [Cd. 7317], appendix xxxvi, p. 376.

political will for any further schemes. A perusal of corporation minutes for the period sees almost no mention of housing for labourers, although the sanitary horrors of the town were well documented in the 1914 report, and various local government board inspections.

The intervention of the First World War ‘accelerated the already unhealthy financial situation of Sligo corporation’ and by 1917 the local authority was effectively broke.<sup>111</sup> This was in part due to poor administrative procedures, as well as the constraints of the 1869 Borough Improvement Act, which restricted the municipal revenue to 4s 6d in the pound, and a large annual deficit was run up. The ‘county demand’ - in other words the money owed to the county council by the corporation for maintenance of roads and county-at large charges – had risen steeply after the 1890s, and by 1917, the county council took the corporation to the superior courts for indebtedness. Every penny that came into the municipal coffers had to be handed over to the county, so that none of the corporation’s officials could be paid. A further legal action for rents connected with the town markets, resulted in the Town Hall being possessed by the bailiffs in 1917, and the moveable effects of the Town Hall being put up for auction.

A Sligo ratepayer’s association was formed in 1917, comprised mainly of mercantile Protestants, but also numerous wealthy Catholic shopkeepers and merchants, who were the top rate-payers in the town. ‘Religious sympathies and differences were cast-aside’ as the organisation made a common effort to put pressure on the sitting corporation to amend the 1869 act and have a more effective and widespread system of local taxation.<sup>112</sup> Following much scandal and political manoeuvring between the ratepayers association, Sligo corporation and the Local Government Board, the Westminster parliament passed the Sligo Corporation Act in July 1918, which removed the cap on the Sligo municipal rates, permitting the setting of a more viable local level of taxation. This same bill was used to introduce the electoral experiment of proportional representation, and Sligo corporation was the first body elected using this system in 1919.<sup>113</sup> However, the new corporation did not have much time in which to pursue a social agenda; the intervention of the war of independence and the civil war was to fundamentally change the approach to state-funded housing in Sligo. Housing for the poor took a back seat.

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<sup>111</sup> Pdraig Deignan, *The Protestant community in county Sligo, 1914-1949* (Dublin, 2010), p. 362.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 367.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 367.

The 1919 borough election, the first held under PR, heralded a different political age. There were no UIL candidates, and a slender Sinn Féin / labour-movement majority resulted. Sinn Féin received a total of 674 first preference votes, and seven seats, with labour-movement candidates gaining five seats. The Ratepayers Party polled 823 first preference votes, resulting in eight seats. The sitting Sinn Féin mayor, Dudley Hanley, retained his office. Sligo corporation thus became the first Irish local government body to be controlled by Sinn Féin, and have a Sinn Féin mayor.<sup>114</sup> Much of the corporation's work over the period to 1921 was taken up with the burdensome affair of continuing the operation of local government in the rapidly changing environment of the War of independence, and the substitution of Dáil Éireann administration for the old Local Government Board.<sup>115</sup>

Following the upheaval of the Civil War, the 1925 local election produced a raft of independents, 13, many of them former Ratepayers Party, with five Labour and four Republicans. Local elections were held again in 1928, when clearer party lines began to emerge, with 13 corporation seats going to Fianna Fáil, 7 to Labour and just three to independents.<sup>116</sup> However, a look at many of the candidates running for the 24 seats on Sligo Corporation over the period 1912 to 1928, show that the same men were in power, although their political allegiances may have shifted over the decade. Many of those in the Ratepayers Party became Independents, and later Fianna Fáil councillors; many labour-movement politicians became anti-treaty and later Fianna Fáil members, but retained their tendencies for social betterment. Many of the names which were to be prominent in the housing drive in the 1930s were already active in local politics in 1919: John Jinks, the noted TD, John Lynch, champion of the working class, who was to serve as mayor in the 1930s, and Michael Nevin, the Sinn Féin activist, mayor, and long-standing councillor.

### **Post-independence housing schemes**

Following the setting-up of the Irish Free State, there was some advancement on the housing front in Sligo. The British government ironically, funded the first scheme. Under the terms of the Irish Land (Provision for Sailors and Soldiers) Act of 1919, over 4,000 dwellings were erected in Ireland between 1921 and 1932, 2,600 of this total in

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<sup>114</sup> Michael Farry, *The Irish revolution 1912-1923: Sligo* (Dublin, 2012), p 46

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 78-80.

<sup>116</sup> <http://electionsireland.com/election.php?elecId=160&constitid=436&electype=5>. Retrieved 11-Nov-2015.



the Free State area.<sup>117</sup> Financed by the British government, the act was aimed at providing appropriate housing for returning servicemen who had fought in the Great War, the ‘Homes fit for Heroes’ policy. In total, about £3 million pounds was spent on the scheme by the time of its termination in 1932, and most of the houses were sold to sitting tenants after 1952.<sup>118</sup> In Sligo a scheme of twenty houses was erected at Ardee Terrace, in Ballydoogan, in 1926-27, and are still known as the ‘Soldiers’ Houses’. The scheme was laid out very much on the style of the ‘garden city’ ideas promulgated in Britain. Built in blocks of four or six, the dwellings were two-storeys with four rooms and a scullery, and small gardens front and rear. Rents in urban areas were about 9 shillings a week by 1923, and the scheme was built and administered by a board of trustees. The Sligo scheme was commenced in 1926, and was reduced from a planned forty houses due to the difficulty of getting water to the site, which was some way out of town, in Maugheraboy.<sup>119</sup> The town councillors were somewhat perturbed that the soldiers’ houses were to be exempt from rates for twenty years under the legislation, and the corporation would thus receive no income from them. There was little local support for the building scheme at institutional level, as it was regarded as a private rather than public undertaking.

The 1919 Housing of the Working Class Act remained virtually unused in the 26 counties, following the War of Independence, but the house designs and layouts specified in it,<sup>120</sup> were applied to the dwellings erected under a new scheme announced as part of the Provisional Government’s attempt to alleviate the housing crisis.<sup>121</sup> The ‘Million pound scheme’ as it became known, promulgated under the Cosgrave government of 1923 was the first attempt at public housing by the new Irish Free State.<sup>122</sup> (See chapter 2). This financial incentive took the form of a grant to the local authorities, on the basis of their rateable valuation, and the levying of a special housing provision rate by each council. The council was able to borrow up to three times the

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<sup>117</sup> Biographical background, TNA <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/SearchUI/details?Uri=C14> (accessed 12 December 2013).

<sup>118</sup> Murray Fraser, *John Bulls’ other homes; State housing and British policy in Ireland, 1883-1922* (Liverpool, 1996), pp 258-271.

<sup>119</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 10 Apr. 1926, p. 6.

<sup>120</sup> *Housing of the working classes (Ireland)*. H.C. 1919 [Cd. 129]; Also *Report from standing committee D, on the housing of the working classes (Ireland) Bill with the proceedings of the committee 1919*, H.C. 1919 (133). p. 129

<sup>121</sup> Fraser, *John Bull’s other homes*, p. 280.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

amount of the levy, and the government would then contribute double that amount.<sup>123</sup> Seventy-one local urban authorities took up this incentive, and between 1922 and 1928 over 2,100 houses, comprising of four and five rooms, were constructed, at an average cost of between £570 and £600. Loans amounted to £994,000. These were the first post-war houses erected by the Free State.

Sligo corporation funded the erection of 53 working-class houses on two separate green-field sites at Ballytivnan and Cleveragh, between 1923 and 1929.<sup>124</sup> They were a huge improvement on previous ‘cottage designs’, with three bedrooms and a kitchen; larger houses had a parlour. A density of not more than 10 houses to the acre was specified, and house frontages were to be wide, enabling enough light and air to the rear returns. A standard house was to have two-living rooms, (i.e. a kitchen and parlour), and three bedrooms, which were to be constructed to stated minimum sizes. Indoor toilets and fixed baths were considered essential, as was running fresh water.<sup>125</sup> The designs of these first Free State housing schemes were ‘clearly derived from the low-density garden suburb model’, as the *Irish Builder* of 1923 acknowledged, although the authors maintained that the standard enforced was too high, leading to increased costs.<sup>126</sup> However, the advantages in both construction quality and for health were undoubted, and these layouts gradually replaced the Victorian terrace layout for working class housing. This move to a less utilitarian style, including a lower site-density of 12 houses per acre, with a stress on greenery and small grassed areas was a ‘radical departure’ from the previous industrial-style layouts,<sup>127</sup> seen in Sligo at the older Artizans’ dwellings. There were two schemes of two-storey houses, 9 houses at Ballytivan, and 16 at Cleveragh Road.<sup>128</sup> A further 28 single-storey houses, designed in the ‘garden-city’ style, were built off Cleveragh Road, and named Corporation Terrace. (now Fatima Ave.).<sup>129</sup> Ballytivnan and Cleveragh houses conformed to the standard two-storey design, as illustrated in the Ministry for Local Government’s, ‘House

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<sup>123</sup> S. J. Brandenburg, ‘Housing progress in the Irish Free State’ in *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Feb. 1932), pp 1-10; also the *First report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health, 1922-1925*, pp 77-81, 158-160.

<sup>124</sup> *Sligo Champion* 24 Mar. 1923.

<sup>125</sup> Ruth McManus, ‘Suburban and urban housing in the twentieth century’, in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. III C (2011), Domestic life in Ireland, pp 253-286.

<sup>126</sup> Fraser, *John Bull’s other homes*, p. 280.

<sup>127</sup> McManus, ‘Suburban and urban housing in the twentieth century’, p. 261.

<sup>128</sup> Tenders were issued for 23 houses at Cleveragh and Ballytivnan on 7 Mar. 1923; *Freeman’s Journal*, 22 Mar, 1923, p. 4.

<sup>129</sup> Tenders were issued for 28 houses at Cleveragh on 7 March 1929, *Irish Independent*, 30 Mar. 1929, p. 14.

Designs' manual.<sup>130</sup> Another small scheme at the Lungy Field was sanctioned in late 1923, comprising of 8 terraced houses, on a site purchased from the Representative Church Body for £200.<sup>131</sup>

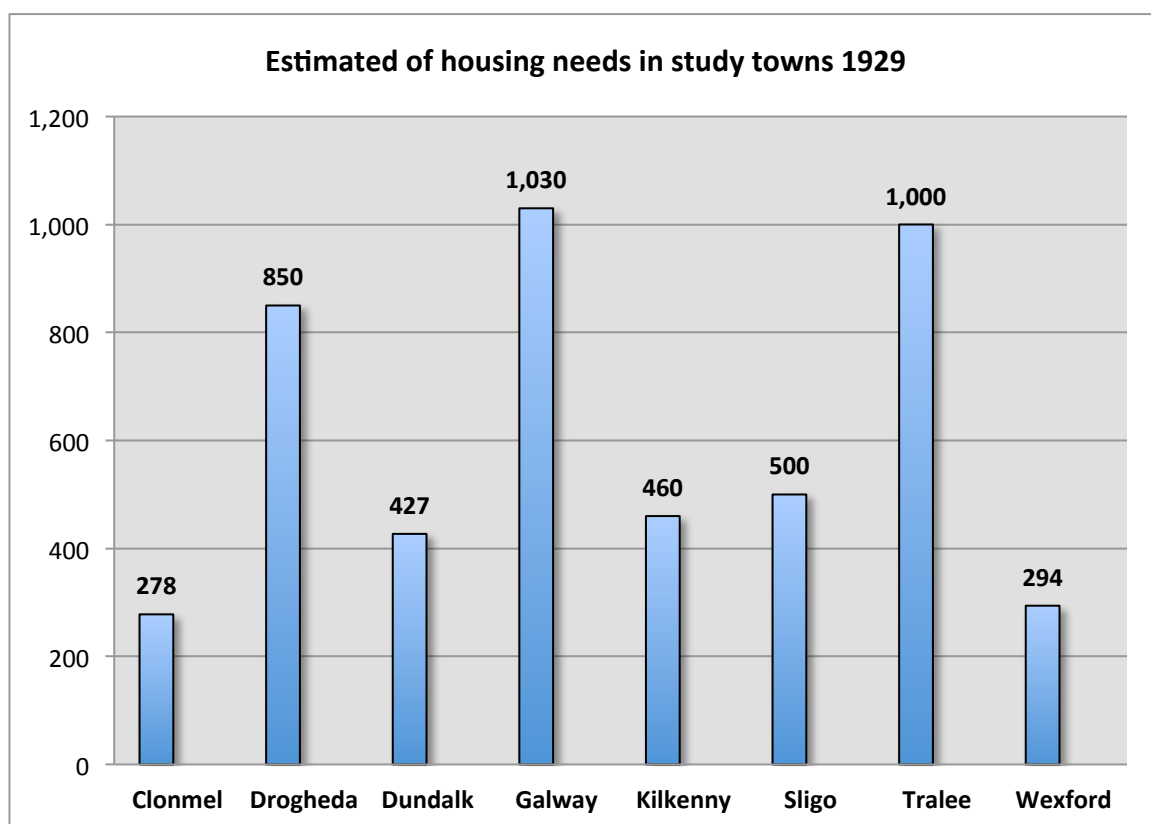


Fig. 5.34. Estimate of housing needs in the study towns 1929. Source: *DLGPH Annual Report 1929-30*, appendix xxvii, p.209-212.

Due to the high rents charged on these subsidised houses in the various towns, many were quickly sold to occupiers, in order to avoid long-term losses.<sup>132</sup> The Sligo schemes however, remained largely in corporation ownership until well into the 1950s. These 1920s schemes made negligible impact on the huge housing need in Sligo. Occupied for the most part by the better-paid labourer and clerical workers, rents were frequently in excess of 13 shillings per week. For the quarter ending June 1932 the rents collected on the houses were £107 2s 0d for the Cleveragh Road houses, and £46 3s 0d for Ballytivnan, with a further £202 for Corporation Terrace, (Fatima Ave), also in Cleveragh. This was a total rental income of £316 13s 3d, for that quarter, out a total borough quarterly rental income of £856 19s 6d, which included water rates and rental

<sup>130</sup> Ministry of Local Government, *House designs prescribed by the minister for Local Government, under the Housing Act 1924* (Dublin, 1925).

<sup>131</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 24 Mar. 1923. The terrace became known as Church View in The Lungy.

<sup>132</sup> DLGPH, *First Annual report, 1925*; see also Mary Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 208.

income from the butter and corn markets.<sup>133</sup> This was a substantial proportion of the annual borough income, but is also indicative of the fact that the rents were totally out of the reach of the vast majority of the working class.

The issue of rents in Sligo was brought to the attention of the minister for Local Government in July 1927, when deputy John Jinks posed a Dáil question in relation to the twenty-four dwellings erected at Cleveragh and Ballytivnan. Jinks, well familiar with the housing situation in the town, maintained the rents were so high due to the 'short period fixed for the repayment of loan, that the tenants find it impossible to pay these rents, and have petitioned the Corporation to have same reduced to a reasonable figure'.<sup>134</sup> Jinks requested the minister to enter into negotiation with the banks, or extend the period of the load from fifteen to twenty years, in order to enable the Corporation to reduce the rents in accordance with the wishes of the tenants. The minister, Richard Mulcahy, promised to look specifically into the finances of the Sligo scheme, but was adamant that the banks were unwilling to consider any further long-term credits.<sup>135</sup>

Sligo borough erected just 54 houses between 1890 and 1928; Sligo county a more respectable 241.<sup>136</sup> Most of these grant-aided houses were owner-occupied, with farmers benefitting to a large extent. By 1928 Sligo county council had received £19,471 in grants, and Sligo corporation just £2,915.<sup>137</sup> Rents (including rates) for the Cleveragh and Ballytivnan houses in March 1930 were £902.<sup>138</sup> There were no public-funded houses built in Sligo town between 1925 and 1930.<sup>139</sup> The 1929 survey of estimated needs, indicated that 500 houses were required in Sligo to fulfil existing demand.<sup>140</sup> But the poor would have to wait.

## Conclusion

Over the span of a century, successive observers, both casual and official, identified the same issues in relation to the housing quality in Sligo, with remarkable consistency. The stubborn persistence of this poor type of dilapidated, overcrowded housing, and the

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<sup>133</sup> Sligo Corporation, *Minutes*, 11 Jan. 1933, p. 342.

<sup>134</sup> *Dail Éireann debates*, vol.20, no. 15, Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> July 1927.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1927- 28*, p. 79-80.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, *Appendix xxi*, p. 165-168.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, *Appendix, xxix*, p. 218-219.

<sup>139</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1929-30*, appendix xxix, pp 218-219.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, appendix xxvii, pp 209-212.

associated incidence of disease and mortality, was, by the second decade of the twentieth century no longer acceptable. More tellingly, it was a source of worry and embarrassment to the corporation.<sup>141</sup> However, lack of financial support from central government until 1907 resulted in fewer than 30 houses for the working class being erected between 1880 and 1914.<sup>142</sup> The Clancy Housing Act of 1908 had no impact on Sligo, and as of 1914, Sligo corporation had built only 30 houses at a cost of £3,000, all artisans' dwellings', but none for the poorer classes.<sup>143</sup> This lack of resolve to deal with what all agreed was a housing crisis, was founded in the reluctance of the corporation to take out loans, and make provisions to repay them. The indebtedness and subsequent bankruptcy of the corporation by 1917 is a clear result of the corporation's poor financial base over the preceding decades. This clearly impacted on public housing. The legal uncertainty over who actually owned the title to a large portion of the poorer houses also caused indecision, as many leases and sub-leases were over 150 years old.<sup>144</sup> This was not to be solved until the compulsory purchase acts of the 1930s.

The housing drive of the 1920s did not cater for the very poor or ill-housed; in fact the vast majority of dwellings erected in the decade before 1932 were rented or sold to families who were in 'relatively comfortable circumstances'. The acts were designed to help those who could afford to pay a mortgage on their own home, and as a result most of the dwellings erected in the 1920s were built for the lower-middle class. In Sligo the small number of dwellings erected could make little impact on the 1,800 people who lived in insanitary dwellings of two rooms or less in 1926. Families in poor areas all experienced poverty in some form, but not all families experienced it to the same degree. Some houses were overcrowded, due to large family size, and this put economic pressure on the head of household, who was generally employed in low-paid casual labourer. However, some households consisted of only two or three people, with low rents, and regular employment for the head of the household, and they can be deemed to be suffering less from chronic poverty.

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<sup>141</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minute Book, 12 Mar. 1936.

<sup>142</sup> *Housing of the Working Classes Acts. Return ... showing particulars as to the action of local authorities in Ireland under the acts, compiled to the 31st day of March, 1906.* HC 1906 (337), pp 864-865.

<sup>143</sup> *Appendix to the report ... to inquire into the housing conditions of the working classes ...* HC 1914 [Cd. 7317], appendix xxxvi, p. 376.

<sup>144</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 30 Nov. 1940.

Economic stagnation and uncertainty, the lack of any major industry, and an over-reliance on the volatile port economy led to a substantial proportion of the male workforce during this period being employed in casual labour, with repercussions financially. Thus while there may have been a pent-up demand for better housing, the means to afford this was beyond the reach of all but the small section of the population that were better-waged. Housing was a ‘crucial issue in the arena of local government and welfare’.<sup>145</sup> But, as Ferrtier argues, the real truth was that there was a ‘broad acceptance of substandard accommodation’ in many parts of Ireland.<sup>146</sup> Many regarded the ownership of property as an end in itself, despite the frequently dilapidated and unlooked-after nature of much of the housing stock. It was believed that it was up to the individual to better provide for their family, not the duty of the ratepayers of the town, no matter how sympathetic they might be to their plight. Meaningful change required a cultural shift, not merely funds and enabling legislation.

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<sup>145</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, ‘Local government, public health and welfare in twentieth-century Ireland’, in. Mary E. Daly, (ed.), *County and town; one hundred years of local government in Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), p. 114.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

## Chapter 6

### Sligo's new housing schemes, 1931-1947

‘House hunger in Sligo’

*Sligo Champion*, 29 May 1934

#### **Introduction**

The single most significant physical development in the post-independence Irish provincial town was the enormous expansion of social housing. Sligo was at the forefront of this far-reaching national housing drive. Between 1932 and 1947, Sligo corporation, with state assistance, managed to plan, construct and oversee the allocation of almost 800 modern local authority houses in all three electoral wards of the borough, removing over 2,500 people from chronically unhealthy houses, and re-housing over a quarter of the borough's population in little over a decade and a half.<sup>1</sup>

In the thirty years between 1890 and 1922 only thirty houses had been built by Sligo corporation; a further fifty-four were constructed between 1922 and 1930.<sup>2</sup> With the passing of the 1932 Act, 111 houses were completed or in the course of construction by the end of March 1933.<sup>3</sup> After that the pace increased rapidly. Between 1932 and 1941 over 600 local authority houses were built in the town; another 100 or so were completed by late 1947.<sup>4</sup> The Department of Local Government recorded a total of 735 local authority houses constructed in Sligo between 1932 and March 1947, only 40 fewer than Drogheda, which was the most productive of the eight study-towns.<sup>5</sup> This housing programme was nothing short of a social experiment, turned revolution, which propelled in a single generation, the children of the slums to occupiers of modern homes, with greatly raised aspirations for their own children. Sligo's great housing schemes of the 1930s and 1940s revolutionised the lives of the ordinary people, and resulted in the numerous ‘corporation terraces’, which are a characteristic feature of Sligo to this day.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Michael Kirby, County medical officer of health, *County Sligo, annual report on health and sanitary conditions, 1944*, p. 45. (LGOV/800), A low average density of 5 persons per new house gives 4,000 people. The final total is probably in the region of 5,000 persons re-housed over the period. See also footnote 155.

<sup>2</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1930-1931*, appendix xxviii, pp 246-247.

<sup>3</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1932-1933*, appendix xxxiv, pp 268-269.

<sup>4</sup> Totals from DLGPH, *Annual report 1945-1947*, appendix xvii, p.119 and *Annual report 1947-48*, p. 110.

<sup>5</sup> DLGPH, *Annual Report 1945-1947*, appendix xvii p.119.

Sligo corporation took on the job of re-housing with some trepidation, given the magnitude of the slum problem in the town. In addition, the economy was at its lowest point since independence, and many councillors were reluctant to burden the corporation with unredeemable debts. The task was an onerous one. Land had to be purchased, older houses surveyed, condemned and demolished; plans and tenders drawn up and contractors selected. Close and constant supervision over the construction period was required, and deadlines needed to be met. Legal and procedural difficulties had to be worked out with the Department of Local Government and Public Health, which was the main financier; this was often a troubled and contentious relationship. Rates and rents had to be set and collected, and the corporation had to arrange a system of qualification for the new tenants.

The outbreak of war in 1939 came as a grave blow to the housing programme, with acute shortages of building supplies and labourers, further complicating a national project that was only mid-course. It is not surprising then, that the bulk of the corporation minutes and county medical officer records for this period focus almost entirely on the issue of the 'new housing schemes'. Local and national newspaper reports provide a less biased version of the sometimes-sanitized municipal records. As might be expected, the high level of 'housing hunger' due to a pent-up demand, and the enormous power of the local authority in the allocation of new housing, led to a conflict of interests. Sligo corporation became embroiled in a national scandal, accused of nepotism and corruption by the Minister, because of its dubious process of allocating houses to tenants.<sup>6</sup> The political make-up of Sligo corporation during this period was rooted in the labour movement, with many working-class members, and this was to provide the political will-power to ensure that Sligo accessed all the available funds for the re-housing programme, and carried it through to conclusion.

This chapter will firstly examine the public health situation in Sligo between 1932 and 1947, which closely parallels the housing crisis. The struggle against high infant mortality, overcrowding and insanitary conditions will be discussed and analysed, using the contemporary reports of the borough medical officer. Secondly, the processes by which the local authority grasped the 'housing nettle' will be assessed, the detail of how the corporation financed and executed the process of slum clearance and new construction will be examined and the end result gauged. Additionally, many social

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<sup>6</sup> *Irish Press*, 5 May 1934, p. 7.



questions will be asked of this unprecedented large-scale re-housing of the population. The question of who gained access to the type of social housing constructed in the borough over the period is an important one. Were the most needy housed first? How did the corporation categorize the ‘most needy’, and was there social segregation in the new housing schemes? Did the building of large local authority estates actually widen the social class divisions? Was the quality of lower-rent houses inferior, or were they just smaller houses? Importantly, did the mass-move to modern housing result in a decrease in the high infant mortality rate and rates of infectious disease? What was the topography of the town, and how was it changed by the new housing schemes? How fundamentally was Sligo changed by the ‘housing drive’, and how exactly did the contemporary hopes for the housing programme play out?

### **6.1 ‘A social crisis’ – Health, overcrowding and infrastructure 1931-1947**

The first Irish government during the 1920s endeavoured to place the onus for housing reform on to the local authorities. The new state was fearful of raising expectations amongst the working class that could not – or would not – be met. The Department of Local Government still held the belief that any substantial state aid for public housing would only serve to ‘maintain high housing costs, saddling the community with considerable debt’.<sup>7</sup> Mary Daly considers that this policy – that the government should wait until costs and wages had fallen enough to make decent housing affordable to the working class – was a ‘convenient excuse for postponing costly expenditure...for which the government showed little enthusiasm’.<sup>8</sup> The legislative background to the government policy of funding public housing has already been examined; here the focus is on how Sligo corporation implemented that policy, and the difficulties it faced.

Sligo had constructed only token numbers of municipal houses between 1890 and 1925. This was mostly due to lack of any political impetus and a low rateable valuation, resulting in limited municipal funds. While some private housing was built with government grants – 52 houses were erected in Sligo, mostly on individual sites,<sup>9</sup> –

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Daly, *The buffer state; the historical roots of the Department of the Environment* (Dublin, 1997), p. 208.

<sup>8</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 209.

<sup>9</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1931-1932*, p. 112, and appendix xxxiii.

there were no public-funded houses built in Sligo town between 1925 and 1930.<sup>10</sup> In the returns for the 1926 census, Sligo was recorded as having 11,400 people living in about 2,300 dwellings, an average of about five-and-a-half persons per house, although in reality the rate of overcrowding was much higher. In the Free State as a whole the typical habitation of the time consisted of only three rooms, and 14.8 per cent of all families consisted of five or more persons; however, half of all these families consisted of six or more persons.<sup>11</sup> Overcrowding throughout the Free State was endemic, and conditions ranged from basic to appalling. Sanitary conditions were poor, and consequently health and life expectancy suffered. The average life expectancy in the Irish Free State for both men and women in 1926 was just over 57 years.<sup>12</sup>

The 1929 survey of the housing needs of the working class, carried out by the various local authorities on behalf of the Department of Local Government, showed that an estimated total of 500 houses were needed in Sligo in order to replace insanitary housing and to meet the expected housing demand.<sup>13</sup> (See table 5.34 chapter 5). This was in contrast with the other provincial towns, such as Tralee and Galway, which had an estimated need for over 1,000 houses each. However, as the surveys were carried out by the local corporations and urban district councils, a certain level of bias is to be expected. In all, the Department estimated that 43,600 houses needed to be built throughout the urban areas of the state in order to replace the existing poor stock and meet demand.<sup>14</sup> This survey was to provide direction and motivation for the housing programme of the 1930s.<sup>15</sup>

In Sligo town health issues associated with poor housing continued to be a serious worry for public health officials in 1931. No county medical officer of health had yet been appointed for Sligo, despite the new legislation of 1925.<sup>16</sup> (The medical officer under this legislation, was a public health official, they were full time employees of the

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<sup>10</sup> DLGPH *Annual report 1929-1930* appendix xxix, pp 218-19.

<sup>11</sup> S. J. Brandenburg, 'Housing progress in the Irish Free State' in *The Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics*, vol. 8, no.1. (1932), pp 1-10.

<sup>12</sup> *Census of Saorstát Éireann, 1926*, vol. v, part 1.

<sup>13</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1929-1930*, appendix xxvii, 'Housing survey by local authorities 1929, estimate of housing needs', pp 209-12.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>15</sup> The 1929 'Survey of Housing Needs' was carried out by each local authority in the urban sanitary areas. The Department of Local Government and Public Health drew up and distributed questionnaire forms, which complied with the requirements under Housing of the Working Classes (Ireland) Acts, 1890 to 1921, Original ink-filled forms for Rathmines and Rathgar are held by the Dublin City Library (UDC/1/14/3). The location of original returns for other areas is unknown.

<sup>16</sup> Ruth Barrington, *Health, medicine and politics in Ireland 1900-1970* (Dublin, 1987), p. 102. See also DLGPH, *Annual report 1929-1930*, p. 31.

state, and were not allowed to have a private practice). The Infant mortality was still unacceptably high, and tuberculosis ravaged the adult population. The departmental medical inspector could report in 1930 that there was still no efficient disinfecting apparatus in Sligo, and observed pointedly that the appointment of county medical officers in some counties had ‘greatly improved the ...public health of the community’.<sup>17</sup> The acting medical officer for Sligo borough, Dr Paddy Quinn, (who was the physician at the fever hospital, and assistant surgeon at Sligo Infirmary, and acted as the de-fact public health officer for the corporation), addressed a meeting of the corporation in April 1931, where he outlined the state of health of the town, and the urgent need for new housing. The blight of poor housing was his major concern: ‘there are only 2,048 houses in the urban area with a population of approximately 11,437’. He also noted that overcrowding was endemic in certain areas of the town. In 1909, two decades previously, he had made a personal inspection of the urban area, where he found 295 houses unfit for human habitation. By 1931 many of these had been demolished, but he expressed concern at the number still remaining.<sup>18</sup>

A new borough medical officer Dr Michael Kirby, (one officer covered both town and county), was eventually appointed in late 1931.<sup>19</sup> His annual health reports published from 1936 onwards paint a clearer picture of the health of the poor, which despite the construction of new houses, continued to display worrying trends. A substantial morality ‘penalty’ for living in urban areas had developed in Ireland in the late nineteenth century, and was consistent right up to the 1940s.<sup>20</sup> In 1930, mortality amongst males in the urban areas showed an excess of 40 per cent more than their rural cohorts; for urban women, mortality rates were 25 per cent higher than for rural women.<sup>21</sup> Urban mortality rates were higher mostly due to poor sanitation and overcrowding. By the 1930s, the official public health consensus was that poverty, infant mortality and family welfare were all intimately connected; central government eventually subscribed, albeit belatedly, to this belief. However, overcrowding had a lower priority on the Department’s criteria for ‘unfit dwellings’.

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<sup>17</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1929-1930*, p. 154.

<sup>18</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 5 Apr. 1931, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Dr Kirby was appointed to the position of county medical officer in 1931, and was the first person to hold that post, which he carried out with great distinction. He died in office in 1964. See Patrick Henry, *Sligo: medical care in the past, 1800-1965* (Sligo, 1995), p. 111.

<sup>20</sup> *Annual report of the Registrar General 1930*, p. xvii; see also, Liam Delaney, Mark McGovern, James P. Smith, ‘From Angela’s ashes to the Celtic tiger: early life conditions and adult health in Ireland’ in *Journal of Health Economics*, xxx, (January, 2011), pp 1–10.

<sup>21</sup> *Annual report of the Registrar General, 1930*, p. xvii.

Infant mortality rates are one of the key barometers of public health, and in Sligo town in the mid-1930s, the outlook was not good. Infant mortality in the borough, which stood at only 86 per thousand in 1928, had increased to 124 per thousand four years later. This shocking rate drew the indignation of the local medical officer, Dr Kirby. Addressing a special meeting of the corporation in October 1936, he stated that Sligo borough ‘has the highest infant mortality rate in any town in the Free State. For every 1,000 children born alive, 124 die before they reach their first birthday’.<sup>22</sup> Dr Kirby went on to stress that a large number of the children in Sligo who did survive their first year, never reached five years of age, and many of those who did never became ‘citizens of utility’, owing to the lack of proper care in childhood.

The rate of infantile mortality in Sligo is kept higher than any other county, city or town in the country, by the ill-health of mothers before the child is born; by domestic incompetence; wilful neglect; a low standard of the sense of duty to infants, and bad housing.... At the moment, a child born in Sligo has only half the chance of living which the Dublin county or city infant might expect.<sup>23</sup>

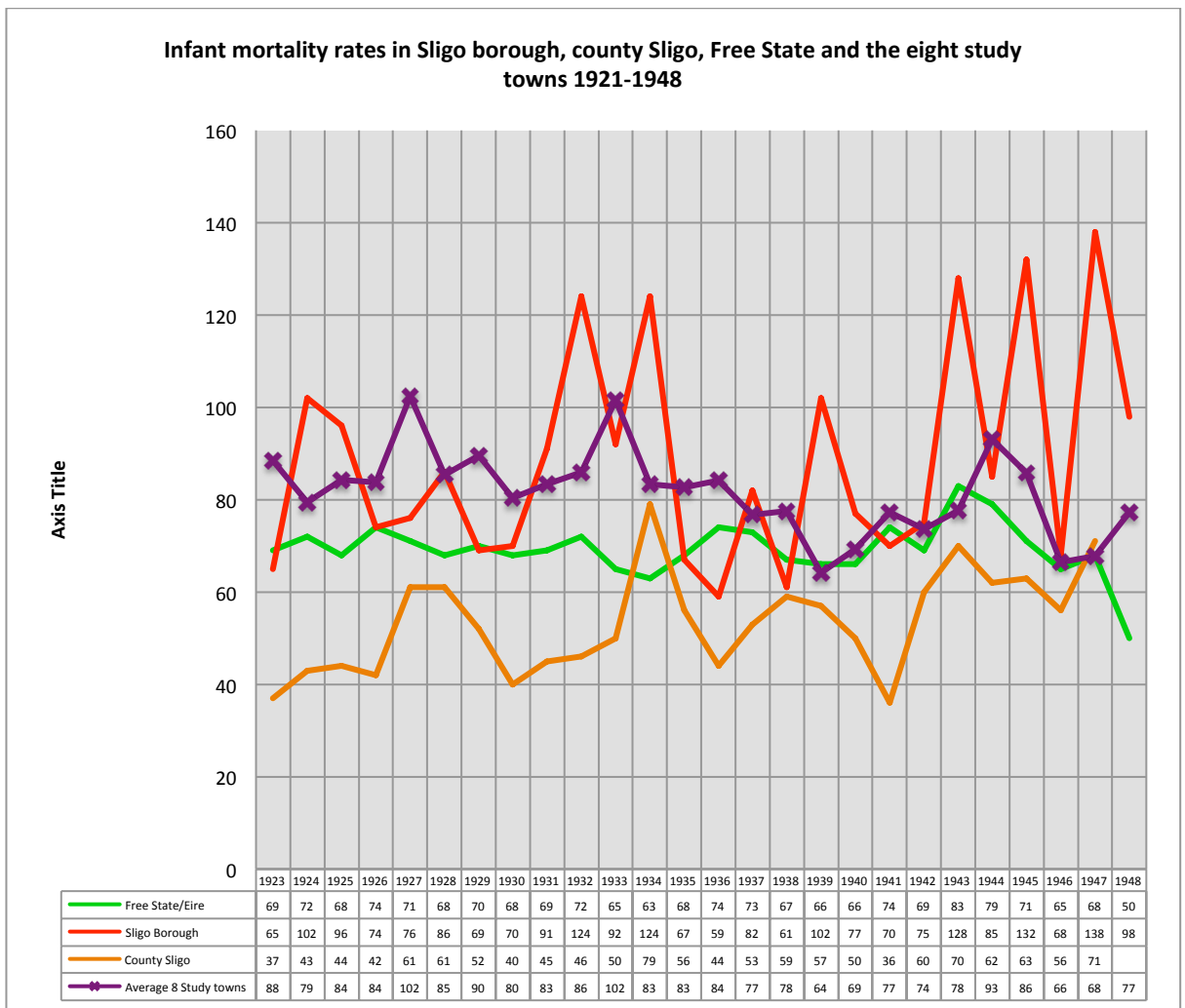
Infant mortality is a widely-used indicator of a population’s health status because it is associated with socio-economic status and development, education, and availability of health services. Incidences of high numbers of children dying within the first year of life are generally due to poor maternal nutrition, low birth-weight, poor sanitation, increased risk of infection and reduced immunity to childhood diseases. Large families also increased the pressure on household resources. It is apparent from the 1911 census that the concentrations of large families in the poorer areas of Sligo borough was no coincidence. Infant mortality was clearly subject to a ‘steep socio-economic gradient’.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Irish Press*, 31 Oct. 1936, p. 9. However, the returns of the Registrar General for 1936, indicate that the infant mortality rate for the Sligo borough area was actually only 59 per thousand. The rate in 1934 was returned as 124 per thousand. In 1939 the rate was 102 per thousand. It may be that Dr Kirby was using the 1934 figures to back up his outrage.

<sup>23</sup> *Irish Press*, 31 Oct. 1936, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Cormac Ó Gráda, ‘Infant and child mortality in Dublin a century ago’ in M. H. Preston and M. Ó hÓgartaigh (eds), *Gender and medicine in Ireland, 1700-1950* (New York, 2012), pp 59-62.



**Figure 6.1. Comparative infant mortality rates in Sligo Borough, Co. Sligo and the Irish Free State, and showing the average IMR for the eight study towns, 1935-1948. Sources: Compiled from figures in *Co. Sligo county medical officer's annual report on health and sanitary conditions, 1936-1956*. Also extracted from the Returns of the Registrar General, 1922-1948.**

All the evidence is that the public health situation in parts of Sligo town in the opening years of the 1930s was dismal, with overcrowding endemic, existing housing insanitary, and little prospect of betterment for the vast majority of the poorer classes. The infant mortality rate in the Sligo urban area continued to be higher than that of the county at large, and that of the Free State, right up until 1948. (See Figure 6.1). The conspicuous spikes in the urban infant mortality rate correspond with outbreaks of infectious diseases, which spread quickly in overcrowded, insanitary dwellings. Contagious diseases were long the scourge of urban districts until the ready availability of synthetic antibiotics in the early 1950s. Diphtheria and infantile enteritis were the principal causes of infant death, and closely related to the social and housing conditions in which the child lived. Sligo was fortunate in that its fresh water supply was excellent, as was its distribution, at least to street-pump level, if not to individual house level. This water

came from the Kinsellagh reservoir, three miles outside town, first constructed in the 1880s, and improved and well-maintained from that date. The benefits of clean water were frequently overwhelmed by the overcrowding in slum areas, the lack of proper flush toilets and direct piped water, the prevalence of insanitary, un-cleaned latrines, (frequently in the back gardens of homes), the severe dampness of slum houses, along with general poor nutrition. The life expectancy of Sligo's poor remained intractably low in the 1930s, with an average death rate in the town of 13.4 per thousand, higher than the Free State average.<sup>25</sup>

In 1937, a welcome improvement to the town's infrastructure was the completion of the new intercepting main sewer along the north bank of the river. But the sewerage from the southern side of the town continued to discharge into the river at several points upstream of Victoria Bridge.<sup>26</sup> This was finally resolved in 1942, when the main drainage scheme was completed, intercepting most of the sewage from the southern bank of the Garavogue river and discharging it into a tank at the Deep Water quays, which would empty on each outgoing tide. By this date, insanitary privies were decreasing rapidly in number, in line with new housing scheme construction. The municipal collection of domestic refuse was continuing on a weekly basis, and was now disposed of in an officially-controlled dumping ground outside of the town, a more sanitary and satisfactory situation than that which existed before 1942.<sup>27</sup>

However, in the years 1937 and 1938, which coincided with the completion of construction of over 150 modern corporation houses in Sligo borough, the public health indicators showed no sign of improvement. Infant mortality stood at 82 per thousand live births in 1937, dropping to 61 per thousand the following year. The average national figure for infant deaths in the eight principal Free State towns in 1938 was 88.3 per thousand. In all, 5,146 children under five years of age died in the Free State in 1938. The Irish infant mortality death for those dying before they were one month old was 28.2 per thousand.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, additional contributory factors were at play in Sligo and in other towns. These may have been as diverse as continued over-crowding in newer council houses, non-collection of domestic rubbish, reduced infant and maternal

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<sup>25</sup> Kirby, *CMO Annual report, Sligo, 1934*, p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> Kirby, *CMO Annual report, Sligo, 1937*, p. 25.

<sup>27</sup> Kirby, *CMO Annual report, Sligo 1942*, p. 42.

<sup>28</sup> *Annual returns of the Registrar General, 1938*, p. xxxix, pp 27-8.

nutrition during a long period of war-rationing, lack of access to medicines, and poor personal and food hygiene.

Significantly, but not surprisingly, the lower socio-economic groups exhibited the greatest mortality and morbidity rates. This urban infant mortality penalty was eventually eliminated by multi-faceted public health interventions, most effectively after 1947, when the Department of Health was formed. But it is questionable if the new sanitary housing had any immediate effect on the condition of infants' health, or whether this factor took a period of time to translate itself into improved health across the board.

## **6.2 An outline of the various housing schemes, 1931-1947**

The 1930s housing schemes in Sligo are representative of the type of large-scale slum clearance projects undertaken in many provincial towns around country. Sligo corporation, whose membership in the 1930s had a substantial labouring-class tint, was elected on a populist ticket, and accordingly decided to tackle the worst areas of housing first.<sup>29</sup> Sligo's electoral system of wards (there were three) also meant there was competition between councillors to have a large scheme allocated to their ward. Eleven separate housing schemes were planned and executed by Sligo corporation between 1932 and 1947. This amounted to over 750 houses constructed according to the departmental figures, but over 800 if the figures to December 1947 are included.<sup>30</sup> The schemes were spread uniformly across the three electoral wards of the borough, and frequently made use of empty areas of agricultural land on the fringes of the built-up areas. Slum areas were designated and cleared, and newer houses built on their sites. In many cases newer schemes were constructed behind the older straggle of cottages, avoiding the disruptive effect of finding temporary accommodation for the tenants, who generally wished to stay in the same area of the town.

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<sup>29</sup> Local elections for the 22-member Sligo Corporation in 1928 produced a council with 12 Fianna Fáil seats, 5 Labour, and 5 Independent/Republican. Many of the nominally FF councillors had a strong labour movement background, (such as John Lynch and Michael Nevin), which coloured their political policies. The 1934 corporation election resulted in 15 Independents, (again of a labour-movement background), 5 FF, and 5 Labour. Thus 19 of the 24 councillors were of a working-class background. The next local elections were not held until 1942, when the membership of the Corporation was reduced to 12, and once again, Independent and Labour were to take over 80 per cent of the vote. No FF or Cumann na nGaedheal councillors were returned in 1942, nor in the 1945 local elections. For detailed election returns see <http://electionsireland.com/council.php?elecId=161&tab=constit&detail=yes&electype=5&councilid=34> (Retrieved on 28 September 2015).

<sup>30</sup> Totals from DLGPH, *Annual report 1945-1947*, appendix xvii, p.119, and DLG, *Annual report 1947-48*, p. 110.

The worst areas were tackled first. Barrack Street and the Forthill area in the North Ward had long been considered the most desperate slum area in Sligo. (See figure 6.2). Three schemes were developed here between 1932 and 1936, expedited by the absolute necessity of the people. Greenfield schemes were in place by 1935-36, at Knappaghbeg on the western periphery of the town (Jinks's Avenue), and in Abbeyquarter (St Anne's Terrace) on the eastern fringes. A total of seven large-scale clearance orders were issued in 1934, mostly for the houses in the insanitary lanes at the centre of the town, which were prioritised for demolition, albeit with varying degrees of progress. The more structurally complex schemes on South Gallows Hill, and Mail Coach Road (St. Brigid's Place and St. Joseph's Terrace), were in progress between 1936 and 1941. This timescale included clearing out the existing insanitary houses, and constructing two new schemes in their place, utilising the gardens and small fields attached to the older houses. The extreme steepness of South Gallows Hill made this a particularly challenging part of the project from an engineering point of view.

By 1940, and the onset of war, almost 500 houses had been constructed, a creditable number in comparison to Drogheda's 700, but not as many proportionally as Ballina had built since 1890, despite its much smaller population.<sup>31</sup> With much of the most needy sections of Sligo's population catered for at this stage, and war shortages hampering development, a smaller scheme of 36 houses was completed along the Riverside between 1942 and 1944 (St Joachim's Terrace and St Asicus's Terrace). Attention then turned to the higher-waged class, and consequently forty-one 'better-class' houses were constructed along Albert Line (now Pearse Road), between 1943 and 1945. Some of these were constructed in a small terrace and crescent, and others were constructed as paired houses on individual sites. The total cost was £43,000, over £1,000 for each dwelling. These houses were bigger, had a bathroom and were considerably more expensive to rent, at almost 26 shillings a week. They were aimed squarely at the middling and professional classes.

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<sup>31</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1940-1941*, appendix xvi, p.174.



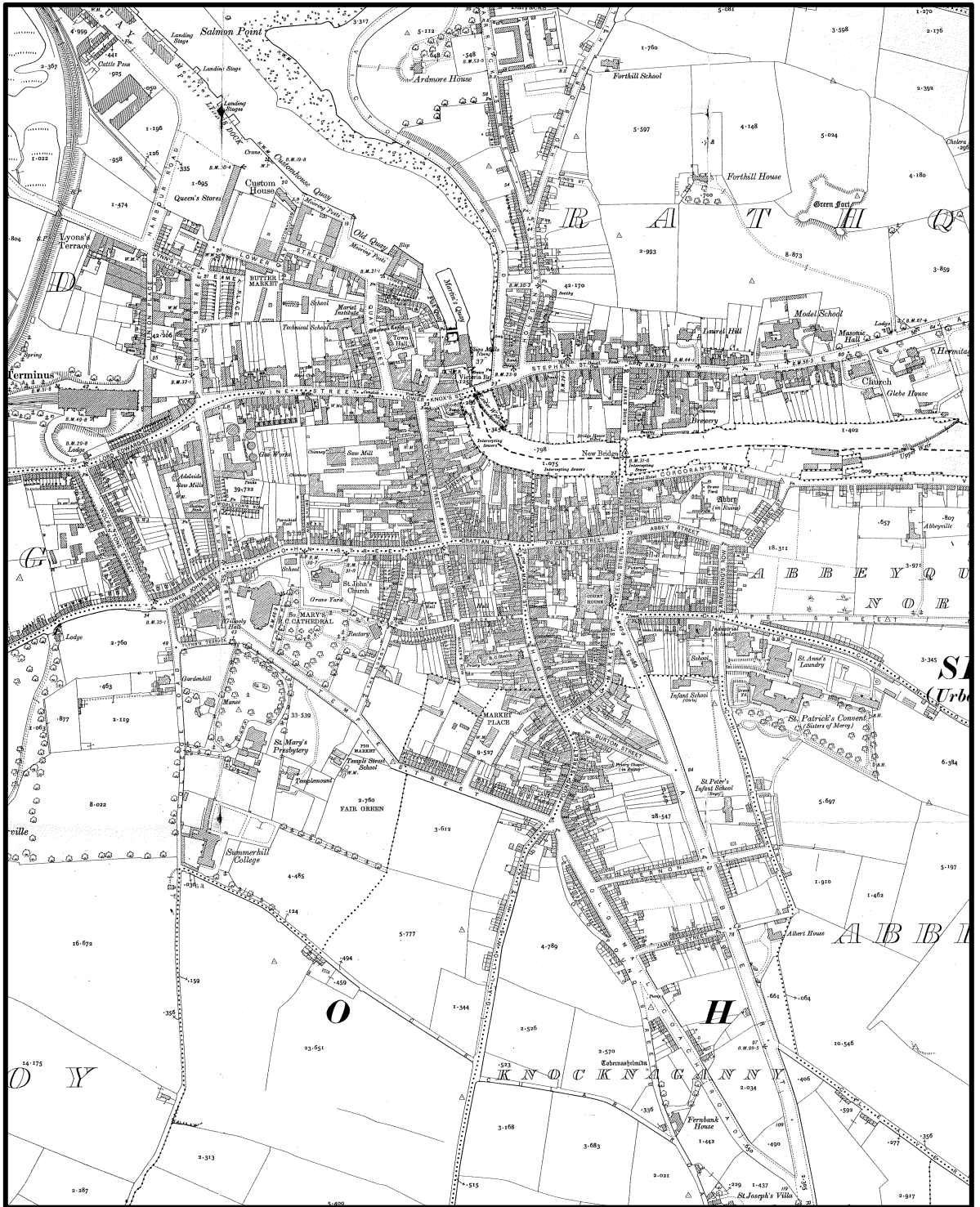


Figure 6.2. Plan of Sligo before the building of the new housing schemes, OS, Six inch, Sligo, Sheet XIII (1910). Note the compact nature of the town centre, and the open greenfield sites very close to the core of the urban area.

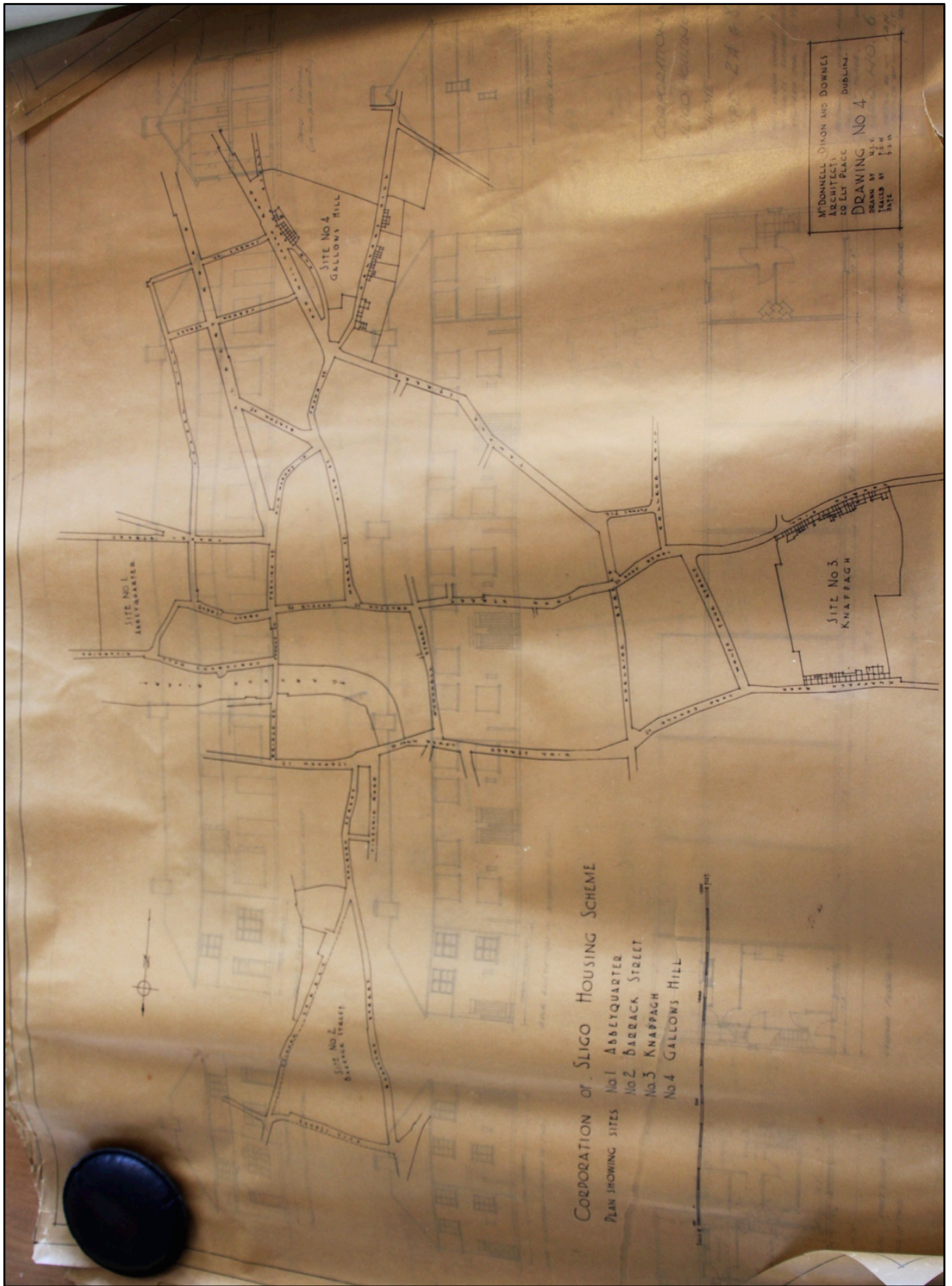


Figure 6.3. Original map of Sligo from architects, McDonnell and Dixon, showing areas selected for the new housing schemes, 1932-1944. Source McDonnell and Dixon Collection, Irish Architectural Archive.. Roll 359.

Year	Scheme Title	New terrace name	Number of houses	Total Scheme cost	Approx. house cost
1923-1925	<b>Ballytivnan and Cleveragh Schemes</b>	Ballytivnan Road (8), and Cleveragh Road (16 houses)	24	£13,082	£545
1929	<b>Cleveragh II scheme</b>	Sleepy Valley (later Fatima Avenue)	28	(This is the combined cost for both schemes)	
<b>1932</b>	<b>Barrack Square scheme</b>	Benbulben Terrace	28 houses	£7,779	£278
1932	<b>Temple Street Scheme</b>	St. Patrick's Terrace	31 houses	£10,816	£348
1933-1934	<b>Abbeyquarter Scheme</b>	St. Anne's Terrace	68 houses	£19,560	£290
1934-1936	<b>Barrack's Street schemes (I &amp; II)</b>	St. John's Tce	78 houses	£20,092	£257
		St. Edward's Tce.	66 houses	£23,335	£300
1934-1935	<b>Knappaghbeg Scheme</b>	Jinks's Avenue	100 houses	£28,681	£286
1936-1937	<b>South Gallows Hill</b>	St Joseph's Terrace	112 houses	£24,388	£217
1939-1940	<b>Garavogue Scheme</b>	Garavogue Villas	136 houses	£60,000	£467
1940-1941	<b>Mail Coach Road Scheme</b>	St. Brigid's Place	114 houses	£58,834	£516
1943-1944	<b>Riverside &amp; Armstrong's Row Scheme</b>	St. Asicus's and St. Joachim's Terraces	38 houses	£22,858	£534
1945	<b>Albert Line Scheme (2 sections)</b>	Pearse Crescent	23 houses	£24,000	£1,045
		St. Muireadach's Terrace	19 houses	£19,451	£1,023
1946-1948	<b>Knappaghbeg II Scheme</b>	Tracey Avenue	106 houses	£67,800	£640
			<b>845 houses</b>		

Figure 6.4. List of housing schemes funded under the 1932 Act and subsequent acts, in Sligo borough areas, 1932-1947, showing dates of construction, number of houses, and tender cost for housing scheme. An approximate cost per house is also given, but not all houses in each scheme cost the same, as there was a slight variation in types, and number of bedrooms.

Sligo's great housing drive ended in 1947-48 with the construction of the 106 houses of the Knappaghbeg II scheme (Tracey Avenue), on the western extremity of the town, although some of these houses were not fully finished until 1949. By the end of the

fifteen-year period, the physical morphology of the town had changed more than it had in the previous 150 years, bringing an end to the insanitary straggle of cabins that had so characterised Sligo. With a total of almost 800 houses erected by 1948, and the re-housing of almost 5,000 people, Sligo's housing drive was seen as a success story and applauded as such at the time.

### **6.3 House types, plans and layout of schemes**

Housing erected by the various municipal authorities in Ireland in the 1920s and 1930s reflected several significant fundamentals of planning. Firstly, it was believed that 'physical, moral and social welfare' could be promoted by upgrading the physical domestic environment of the poorer labouring classes.<sup>32</sup> This moralist train of thought was a consequence of the public health campaigns of the nineteenth century, and the ideas of social reformers such as Jeremy Bentham and Charles Booth. Most of the 'corporation' housing erected in Ireland in the 1930s is readily identifiable today, due to the uniformity of house design, the recognisable layout, and the large number of houses in each of these schemes, which frequently extended over considerable areas. The standard layout of the 1930s house for the working class was driven by contemporary architectural design, and the concern of town planners for 'visual order, harmony, and scale'.<sup>33</sup> McManus argue that there was a belief that 'a careful layout of residential areas, would lead to a development of community and social interaction by stimulating feelings of security and stability'.<sup>34</sup> While this desired social cohesion was dubious at best in the large Dublin estates of the 1930s, in a smaller provincial town like Sligo where the new schemes were built on clearance areas, and the people re-housed close to their old neighbours and families, social cohesion was much more successful. Social segregation was minimal, even though some of the schemes were peripherally located. The compactness of Sligo as well as the concentration of shops and churches in the town centre ensured a daily mix of all classes. The schemes on Forthill were somewhat apart socially, but this area atop a steep hill, always had a distinct identity dating back to the eighteenth century. The one scheme that came in for criticism in terms of its distance from the town centre was that at Garavogue Villas, which was located a half - a-mile east of the main street, on land adjacent to the county jail. However, this relative isolation was as much subjective as real, as the site was a greenfield one, overlooking

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<sup>32</sup> Ruth McManus, *Dublin, 1910-1940: Shaping the city and suburbs* (Dublin, 2002), p. 228.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228

the river and open countryside, yet just 500 yards from the new schemes at St Anne's Terrace, which was never dubbed 'peripheral'.

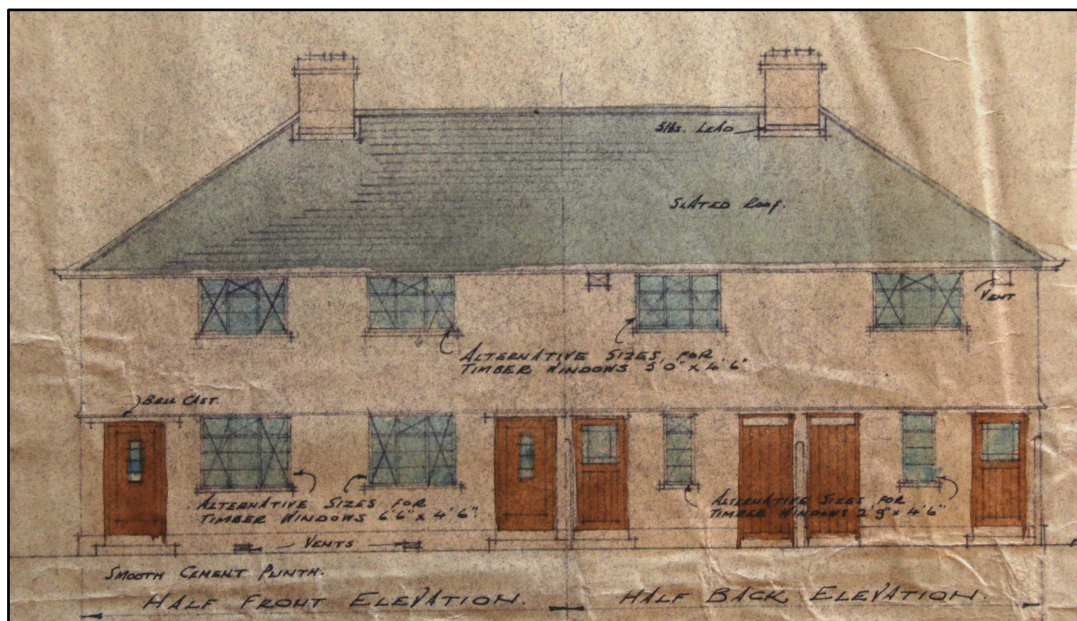


Figure 6.5. Front and rear elevation of block of four houses at Garavogue Villas, Sligo, 1940. Source: Sligo Borough Council Architectural Archive, courtesy of Mr Sean Martin.

The house layouts for the Sligo schemes were designed by McDonnell, Dixon, and Downes, well-known Dublin architects.<sup>35</sup> The contractors for a large proportion of the schemes in the Borough were Kilcawley, Maloney and Taylor. So ubiquitous was the firm, that locals coined the phrase 'God may have made the world, but Kilcawley Maloney and Taylor made Sligo'.

Layout and facilities in the scheme of the 1930s would be considered basic by today's standards, but were a huge improvement on the existing conditions. In Sligo, schemes contained a mixture of different 'types' of house, classified as A, B, C, or D, all of which had slightly different sizes designs and floor area. Each terrace was generally laid out in a long block of four, six or eight dwellings; adjacent dwellings were mirror-imaged in order to accommodate the chimneys in one central pillar. There were two or three bedrooms upstairs, usually separated by simple wooden partitions. Heat was provided by small cast-iron fireplaces in each bedroom, which were frequently overcrowded with several beds for multiple children.

<sup>35</sup> During the 1930s and 1940s the firm did a considerable amount of hospital design and housing design, both public and commercial. The firm's archive containing valuable drawings and plans has been donated to the Irish Architectural Archive.

Downstairs there was a small front ‘parlour’, with the kitchen and living room to the rear. Smaller houses had just one large kitchen-living area downstairs, with a small scullery as an appendix. Dressers and storage units in the new dwellings were free-standing and frequently bought by the family themselves. Coal was usually stored in the cupboard under the stairs, and a tall press in the alcove beside the chimney-breast in the kitchen was used for kitchenware. Most of the new schemes were connected to the electricity supply, but some were not, due to cost. A haphazard supply was often installed afterwards, with subsequent electrical fires being problematic. Electricity use for domestic work as opposed to merely light, was slow to take off in Ireland. In 1923, there were 40,000 houses in Dublin city, but only 13,000 had electricity installed.<sup>36</sup>

Running cold water was provided to all new dwellings. The lavatory was still outside the main body of the house; it was sometimes contained in a small recess beside the back door which was open to the fresh air, eliminating odour, and sometimes as a stand-alone facility in the yard. Significantly, all lavatories had flush toilets attached to new main sewers, a big improvement on the older privies and dry toilets in the condemned areas. Water was supplied only to the kitchen sink, as bathrooms were not a feature of the Sligo schemes due to cost. Bathing was generally done once a week in a galvanised tub in front of the kitchen range. A large range was provided in the kitchen for cooking and heating water, and the kitchen sink was typically ceramic-stone, and stood alone under the kitchen window. The provision of running fresh water was considered a major achievement. In 1946, in Sligo borough, 81 per cent of all dwellings had a piped water supply, but only 17 per cent of private dwellings had a fixed bath. In contrast, in the remainder rural area of county Sligo, only 6 per cent of the households were connected to a piped water supply and less than 2 per cent had a fixed, plumbed bath.<sup>37</sup> Sligo was ahead of some of the other provincial towns in this sanitary respect: Kilkenny had 76 per cent of its houses connected to a water supply, whereas Tralee had only 60 per cent, and Wexford 77 per cent in 1946.<sup>38</sup>

In terms of sanitation, Sligo town in 1946 could claim that 96 per cent of its private dwellings had ‘flush lavatories’, although only 37 per cent of these were classified as

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<sup>36</sup> Mona Hearn, *Below stairs: domestic service remembered* (Dublin, 1993), p. 109.

<sup>37</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1946*, vol. iv, table 29, p. 173, Number of private dwellings in urban and rural districts...classified according to water supply.

<sup>38</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1946*, vol., iv, table 29, p. 166-173.

being 'indoors'. The exact designation of 'indoors' is unclear: most of the alcove type lavatories in the corporation houses, while under the roof, were outside the back door. Kilkenny had 92 per cent of its lavatories classified as 'flush type', but only 31 per cent were classified as 'indoor lavatories'. Galway had more success with indoor flush toilets in 1946, when 55 per cent of its dwelling could boast of them.<sup>39</sup> However, the rural area of county Sligo, comprising almost 13,000 dwellings, remained abysmally bad in terms of sanitary facilities; only 6 per cent of the homes had flush toilets, and only 5 per cent of these were indoors. Throughout the 26 counties only 29 per cent of private dwellings had a individual piped supply in 1946. There were still some 60,000 dwellings with a shared supply, and 365,800 dwellings with no piped water at all, relying on streams, wells, and public street pumps.<sup>40</sup>

Construction standards and designs of Irish local authority housing were influenced by British experience in planning, most notably the garden-suburbs idea promulgated by the Tudor Walters report.<sup>41</sup> They were also influenced in practical ways by the limitations of using only as far as possible, material produced in the Irish Free State, which was one of the conditions imposed by the Department. The layout of the schemes was reasonably aesthetic, and long blocks of terraced housing were to be avoided. Many of the new houses erected in Sligo had quite long gardens, dictated by the land-holding layout, and the idea that vegetables could be grown in them. House walls were constructed of mass concrete, capable of being erected quickly, and roofs were tiled with concrete cement tiles, Irish made. (Many houses still have the original roof tiles in place, functioning perfectly after almost 80 years). There were generally two windows on the front elevation of the houses, and three on the back. Windows and doors were contentious points with new tenants, as material quality declined as the war shortages took hold. Early schemes had cast iron windows, prone to leaks and warping. Wooden windows frequently rotted quickly, or became distorted with the adverse weather. This was a fact of life for all settlements in the Atlantic seaboard. Front doors apparently were more durable, and the number of complaints noted in the local newspapers of the time refer mostly to windows! Some schemes had wrought iron front gates, and concrete boundary walls to the front, with iron railings dividing the gardens

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., table 44, p. 188.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., table 29, p. 166-73.

<sup>41</sup> The Tudor Walters Report was commissioned by the British government in 1917 to set standards and to produce model plans and specifications for the building industry, pending the house building programme which was to start at the end of hostilities. This report contained plans and illustrations of approved building construction methods, as typified in the 1919 Housing Manual.

between houses. Back gardens were more simply divided; concrete pillars and strand-wire were typically employed.

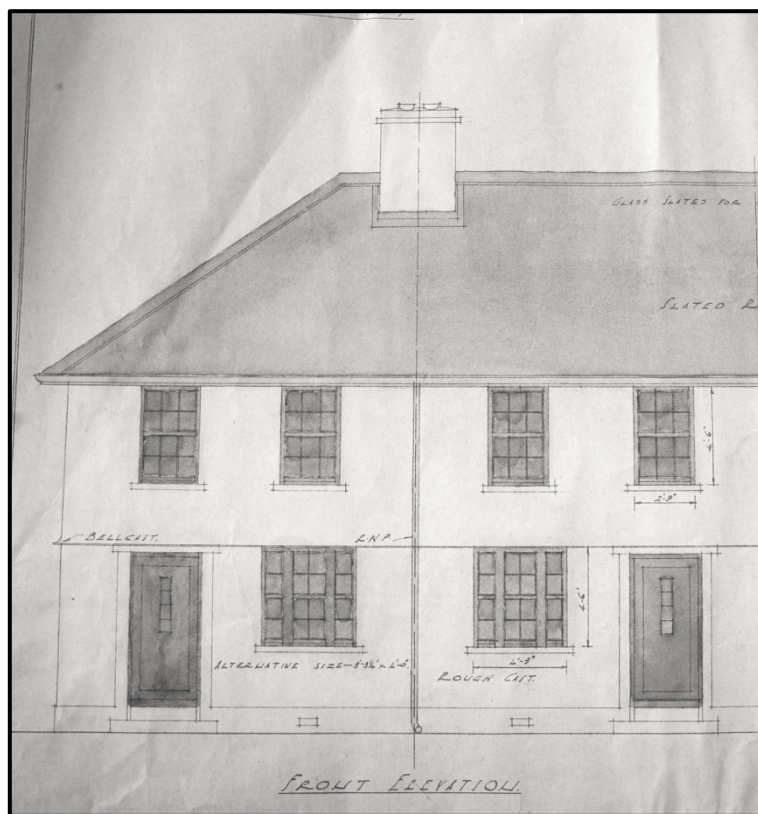


Figure 6.6. Elevation of 'better-class' house at Temple Street, Sligo, 1933, as drawn by the architects. Source: Sligo Borough Council, courtesy of Sean Martin, borough architect.

Long-term maintenance problems plagued the Sligo housing schemes right up to the 1980s. The poor quality of materials used during WWII led to difficulties particularly with the windows and doors, which were already rotting by the mid-1940s. One particularly deadly flaw was the use of thin wooden partitions between all the upstairs bedrooms. This was a major fire-hazard, and the contemporary newspapers carry frequent reports of houses being gutted in minutes.<sup>42</sup> The mass concrete walls of the houses often exhibited large cracks, exacerbated by the lack of solid foundations, and low-quality wartime materials. The corporation was frequently slow to make repairs, and maintenance issues were a constant source of aggravation between the body and its tenants. Lack of financial input led to a significant deterioration in houses remaining in council ownership by the 1970s.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 21 Nov. 1959, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 8 Nov. 1974, p. 9; 30 May 1975, p. 1, also 13 Jan. 1978, p. 1.



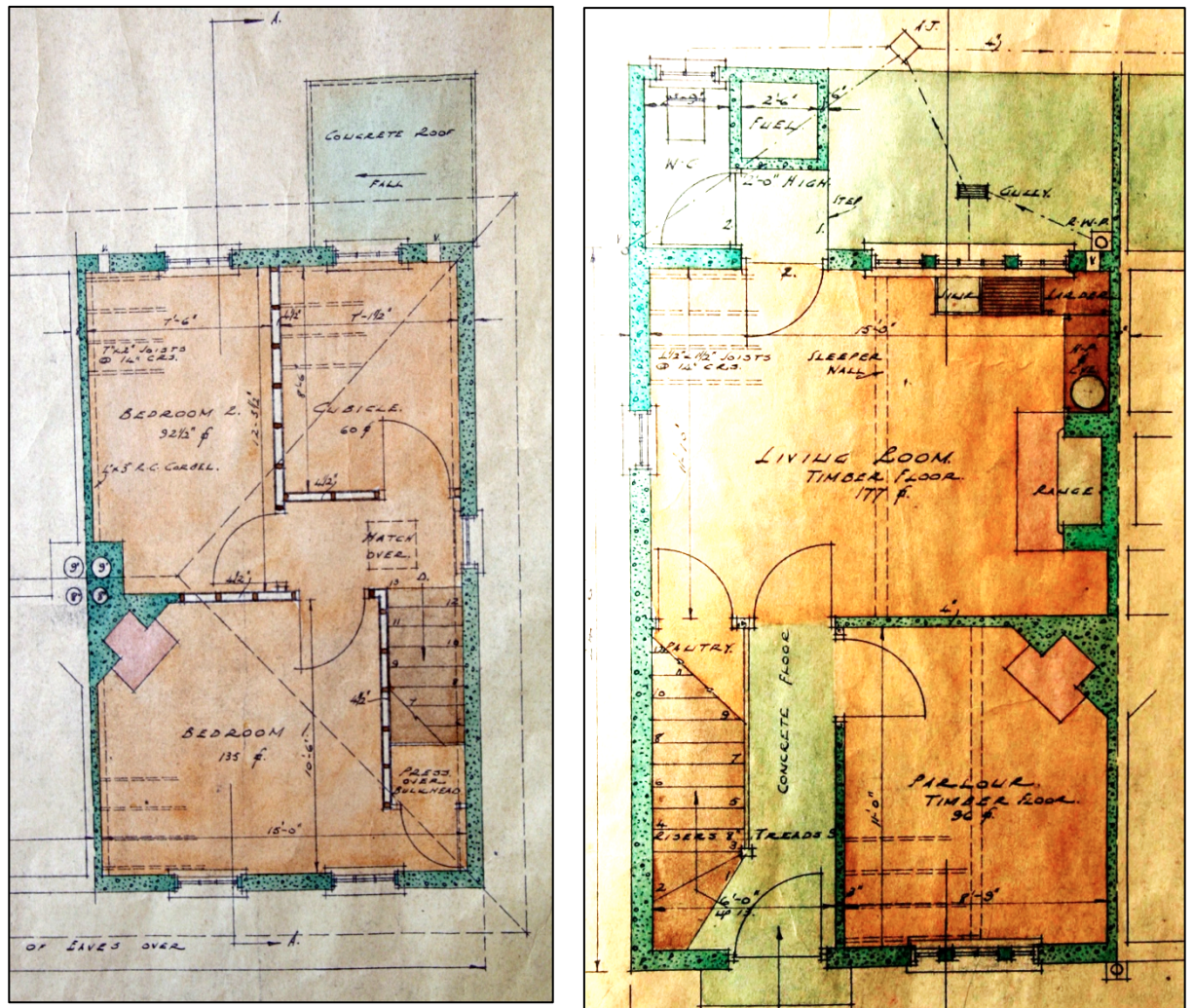


Figure 6.7. Left, bedroom plan of new house at St. Brigid's Place, Sligo, 1941. Note the fireplace in the main bedroom, and two small windows in the front elevation. On the right is the ground plan for houses at Garavogue Villas, completed in 1940, showing a variation on a similar plan, with the toilet outside, but under a covered alcove, and the addition of a hot water boiler beside the kitchen range. Source: Courtesy of Mr Seán Martin, Sligo Borough Council architect.

The original site layouts for each individual scheme of the 1930s were often determined by the topography. Forthill, to the north of the town, and South Gallows Hill, both posed problems due to their steep gradient, and the amount of embanking required to keep the houses on level ground. During the planning process the architects frequently submitted several different scheme layouts, before final approval. Numerous factors came into play during this stage of the process, including site density, economies of scale, garden layouts, and placing of new street frontages. While the houses themselves showed very little variation in design, the layout of the Sligo schemes was generally pleasing, with short terraces of six or eight houses, small front gardens, and varying

sized back gardens. Much attention was paid to light and fresh air, and distances between the blocks were generous.

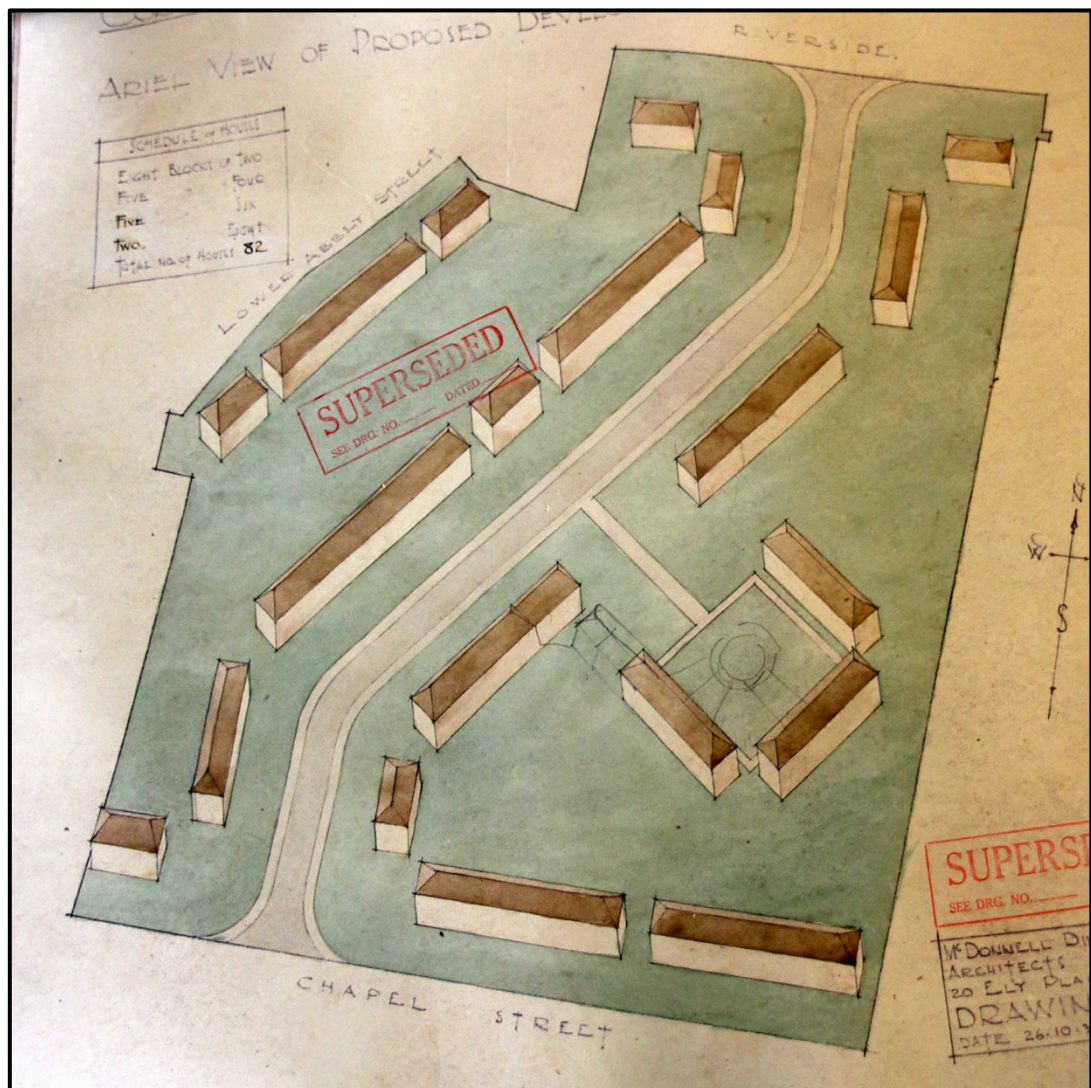


Figure 6.8. The site-layout for the Abbeyquarter scheme, 1934 (St Anne's Terrace). This was not the final layout, and some houses were omitted, and other added. Source: McDonnell Dixon collection, Irish Architectural Archive, 2008/81. Roll 394. By kind permission of the general manager.

#### 6.4 Designation of clearance areas and land acquisition difficulties

Corporation procedures between 1932 and 1936 were mostly taken up with the legal difficulties of land acquisition and compulsory purchases. The state compensation scheme was an attractive one to some landholders and owners of slum housing, so inevitably there were problems, with some owners holding out for more money and

blocking purchases. The complicated relationships between lessors and lessees was also problematic, with the corporation's solicitor, Frank Armstrong, noting that some of the worst houses had been built in the 1790s, and tenant leases were produced that were over 150 years old.<sup>44</sup>

Under the 1932 Housing Act, the local authority was obliged to first declare an area or specific houses as a 'slum-clearance area', in order to avail of the subsidy of 66.6 per cent towards each house from the Department of Local Government. Sligo corporation started the ball rolling early in July 1932, identifying and designating clearance areas within the borough which would qualify under the terms of the new act. It was proposed and resolved unanimously to 'acquire the sites as enumerated and defined on the map for the housing schemes, and the Department be requested to employ Messrs McDonnell and Dixon to prepare plans and layout site plans at a fee to be fixed by the department'.<sup>45</sup> The map is not extant, but the areas to be utilised for re-housing were described in some detail, as identified in figure 6.3.

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***Sites selected for new housing schemes in 1932***

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1. Site at the corner of Circular Road, at South Gallows Hill
  2. Site along west side of South Gallows Hill
  3. Site along the east side of South Gallows Hill
  4. Site at Abbeyquarter bounded on the north by the Riverside, west by Lower Abbey Street, and south by the Gaol Road.
  5. Site known as 'Canteen Gardens', and triangular portion of the Barracks site
  6. Site on the east side of Holborn Hill extending up to Bishop's Terrace
  7. Site at Knappaghbeg, bounded on north by Knappagh Road, and south by Church Hill
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**Figure 6.9.** List of sites selected by Sligo Corporation for new housing schemes in 1932. Source, *Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 21 July 1932, p. 250. (LGOV/835)*.

These sites were to form the core areas for house building over the next decade and a half. Further sites would be added at later dates, but none would be as large as these initial clearance areas. A letter from the Minister, Seán T. O'Kelly, in August 1932, suggested that McDonnell & Dixon Architects, should be employed by the corporation to design and layout their proposed schemes. Fees should then be submitted to the

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<sup>44</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 30 Nov. 1940.

<sup>45</sup> *Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 5 July 1932, p. 24.*

Department.<sup>46</sup> This experienced Dublin architectural practice would become synonymous with corporation housing in Sligo, in effect carrying out almost all of the design, site-layout and surveying works in the borough during the period of this study. Founded in 1917 by L. A. McDonnell, the firm did a considerable amount of public housing work in the 1930s and 1940s, being a ‘preferred contractor’ for the Department of Local Government during this period.<sup>47</sup>

A series of compulsory purchase orders were made in 1932 to acquire lands for public housing along the river and the Gaol Road, in order to advance the Abbeyquarter North scheme.<sup>48</sup> Land was also acquired at Barrack Street, in the North Ward. Compulsory purchase was seen as an attack on property rights by many of those affected by the clearance schemes. The obligation on the owners of condemned property to clear the sites was seen as an onerous imposition.

The legal intrigue behind the complicated compulsory purchase schemes is illustrated by one drawn-out case involving the very bad housing on South Gallows Hill. In August 1932 the corporation started the process of issuing a clearance order and compensation-purchase orders for these houses and lands, but met some stiff opposition along the way from private landowners. John O’Hara of Pound Street, (a butcher and cattle dealer), submitted a claim for £850 in respect of his property on South Gallows Hill and Mail Coach Road. He had possession of a field of five acres, and eight houses on the Mail Coach Road and six houses on South Gallows Hill, which included his own house and the house next to it.<sup>49</sup> This example illustrates that many of the insanitary houses were owned or leased by local businessmen and merchants of a better-off class, who were quite active in the rental and sub-letting markets. By October, following protracted letter-writing, O’Hara had been offered £300 for his property at South Gallows Hill, with the corporation instructing its solicitor to commence a compulsory purchase order on the extensive property, if O’Hara failed to accept what they considered a generous offer under the state compensation scheme. The convoluted pattern of land-ownership is revealed in a further letter of 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1932, which notes that John O’Hara was in effect, the main lessee of the lands at the Mail Coach

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<sup>46</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 15 Aug. 1932, p. 262.

<sup>47</sup> The firm is still in existence and in 2008 it donated a large and unique archive of drawings to the Irish Architectural Archive (Acc. 2008/81). I am grateful for the IAA’s permission to reproduce some of their Sligo drawings in this thesis.

<sup>48</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1932-1933*, p. 109.

<sup>49</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 15 Aug. 1932, p. 262.

Road and South Gallows Hill. The actual owners were the Rev T.S. Stoney, The Rectory, Tashinny, Mullingar, and Miss Emily A. Phillips, 108-115 West 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York.<sup>50</sup> Many of these owners were frequently only vaguely aware of the nature of their holdings, with families having inherited many detached parcels of lands over the years, after the break-up of the O'Connor-Sligo estate in the late seventeenth century.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, all legal norms under the various acts had to be observed before the corporation could activate the compulsory purchase orders. This frequently led to hold-ups and delays.

By October 1932 the corporation had agreed to pay £300 compensation for the purchase of lands at Barrack Street and Abbeyquarter, clearing the way for the issuing of tenders for the construction of 52 houses in Abbeyquarter in December 1932. However, the minister for Local Government summoned the corporation to a meeting over the excessive prices offered in compensation for the required land at Barrack Street. He instead directed that clearance orders should be obtained, which resulted in a lower compensation price being paid. Finally, a tender was issued in February 1933 for 64 four-bedroom houses on Barrack Street.<sup>52</sup> Despite the legal mire of site acquisition, steady progress was made in 1932. By October, McDonnell and Dixon architects had surveyed and taken all the necessary levels at the four major sites in Sligo, Abbeyquarter/ Riverside, Barrack Street, Knappaghbeg and South Gallows Hill.

In reality the owners and landlords of most slum and condemned housing in Sligo were small-scale investors and middle-men, who used these houses to supplement their relatively small incomes, and frequently lived in one of the better houses themselves. Many had inherited the properties, as can be seen from the O'Hara case. At the Knappaghbeg site (later Jinks' Ave.) on the compulsory purchase documents drawn up in 1933, George Williams is listed as owning 27 out of the 70 properties in the clearance area. However, there were several tenants on the same site who are listed as the owners of three or four other house adjacent to their own home.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 2 Oct. 1932, p. 295.

<sup>51</sup> Mary O'Dowd, *Power, politics and land: Sligo, 1562-1688* (Belfast, 1991), p. 134.

<sup>52</sup> Tender advertisements, 1932-1945, Sligo County Archives.

<sup>53</sup> Map entitled, 'Knappagh compulsory Purchase order, 1933, for Sligo Corporation', in the IAA, records of the McDonnell and Dixon architectural practice. (Not fully catalogued). Catalogue no. 2008/81. Rolls 105 & 123.

## 6.5. The first Sligo schemes, 1932

Sligo's first major housing schemes of the 1930s had been proposed before the sanctioning of the 1931 and 1932 Acts, and were discussed at corporation meetings in the autumn of 1930.<sup>54</sup> Originally, these schemes were intended to be funded under the terms of the 1929 Housing Bill, however, the proposed two separate schemes of 59 houses were eventually funded under the terms of the 1931 Act, and the amended 1932 Act. The corporation consequently had provisional plans drawn up for the old Barracks Yard, on Forthill, as early as January 1931.<sup>55</sup> This site was already in state ownership, having been home to the former military barracks constructed in 1824. The extensive buildings were vacated by the British army in 1909, and burnt to the ground in July 1922 during the Civil War. In the absence of any ground rent disputes, the corporation decided to use this site as a trial run for implementing the new house-building programme. The finished houses were to be let at low subsidised rents, more affordable to the poorer classes, many of whom lived in the crumbling dwellings adjacent to the site. A greenfield site along the southern side of Temple Street, also in corporation ownership, was selected for a 'better-class' house, with higher rental costs.

In January 1931, the Department of Local Government examined provisional layouts for the Barrack Yard scheme but it was not satisfied with the plans which had to be altered. The proposed bathrooms were omitted, although the indoor toilets were retained. The compulsory purchase order was made on the site, and tenders were issued on the 21<sup>st</sup> June 1931 for the erection of 28 houses. The architects were McDonnell & Dixon, and the houses were deigned to a standard plan, to speed up and facilitate construction.<sup>56</sup> Two types of houses were designed, referred to as type no. 4, and type no. 1, differentiated only by the layout and square footage.

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<sup>54</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 20 Nov. 1930.

<sup>55</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 24 Jan. 1931, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Tender advertisements, 1932-1945. Sligo County Archives.

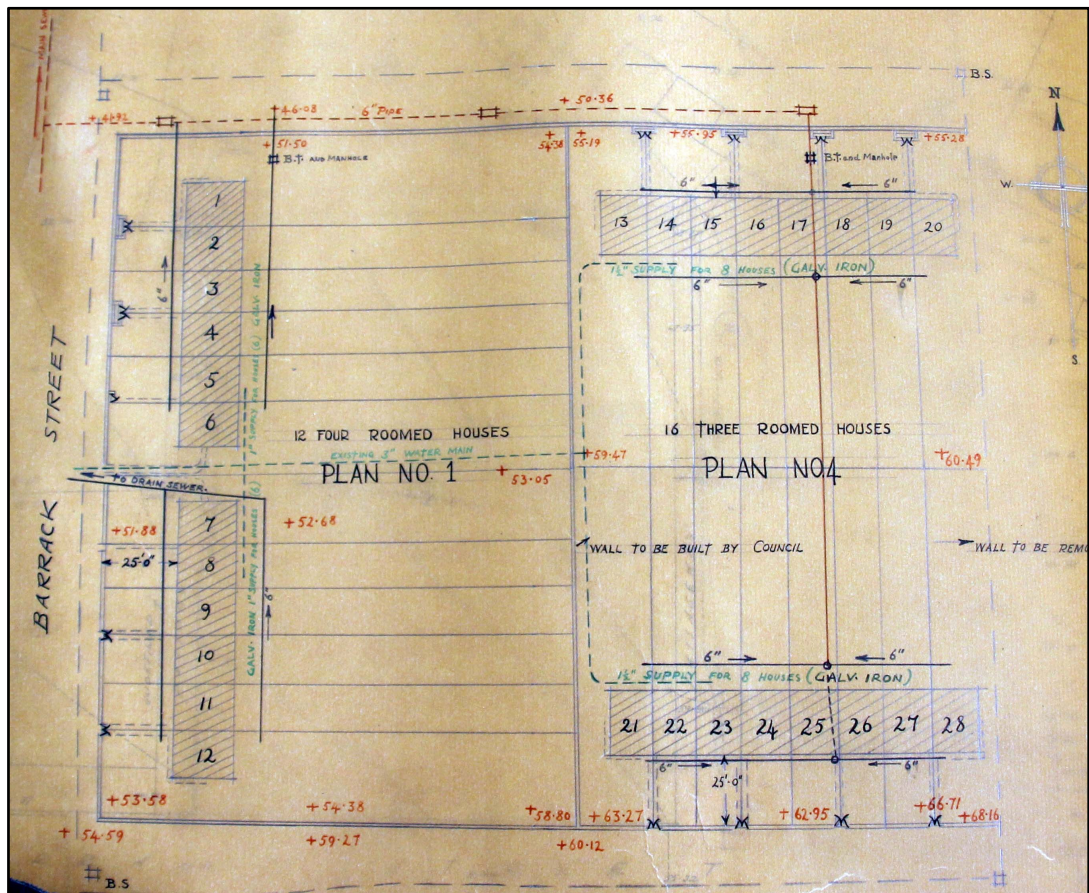


Figure 6.10. Initial layout for the Barrack Yard scheme, as drawn by McDonnell and Dixon in 1932. Source: Irish Architectural Archive, McDonnell Dixon collection, (TO4535). Roll 525. (individual drawings are un-catalogued as yet).

Several tenders were received, and the corporation accepted that of £7,779 from Murphy and Sons, Athlone, in July 1931.<sup>57</sup> This was on condition that Irish slates were used on the houses, and that the price per house-type number one would be lowered by £1 14s 6d.<sup>58</sup> The remnants of the old barrack buildings had been demolished in 1926, but the wall around the site was intact, and it was decided to build the scheme within the perimeter of the old wall, in order to save costs. By January 1932, twelve of the houses were ready for slating, and the dwellings were fully occupied by the end of that year. However, the houses did not have electricity, which was not installed until late 1943.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 5 July 1931, pp 129-130.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 21 July 1943.

<b>Rent and house type</b>	<b>Scheme</b>
4s 6d for No. 4 type house. (16 houses)	Barrack Yard
6s 0d for No. 1 type house. (12 houses)	Barrack Yard
10s 0d for C7 type house (20 houses)	Temple Street
17s 6d for D9 type house. (11 houses)	Temple Street

**Figure 6.11. Rents set for two classes of Corporation housing, by Sligo Corporation in 1931. Source: Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 14-Jul-1931, p.131, (SLHC/LGOV/838).**

The fixing of an economic weekly rent for the new houses was a source of concern to most councillors. On the 13<sup>th</sup> July 1931 a special meeting was called to clarify what the most appropriate rents would be for the two different schemes, and the different types of houses in each scheme. The quality and size of the houses was reflected in the variations in the rent. After much discussion, the meeting resolved on the rents to be charged for the proposed houses (see figure 6.11).<sup>60</sup>

The Temple Street site was also partly in corporation hands, being adjacent to the town's fair green. The site fronted the main road meaning that sewer and water connections were immediately available, and the road building cost would be negligible.<sup>61</sup> There was to be 24 feet between the street and the houses, with substantial gardens front and rear. The scheme was classified as 'better-class housing', with five rooms, and a bathroom. Rents were to be set at 14s or 15s a week. However, the plans for the scheme were rejected by the DLGPH in April 1931, when it requested that the bathrooms be removed.<sup>62</sup> The corporation objected strongly to this, but eventually reduced the proposed number of houses in the scheme to 31 houses. The final specification was decided after much delay, and tenders were issued in July 1931.<sup>63</sup> The minister accepted the tender of £10, 816 from Molloy and Son for the erection of 31 houses at Temple Street, on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1931.<sup>64</sup> Work started in September, with the houses ready for letting in September 1932. Many of the tenants in the Temple Street houses were not labouring class, but higher-paid public servants, such as Gardaí and higher-waged clerical workers, with secure employment and disposable income.

<sup>60</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 14 July 1931, p. 131.

<sup>61</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 20 Jan. 1931.

<sup>62</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 23 May 1931, p.1.

<sup>63</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 22 Aug. 1931, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 19 Aug. 1931, p. 141.



The thorny question of selecting tenants for the Barracks Yard scheme came before the corporation at a special private meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> August 1932. Priority was given to those who had been displaced by the demolition of the slum housing, and those judged most in need. The tenants were selected by a vote of the corporation; their names were published in the *Sligo Champion* the following week, and there was inevitable disappointment for those who had not secured a house.<sup>65</sup> On 10<sup>th</sup> August 1932 the corporation unanimously voted to name the Barracks Yard Scheme ‘Benbulbin Terrace’ in honour of ‘Sligo’s Noble Six’, six anti-treaty troops who were killed in a clash with the Free State Army on Benbulbin, in September 1922.<sup>66</sup> On 20<sup>th</sup> September 1932 tenants were selected for the Temple Street Scheme.<sup>67</sup> It was also resolved that the houses be named ‘St. Patrick’s Terrace’, although it had originally been proposed that the scheme be called ‘Congress Terrace’ to commemorate the Eucharistic Congress of that year.<sup>68</sup> The selection of these tenants was not as contentious, as the rents were high enough to preclude all but the middle-class from affording the rents.

## 6.6 Progress and problems – The initial push up to the outbreak of war

Following the success of the Barracks Yard and Temple Street schemes, the corporation forged onwards. In December 1932 the Department of Local Government sanctioned loans for the Abbeyquarter scheme, in the East Ward, (later to become St Anne’s Terrace), and the older houses in the area were condemned at the same time. This procedure triggered the drawing-down of subsidies to enable the construction work to proceed, and the compulsory purchase order was passed by resolution in August 1933.<sup>69</sup> Plans were drawn up for 68 houses, and tenders were issued for an initial phase of 52 dwelling in November 1932. The second-lowest tender, for £15,163, from Kilcawley Maloney and Taylor was accepted in February 1933, ‘as they are a Sligo firm, and as their tender was only slightly higher than the lowest tender. The corporation is also

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 Aug. 1932, p.258. The names of the head of households, afterwards published in the *Sligo Champion* were given as; Joseph McMorrow (17); Michael Clancy (17); Patrick Kilgallon (17); Stephen Fallon (14); Pa Rooney (14); J.J. Rooney, (13); Jim Smith (13); Pat Chrystal (13); M. Kenroy (12); Michael Scanlon (12); James McGarry (12); Michael Armstrong (12); Hugh Flynn (11); Hugh Costello (11); Nellie Maughan (11); Sly Rooney (11); John Creighton (10); Owen Johnston (10); W.J. Edgar (10); Edward Wallace (10); Martin Kelly (10); James Fox (10); Patrick McMorrow (10); John Meldrum (10); Martin Kelly (9); L. Nellaney (9); Mrs. Bree (9); John McMorrow (9). The number in brackets after the name indicates number of votes each applicant family received from the councillors.

<sup>66</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 10 Aug. 1932, p. 260.

<sup>67</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 26 Sep. 1932, pp 274-5.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 Aug. 1935, p. 356.

aware that the firm are a competent and genuine firm of contractors'.<sup>70</sup> Tenants were selected in February 1933, and the first houses were occupied by that October, comprising families whose houses were about to be demolished to allow the remainder of the scheme to progress.<sup>71</sup> Further tenders were issued for the second phase of sixteen houses in March 1933.<sup>72</sup> A tender for the installation of electric light in the houses was also issued in May. A total of 56 families had been allocated to the completed houses by February 1934, and the entire scheme was finalised by that June. It was named 'St Anne's Terrace', as it was located beside the large commercial laundry of that same name, run by the Sisters of Mercy.

Each of the Abbeyquarter houses cost £290 to erect, with the subsequent rent being set at 4s 6d per week. In January 1936, Alderman J. Fallon, a tenant in one of the new houses claimed that the condition of the new dwellings was 'deplorable'. His own house was flooded with rain, and others were in the same condition. According to him, a bad type of window had been used, and leakage was inevitable. This was to be a recurring theme with many of the corporation houses over the years.

In August 1933, the Knappaghbeg clearance order was issued for old houses lining Knappagh Road and Church Hill on the western edge of the town.<sup>73</sup> Tenders were issued for an extensive new scheme on the partially green-field site containing 153 houses in December of the same year, and McDonnell & Dixon issued several site layout drawings for consideration by the corporation. However, the Department objected to the high density of the scheme, and it was re-advertised for tender in June 1934, with a reduced total of 100 dwellings. The successful tender went to Kilcawley Maloney and Taylor for £28,681, after a lower tenderer withdrew. The 100 houses in the Knappaghbeg scheme were completed by November 1935 at a cost of £27,705, and were named Jinks's Avenue, honouring the former TD, Alderman John Jinks. The first tenants moved in before Christmas 1935, and rents were set in February 1936, at 4/6 per week for 80 five-roomed houses, and 3/6 for 20 smaller houses, making them affordable for the lower-wage tenants.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 21 Dec. 1932, p. 320.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 20 Oct. 1933, p. 41.

<sup>72</sup> *Irish Press*, 25 Mar. 1933.

<sup>73</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1933-1934*, p. 122.

<sup>74</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 2 Feb. 1936, p. 86.

By November 1935, the *Irish Press* could report that ‘Sligo has taken full advantage of the government’s slum clearance and housing policy’.<sup>75</sup> ‘For many years this beautiful western town has been affected by the evil of unsightly and unhealthy slum dwellings, but within the past year the corporation have made clearance orders in respect of about 400 dwellings, the occupants of which will be transferred to the new buildings’.<sup>76</sup> Sligo’s determined progress was clearly not going unnoticed.

### **The Forthill schemes**

Sligo’s second major scheme sanctioned in 1933 was that on Forthill, covering the large area between Barrack Street, Holborn Hill (also known as North Gallows Hill), and Duck Street. Historically this was the area of worst housing in the town, and had the most needy tenants.<sup>77</sup> This project was known as the Barrack Street scheme, and is not to be confused with the earlier Barrack Yard scheme (Benbulbin Terrace) which it eventually surrounded. This extensive scheme of 144 houses, one of the biggest in the country at that time, took place in two separate stages between 1934 and 1936, and eventually became two building contracts, St John’s Terrace (66 houses), and St Edward’s Terrace (78 houses).

A clearance and demolition order was made in March 1933, followed by the compulsory purchase order on part of the site in June 1933.<sup>78</sup> The corporation considered the tenders at its meeting in February 1933, and awarded the contract to Messers Keavney and Harte for the sum of £20,092. Approval was subsequently received from the Department for this scheme, at a cost of £285-1-10 per house.<sup>79</sup> Some dispute arose as to the exact variation in building costs, due to the steepness of the hill on which construction had to take place. It was agreed to provide concrete steps from the gardens into the houses, so as to maintain level roof-lines, which was a more efficient and economical construction method. The average house price for the scheme was £300. The first of the 66 houses in the Barrack Street scheme, later named as ‘St John’s Terrace’, were occupied in mid-1934.<sup>80</sup> All of the allocated tenants were moved from the immediate area, with only two tenants being from outside the area, thus fulfilling the terms and spirit of the 1932 Act. But overcrowding was still problematic in

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<sup>75</sup> *Irish Press*, 25 Nov. 1935, p.4.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1933-1934*, p. 122.

<sup>78</sup> Tender advertisements 1932-1945. Sligo County Archives.

<sup>79</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1931-1932*, appendix xxxiii, p. 265.

<sup>80</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 25 Jan. 1934, p. 75.

these new houses. In September 1941, it was reported in the *Sligo Champion* that in one of the newly-erected houses in St John's Terrace three distinct families were living, comprising 14 people. Despite legislation to prevent this type of overcrowding, it was a common occurrence to have at least two generations of the same family living in the new houses. But more frequently, it was the issue of very large families, some with up to twelve or fourteen children, which was at the root of overcrowding statistics. However, overcrowding as measured by the medical officer was not always experienced objectively by these large families, who generally thought the new houses were so much bigger and brighter than the old, that they had more than sufficient room!

The remainder of the Barrack Street scheme was to proceed in a piecemeal fashion. The second part of it was not started until January 1936, when 78 new houses were approved. The scheme was put to tender in June 1936, the tender of Messrs Kilcawley, Maloney and Taylor, at £23,335 being accepted. Construction was underway by the end of 1936, when the council could report that the 'site is cleared, and the roads laid out, and the putting-in of foundations has commenced'.<sup>81</sup> The local loans fund sanctioned a loan of £25,705 in October 1936 for the completion of the houses.<sup>82</sup> By April 1937, the six blocks were in various states of completion, and there were over 50 men working on the site.<sup>83</sup> All the houses were roofed and slated by August 1937 and electrification was completed in September. Tenants were allocated to some of the first completed houses by mid 1937, but some families had run into serious arrears by December, with one tenant owing £3-18-9s, arrears of over ten weeks.<sup>84</sup> Further tenant allocation was approved by the corporation in May 1938, and after the debacle of other allocations, which resulted in the Sligo housing enquiry of 1934, this process was clearer and targeted at those who were inhabiting slum dwellings in the immediate neighbourhood. Notwithstanding some delays with the portion of the scheme facing Holborn Hill, construction was fully completed by 1940. They were eventually named St Edward's Terrace, in honour of Dr. Edward Doorly, the then Catholic bishop of Elphin, (1926-1950).

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 14 Oct.1936, p. 116.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 7 Oct.1936, p. 93.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 12 Apr. 1937, p. 286.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 12 Dec 1937.

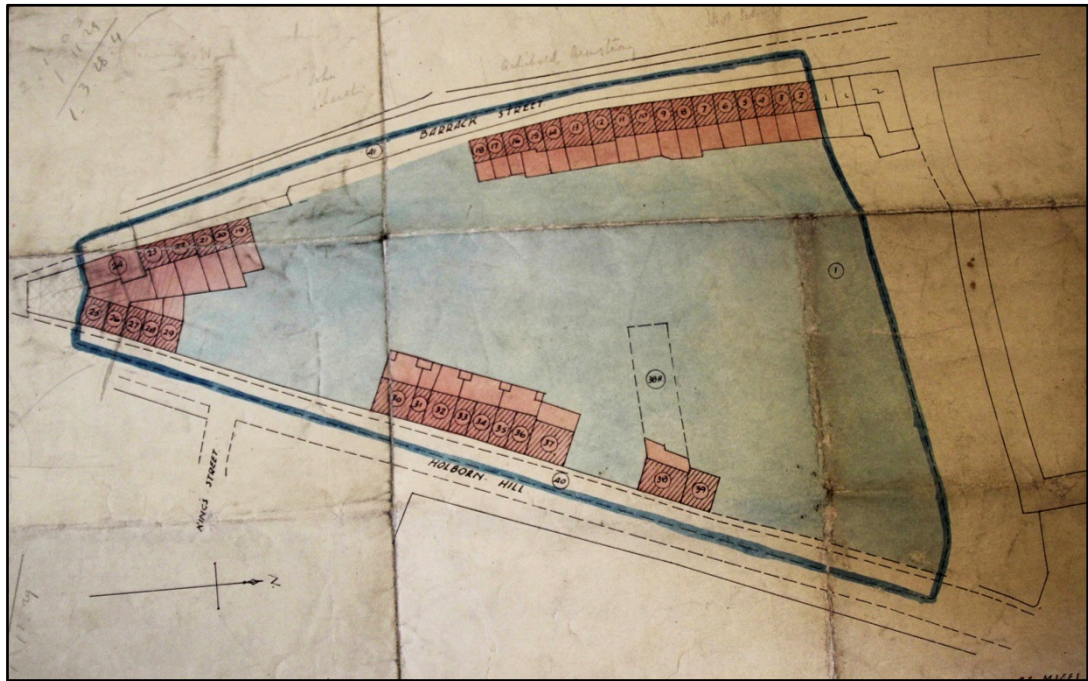


Figure 6.12. The clearance map and orders for the Barrack Street scheme, 1935. Source: Irish Architectural Archive, McDonnell Dixon collection, TO 4535, Roll 525. (individual drawings are uncatalogued as yet).

It has been noted that in some of the new schemes of the 1930s, social facilities were sadly lacking, but Forthill had one advantage. It was already home to a four-roomed primary school, built in 1860 by a local Catholic merchant, specifically to foster education in this poorer area.<sup>85</sup> This school, much dilapidated by the 1940s, was replaced entirely in 1942 with a modern building of six classrooms, capable of accommodating the greatly increased number of children in the new houses on Forthill.<sup>86</sup> The cost of this school was £6,659, and much of the finance came from central government, with some £700 raised by local efforts.<sup>87</sup> There were no Catholic churches on the north side of the river, so Forthill residents attended the cathedral in Temple Street or the Dominican Friary in High Street, in common with all classes of the town.

By March 1936, Sligo corporation had erected 154 houses, and over twenty-two clearance orders were passed in the same year for the borough, indicating the appetite for change.<sup>88</sup> Multiple demolition orders were also passed in the same year for Sligo borough.<sup>89</sup> Both 1934 and 1935 are notable for the large volume of clearance and

<sup>85</sup> *Sligo Independent*, 17 July 1875.

<sup>86</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 16 May 1942.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1935-1936*, p. 128.

<sup>89</sup> These included Water Lane, Cartron Hill, Abbeyquarter, Ramsey's Row, Riverside, Middleton's Row, Pound Street, Pound Lane, Harmony Hill, Back Lane, Cleveragh, Smith's Row, Holborn Street, King's

demolition orders nationally; in excess of 75 were made, though not all demolitions were actually executed. Sligo corporation paid £247 in compensation for the 93 acres of land it compulsorily purchased in the same period.

Sligo had few large tenement houses, but the two most notable ones were the old 'Lungy House', formerly a revenue barracks, and the 'Hibernian Hall', in Market Street. A council inquiry in February 1936 noted that the 'Hall' was occupied by seven distinct families, and was utterly 'unfit for human habitation'.<sup>90</sup> Condemnation and demolition orders were passed on both these premises in August 1936, after a protracted meeting with the owners, who gave assurances that the empty premises would not be rented out again unless the buildings were brought into 'reasonable repair'.<sup>91</sup> But people could not move out until new houses were allocated, and in late 1937, the Hibernian Hall was still occupied, and the subject of a special report by the sanitary officer, following the death of a woman there from an infectious disease.<sup>92</sup>

#### **The Sligo housing scandal of 1934.**

The so-called 'Sligo housing scandal' made national headlines in May 1934, when the allocation of new houses to certain tenants by the members of Sligo corporation came under departmental scrutiny. The resulting tribunal, held locally, had repercussions for other local authorities, and the Sligo affair became an example of how not to manage the process of tenant allocations. The minister was also determined to make an example of the corporation's inadequacies; it was a warning shot across the bow of other local authorities about to embark on the same journey of the construction and management of state-funded housing.

Following the allocation of over 120 new houses under the Housing Act, there was outrage from the Department of Local Government, and in particular the Minister, Seán T. O'Kelly, regarding the process by which some houses were assigned to waiting tenants. During the allocation of new houses in the Barrack Street scheme, five sitting town councillors, and several of their relatives were assigned houses in the new schemes. Over 42 of the new houses were allotted to tenants whose previous housing

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Street, Fish Quay, Robbers Lane, Maugheraboy, Lungy House and Church Lane. Details from DLGPH, *Annual report 1935-1936*, p. 128

<sup>90</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 20 Feb. 1936, p. 458.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 2 Aug. 1935, p. 356.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 2 Mar. 1938.

accommodation had not been condemned. This principle of prioritising tenants from slum areas was a basic tenet of the subsidy scheme operated by the department, and it could not have this compromised, without endangering the entire national housing programme.

The minister considered the Sligo affair to be corruption in its finest form, and a serious indictment of the corporation. The inquiry which was ordered, followed intense anger in Sligo town amongst tenants who were on the housing list, and in addition, living in dreadful circumstances. Some unsuccessful applicants were living in one-roomed dwellings, notably one man with his wife and six children, who had had written to the minister, prompting the investigation. The inquiry attracted national attention. This case was to be a test one for the department, as the methods for selection of tenants in the other provincial towns – and the opportunities for corruption – would hinge on the evidence heard at the Sligo inquiry. The affair made headlines in all the national press; ‘Sligo housing Scandal’, was the *Irish Press* tagline, when an ‘inner cabinet’ of corporation members was alleged to ‘have cooked the evidence.’<sup>93</sup>

On 19<sup>th</sup> May 1934, a letter was read to the corporation from the department, stating the ‘failure of Sligo corporation to take adequate steps to the demolish houses unfit for habitation, and the ‘irregular letting of the houses at Barrack Street and Abbeyquarter’ would be the subject of a sworn inquiry, to take place at Sligo Town hall on May 23<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>94</sup> It is clear from the tenor of the meeting that the corporation was plainly aware that the letting of houses to the members and families of councillors was the main issue behind the inquiry. The public inquiry opened at the Town Hall on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1934, and attracted a large number of townspeople.<sup>95</sup>

The main thrust of the inquiry was to ascertain why the corporation allocated five houses to sitting councillors (one of whom already was tenant in a more expensive house) and why several sons and relatives of these councillors had also received houses, despite not living in condemned houses. The department also wanted to know why 28 tenants, who were not living in condemned houses received preferential treatment over many other who were living in much worse conditions, including single-roomed houses.

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<sup>93</sup> See *Ballina Herald*, 26 May 1934, p. 2; *Irish Press*, 5 May 1934, p. 7; *Irish Independent* 24 May 1932, p. 12, and 25 May 1934, p. 11; *Sunday Independent* 27 May 1934, p.1; *Irish Press*, 28 May 1934, p. 6; *Irish Press*, 20 June 1934; *Irish Independent* 20 June 1934, *The Kerryman*, 23 June 1934, p. 10.

<sup>94</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 19 May 1934, p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> *Ballina Herald*, 26 May 1934, p. 2.

The department was also concerned about the failure of the corporation to demolish vacated dwelling houses already condemned as unfit for human habitation, as these were subsequently re-occupied by desperate families anxious to have any sort of house, even a condemned one. The inquiry was presided over by Mr T.W. Wren, B.E., an experienced civil and military engineer, and a senior inspector with the Department of Local Government. Patrick McSharry, the borough rent collector, gave evidence ‘that in his knowledge, five councillors and a number of their relatives secured tenancies, while the claims of persons with large families living in single rooms were disregarded’.<sup>96</sup> The successful applicants had selected their own houses and taken possession of them before they were completed or handed over by the contractors.

The inspector read a petition by Messrs Fitzgerald and McCormick, solicitors to the department, on behalf of a number of persons who complained that the new houses were let without regard to the position of applicants most in need, particularly those in one-roomed accommodation. They also claimed that undue preference was given to members of the corporation and their families. It was stated that new houses were allocated to five members of the corporation and their families.<sup>97</sup> From this damning evidence the level of political interference in the allocation process was obvious.

Councillor Hunt, in advance of the inquiry, made an attempt to have the list of condemned houses falsified, in order that his own successful application for a new house would seem legitimate. The local sanitary inspector, Patrick McGroary, stated that some members of the corporation had made a deliberate attempt to ‘cook evidence’ for the tribunal. Allegations were made that councillors had tried to have official minutes and the sanitary officer’s diary altered retrospectively, in order to give the appearance that tenants were being moved from officially condemned houses, but that the town clerk absolutely refused to hand over these ledgers.<sup>98</sup> After a few days of sworn evidence, and given the seriousness of the allegations, the department inspector, Mr Wren, announced that the trend of the inquiry having taken an entirely new course, he felt it would be right and proper that he should adjourn, report to the minister and see if he considered there were grounds for the holding of a general inquiry into Sligo

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<sup>96</sup> *Irish Press*, 5 May 1934, p. 7.

<sup>97</sup> They were; Messrs James Hunt, John Gilmartin, Michael Conlon, Patrick Fowley and Joseph McMorrow; houses were also allotted Mr Fowley’s son, Mr Hunt’s father and mother, to three sons-in-law of Mr Conlon, and to 25 other tenants who were not living in condemned houses. *Irish Independent*, 24 May 1934, p. 12.

<sup>98</sup> *Irish Press* 28 May 1934, p. 4.



corporation's general administration.<sup>99</sup> A month later the *Irish Press* reported that the minister had made 'firm demands', and given an ultimatum to the mayor and the corporation. If the tenancies of the forty-two new houses occupied by persons who were not originally living in clearance areas, (in other words, they were given unfair preference), were not terminated with immediate effect, the minister would withdraw the entire subsidy for the 134 houses in the Barrack Street and Abbeyquarter schemes.<sup>100</sup> 'The minister takes a very serious view of conduct of this nature on the part of councillors, which shows a complete lack of appreciation of their responsibilities as corporators and the betrayal of the trust reposed in them by the ratepayers.'<sup>101</sup> The department also had serious concerns about the slow pace of demolition of condemned houses, which were frequently re-occupied by those desperate for accommodation, exacerbating the slum problem. However, given the radical nature of the clearance and re-building scheme, as well as the rapidity of the sequence of events, that it was difficult for the corporation and building contractors to keep logistical matters up to date.

By June 1934, councillors who had been illegally allocated houses were said to be 'willing to give them up'. Asking the minister to 'temper his justice with mercy', a 'delegation was dispatched' from Sligo Corporation to Dublin in early June for a meeting with the minister, Seán T. O'Kelly.<sup>102</sup> The dispute between the corporation and the minister rumbled on for over 18 months, and a small number of the contentious tenants were dispossessed in late October 1935. Even so, some still remained, as the housing they had previously lived in had been demolished by the time the dispute ended. The stand-off between Sligo corporation and the minister is an important saga; the chastising of the corporation was vital, if trust was to be maintained between central government which provided the finances, and local representatives, who executed the housing plans. The corporation was not removed, and the department appears to have been ameliorated by the climb-down of individual councillors.

However, in Sligo, the process of moving tenants was generally fairly smooth and had many benefits. Tenants in clearance areas were given priority for housing, often in order of their family size. On the whole it was attempted to re-house the slum-area families near where they already lived, or to move existing neighbours and extended families

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>100</sup> *Irish Press*, 20 June 1934, p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> *Irish Independent* 20 June 1934, p. 1.

<sup>102</sup> *Irish Press*, 27 June 1934, p. 11.

into the same schemes, as evidenced by the same family names appearing on the clearance orders, and then again on the list of new tenants in the completed schemes. This procedure maintained older communities to a large degree, particularly on Forthill, where young mothers with large families found help from sisters, cousins, and mothers. In many cases – such as at Knappaghbeg and the Mail Coach Road – the new houses were constructed to the rear of the old cottages, which were demolished only when the move was completed, ensuring familiarity and continuity. But house allocation and the position on the housing list was a frequently contentious issue, with many families subverting the process and taking illegal possession of part-completed homes. There were many cases of house-swapping, from one area to another, often without the knowledge or approval of the corporation, and when some slum areas were emptied, desperate tenants occupied the condemned houses before they could be demolished.

### **Schemes at South Gallows Hill and the Mail Coach Road.**

By early 1935, it seemed that Sligo was one large building site. At the close of that March over 212 houses were under construction.<sup>103</sup> Attention shifted to the crowded south-eastern quadrant of the town, specifically South Gallows Hill and the Mail Coach Road area. Initially it was proposed to build flats in the area, and in July 1936, the architects were asked to submit plans and specifications for erecting a series of two and four-storey flats, containing two and three rooms, with a view to having rents on a more economical basis for the working class. But the plans were dropped in favour of the standard short terraces of housing, with attendant gardens, which were considered more desirable from a social point of view.<sup>104</sup> A compulsory purchase order was issued for these areas in August 1934, and a clearance order followed. But the order did not take effect until early 1936, when sites for a total of 226 houses at James's Street, Vernon Street, Mail Coach Road, and Old Pound Street were laid out. This scheme was to take place in two phases, with South Gallows Hill taking precedence, given the very bad nature of the houses there, and the construction difficulties on the steep hill.

South Gallows Hill was earmarked for 112 houses. The architects McDonnell and Dixon issued several site layouts to accommodate the steep gradient on this one-time medieval route-way out of Sligo. The clearance order was carried out in early 1935, and

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<sup>103</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 6 Mar. 1935, p. 270.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 9 July 1936, p. 45.

tenders were issued. Messers Keavney and Harte were the successful contractors, with a bid of £24,388 for the scheme, and by November 1935, the houses were under construction.<sup>105</sup> Sewers were fully laid by September 1936, but controversy erupted in November of that year when several unfinished houses were forcibly occupied by desperate tenants. In February 1936, it was decided at a corporation meeting that the first houses to be completed in the scheme would be allocated to those from condemned houses in Harmony Hill, but this caused outrage amongst those families living along Mail Coach Road and Vernon Street who were also on the housing list. This prompted a spate of illegal occupations, even in houses which were quite unfinished. The medical officer at this point noted that already there were serious problems with overcrowding in the first tranche of allocated houses, with sub-letting problematic.<sup>106</sup> By August 1936, 80 of the 112 houses were completed, 61 were occupied legally. The corporation passed a resolution, stating that ‘due to the pressing housing needs of families’ in the area, new houses at South Gallows Hill would be allocated to existing tenants in the clearance areas of Vernon Street, James Street, Mail Coach Road, Pound Street and the Hibernian Hall tenement building.

Rents for the new houses were set in February of 1936, and varied between 3s 6d and 4s 6d, depending on the number of rooms, and also to allow for lower waged tenants. These rents did not include the rates. For example, in the year ending March 1937, Sligo corporation collected £6,7357 in rents from all its municipal housing; of this £2,155 comprised rates.<sup>107</sup> Frequently the rates on certain house could put an extra shilling a week on the cost of the house for the tenant. Rates were another cost which pushed some tenants to illegibly sub-let.

In November 1936, following the publication of the names of tenants allocated to the next batch of completed houses, there was again a forcible occupation of unfinished houses by 15 families, all from the Vernon Street and Mail Coach Road areas adjacent to the Gallows Hill scheme. The publication of the names of the allocated tenants, who were all from other condemned areas, seems to have sparked the occupation, as many were afraid they would not receive houses in the area, as they had come to expect.<sup>108</sup> The sanitary officer, Mr McGroary, intervened in the situation, recommending that the

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<sup>105</sup> *Irish Independent* 25 Nov. 1935.

<sup>106</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 20 Feb. 1936, p. 458.

<sup>107</sup> DLGPH *Annual Report 1936-37*, appendix xxxvii, p. 325

<sup>108</sup> Sligo Coporation, minutes, 10 Oct. 1936, p. 78.

40 qualified tenants in the Mail Coach Road clearance area should have first priority, despite the pressing needs of the other tenants, as this aspect of re-housing was implicit in the 1932 Act.<sup>109</sup> Of the completed houses, 19 of them were occupied illegally. The crisis was eventually solved with the granting of some houses to the most needy tenants, while those who were squatting were eventually granted their houses, as they were qualified persons. However, there were lingering problems and bad feelings for many months. By December 1936 the South Gallows Hill scheme was completed, all houses were occupied, and it was officially named 'St. Joseph's Terrace' the following spring.

Forcible occupation was a major headache for the corporation, mostly by tenants who were not pre-assigned the particular dwelling in question. There was also a problem with the unofficial exchange of tenancies, as families were allocated a house in a particular area, but then swapped with a family in another area, mostly to be nearer other members of their own family.



Figure 6.13. Original site layout for new houses at South Gallows Hill, 1936. Source: Irish Architectural Archive, McDonnell Dixon collection, Roll 525, (individual drawings are un-catalogued as yet).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

In February 1934, forcible occupation took place on South Gallows Hill, when several people who formerly occupied single rooms in various parts of the town went into possession of both the vacated condemned houses and the newly constructed houses. Mrs Rose Somers joined the ‘army of occupation’ in advance of her husband, in order to be sure of getting out of Water Lane, ‘the worst slum in all Ireland,’ as she put it. In rainy weather the dwelling was a veritable swamp.<sup>110</sup> She took possession of a new house as she believed corporation members intended to give it to persons less deserving than her family. Miss Brigid Gallagher, aged 26, who suffered from rheumatic fever, and was ill in bed, was carried up the hill by neighbours, in order to take possession of one of the incomplete houses on Gallows Hill, along with her mother. ‘I believe I have a right to a decent home... I am here, and here I stay no matter what happens’.<sup>111</sup>

Sligo corporation let 132 houses during the course of the year 1935-36, reflecting the scale of the completed works; rents were set at between 3s 6d per week and 4s 6d per week, including rates.<sup>112</sup> Total income for Sligo corporation for year-end March 1936, was £222,159. Of this total, £5,690 came from rents on public housing. Benbulbin Terrace returned £374, and St. Patrick’s Terrace, £1,074. The large schemes at Abbeyquarter and Barrack Street pulled in £1,073. And the recently completed Jink’s Avenue and part of St. Joseph’s Terrace returned £779 and £905 respectively.<sup>113</sup> These amounts were a substantial portion of the total annual rents accrued by the municipal authority, and show that rent was being collected regularly.

### **Mail Coach Road Scheme**

The Mail Coach Road scheme commenced in 1939 and involved the clearance of the old Vernon Street (Ropewalk) dwellings, and the James’s Street houses, which had most likely been constructed speculatively between 1800 and 1825, according to deeds of the time.<sup>114</sup> Also cleared were several small houses along Mail Coach Road itself, along with some two-and three-storey sub-standard dwellings. All these houses were replaced with a extensive new scheme comprising of 114 houses, laid out in two sections, between 1940 and 1941. The clearance order on all the old houses was passed

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<sup>110</sup> *Irish Press*, 16 Nov. 1936, p. 9.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1935-1936*, p. 130.

<sup>113</sup> Sligo Corporation borough rate estimate, 1 May 1935, p. 295, insert.

<sup>114</sup> Fíona Gallagher, *The streets of Sligo, seven centuries of urban evolution* (Sligo, 2008), pp 636-9.

in March 1935, when the houses were examined by the medical officer, and condemned.<sup>115</sup> A compulsory purchase order was issued in July 1936, but nothing had been done by May 1938, when due to the ‘immediate needs’ of the people in the area, the architects were asked to draw up a housing schedule.

Conditions in Vernon Street were described as ‘deplorable’ by the corporation solicitor Stephen Derham in June 1938, when the layout for the new houses was approved. He was very much afraid that another winter for the tenants in the old houses could prove disastrous, and recommended that the Department of Local Government be lobbied intensively to give immediate approval for the new scheme.<sup>116</sup> Final clearance orders were issued in early 1938 for the Mail Coach Road, Old Pound Street, James’s Street and Vernon Street, and compulsory acquisition of land was ordered.<sup>117</sup> Tenders were issued for the 114 houses and that of £58,834 from Kilcawley, Maloney and Taylor was accepted on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1940.<sup>118</sup> By March 1941, the first of the houses were completed, and in August Dr Kirby and the sanitary officer visited tenants in the old houses to prioritise those in most need of moving.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 6 Mar. 1935, p. 269.

<sup>116</sup> *Western People*, 4 June 1938, p. 7.

<sup>117</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1937-1938*, p. 83.

<sup>118</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 11 Apr. 1940.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 Aug. 1940.

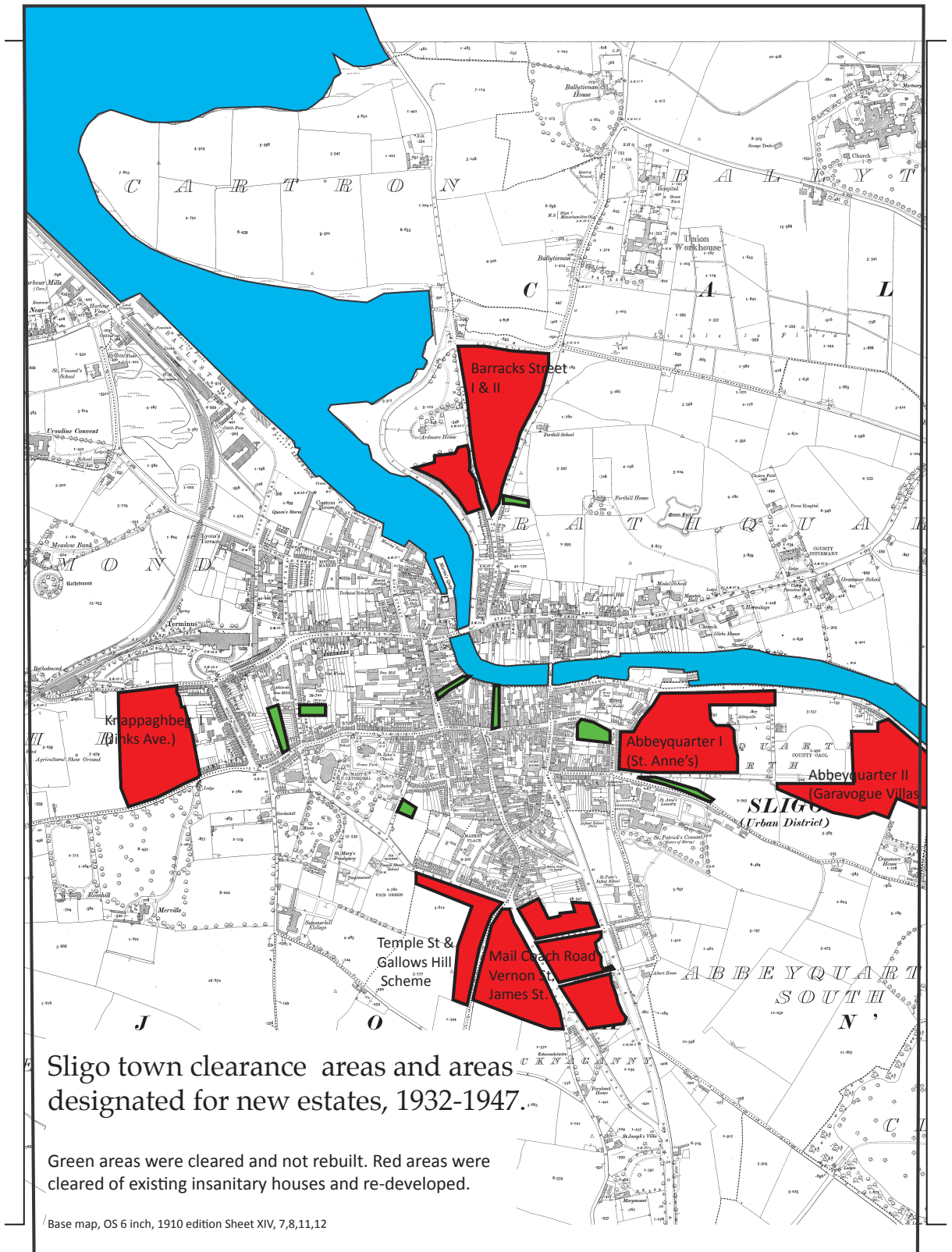


Figure 6.14. Plan of Sligo outlining the areas where new terraces and estates were built, 1932 -1947. Based on OS 6 inch, 1910.



**Figure 6.15. Some of the houses on The Ropewalk, (Vernon Street), in 1935, shortly before demolition. Source. Author's collection.**

In June 1941, condemned houses in Vernon Street were forcibly occupied by people who had moved into them in the middle of the night, despite warnings that they were about to be demolished, a matter of great concern to Mr McGoary the sanitary officer. The final houses were handed over late in 1941, and Sligo's last thatched urban cottages on the Ropewalk were a thing of the past. Rents were set for these new houses in May 1941 at between 6s 6d per week, and 6s per week, exclusive of rates.<sup>120</sup> The scheme of 114 houses was officially named as 'St Brigid's Place' at a corporation meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> July 1941, following a letter of suggestion in June from Mrs Mary Mulligan, president of the local Legion of Mary.<sup>121</sup>

### **Sligo's insanitary lanes – a slow eradication.**

Some of the first areas tackled under the new powers of the 1932 Act were the several insanitary lanes sheltering behind the main streets of the town. The houses in Sleator's Row, near the old Dominican abbey, were noted in 1935 as being some of the most unhealthy dwellings in town, and were condemned. However, they were not demolished

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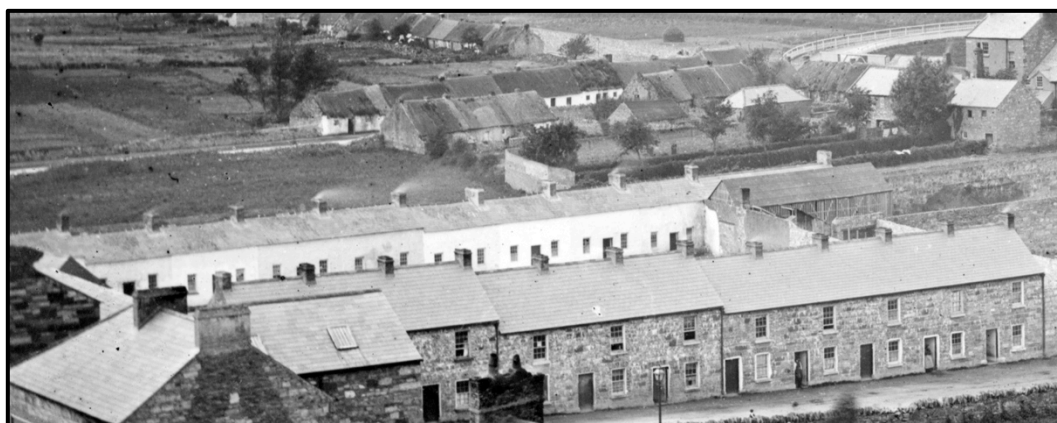
<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 5 May 1941.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 21 July 1941.



until 1937, by which time tenants from other condemned houses in Water Lane were re-housed here, despite the conditions being equally as bad as those they had left. Tenants were moved to new houses on South Gallows Hill after their completion, and the corporation demolished Sleator's Row in order that they could not be occupied again.

Water Lane, running towards the river from Market Street, was another lane with sub-standard housing, where sixteen people were still inhabiting houses in 1926. Some were re-housed as a matter of priority at Benbulbin Terrace in 1932, but others remained, resulting in much anger at corporation meetings, as they lobbied for new houses. Finally in 1936, they were allocated new dwellings at South Gallows Hill, and the lane was cleared. Smith's Row, off John Street, was another source of concern for the medical officer in 1934. The eleven houses in this lane were condemned as early as 1901, when there was an active slaughterhouse in the vicinity. But due to the acute lack of housing in Sligo these dwellings continued to be occupied until late 1934, when the corporation passed a clearance order on them in September of that year. They were in extremely poor condition, at that time, with only two rooms downstairs, and ladder access to the loft above.<sup>122</sup> Water had to be drawn from the John Street pump, and sanitary facilities were non-existent. The residents were re-housed in Benbulbin Terrace in 1932, and the South Gallows Hill scheme in 1936, and the houses were demolished shortly afterwards.



**Figure 6.16. A view of Ramsey's Row, (white houses), off John Street, c. 1900. In the foreground can be seen the better-class houses on Adelaide street, and in the background can be seen the many thatched houses on Knappagh Road and William' street. Source: NLI, Lawrence Collection, extract from STP, 1047-15602.**

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<sup>122</sup> Personal re-collection of Mrs. Annie Gallagher, John Street, Sligo, in conversation with F. Gallagher, April, 2013.

Ramsey's Row, also off John Street, was cleared about the same time. This lane had long been a source of health concern, particularly as regards outbreaks of infectious diseases. Already overcrowded in 1911, with fifty people living in 12 two-roomed houses, its residents were re-housed in Jinks Avenue and in Abbeyquarter. Fish Quay, one of the oldest parts of town, was ordered to be cleared and demolished in March of 1935; it had only four houses, but these were hopelessly overcrowded, with a single two-roomed cottage home to nine people.<sup>123</sup>

In the fulfilment of the 1931-2 housing acts, the condemnation of slum housing and the issuing of clearance orders, the involvement of the county medical officer was paramount. He alone had the power to condemn houses as 'unfit for human habitation', and thus qualify for the re-housing subsidies. He generally did this on the advice of the corporation, but was quite independent in his assessment of public health. The rate of overcrowding was a key determining-factor for prioritising certain families to be re-housed. In 1938 the housing question and overcrowding held prime position in the annual report of Dr Kirby. Forty new houses were under construction, and the site for a further 136 was being developed. A total of 74 unsanitary dwellings were demolished during the year. A housing survey was carried which was compared with one made a decade earlier, in 1929, when it was estimated that Sligo needed 500 new houses.<sup>124</sup> The 1938 survey, supervised by Dr Kirby, found that there were still 42 houses with more than two occupants per room, (excluding infants less than 1 year old). Over 278 persons lived in houses of this type. Fifty dwelling-houses intended for one family were actually being used for two or more families, and 1,031 people inhabited 290 houses that were unfit for human habitation, and 'cannot be made fit at reasonable expense'.<sup>125</sup>

There were forty new houses completed during 1939. There were still 136 more in construction, and in all 424 houses had been erected since 1934. There were 282 unsanitary houses demolished in the designated clearance areas in the year to the end of 1939.<sup>126</sup> Interestingly 16 houses were disinfected in 1938, due to outbreaks of contagious diseases.

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<sup>123</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 3 Mar. 1935, p. 26.

<sup>124</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1929-30*, appendix xxvii, Housing survey by local authorities, 1929, estimate of housing needs, pp 209-12.

<sup>125</sup> Kirby, *CMO Annual report 1938*, p. 43.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

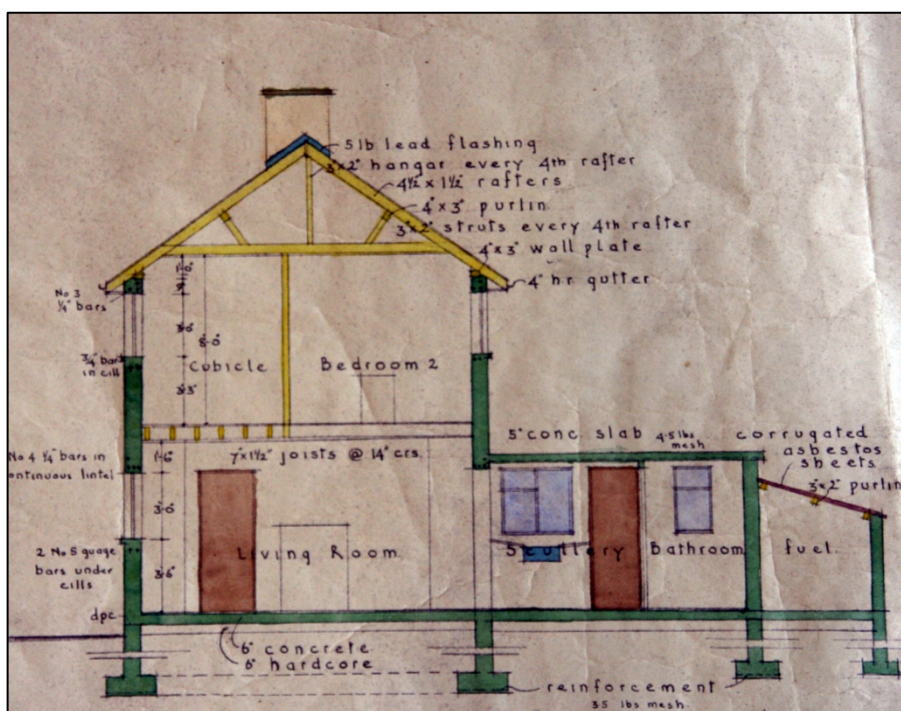


Figure 6.17. Section through house at the Abbeyquarter scheme, 1934. (St. Anne's Terrace). Source: Irish Architectural Archive, McDonnell Dixon collection, (TO4535). Roll 525. (individual drawings are un-catalogued as yet).

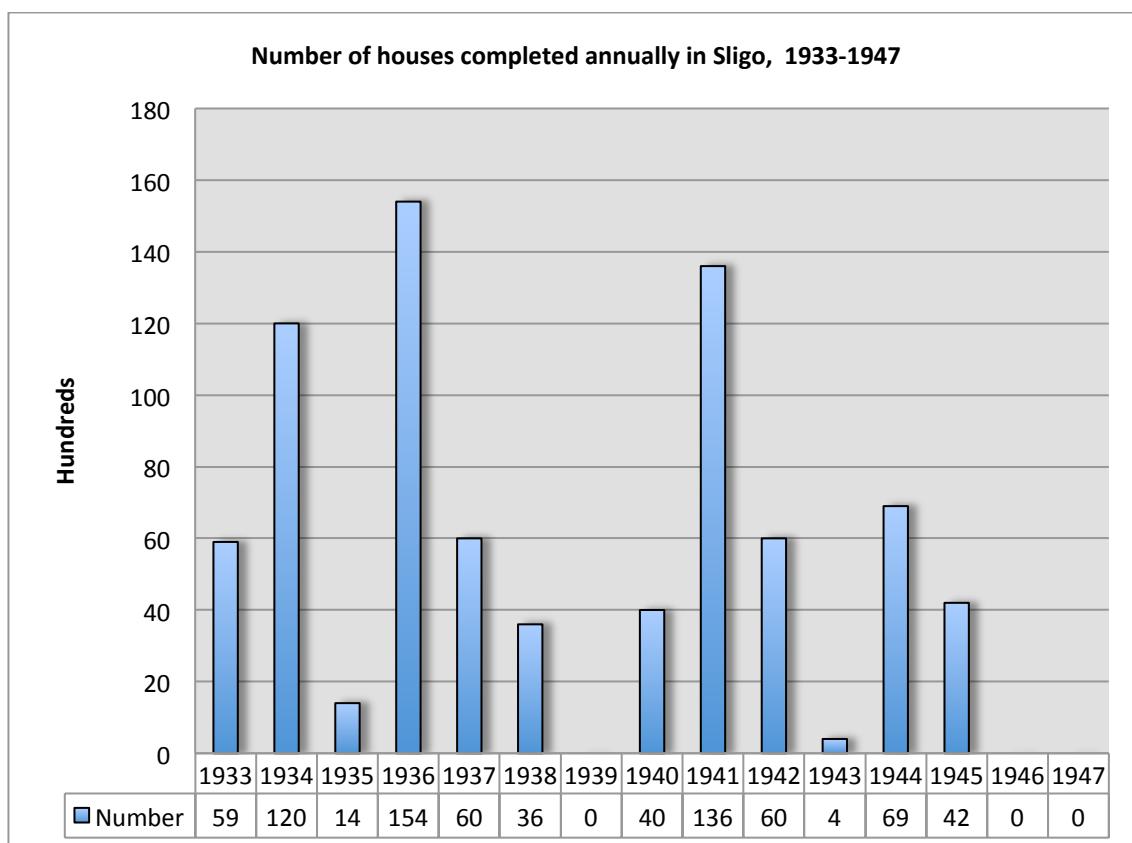
Dr Kirby noted in his annual report of 1940, that 136 houses had been completed in the year, despite the onset of war conditions. Over 350 houses had been demolished in the designated clearance areas, and over 500 houses had been completed since 1934. Over 470 families had been rehoused in modern accommodation during that period.<sup>127</sup>

The incomes of the tenants in these houses varied considerably: 18 tenants had weekly incomes of less than 20 shillings, 49 tenants had incomes of between 20 and 40 shillings weekly, 55 families had weekly incomes of between 40 and 60 shillings, and 14 tenants had weekly incomes in excess of 60 shillings.<sup>128</sup> In 1942 Sligo, rents were sanctioned on 114 new houses at Vernon Street and James Street (St Brigid's Place). These rents were set between 3s 7d and 4s 1d per week, exclusive of rates, keeping them in the affordable range for the labouring classes.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Kirby, *CMO Annual report 1940*, p. 53.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1941-42*, p. 81.



**Figure 6.18.** Number of houses completed annually in Sligo from April 1933 to March 1947. Source: Totals from DLGPH, Annual report 1945-1947, appendix xvii p.119, and DLGPH, Annual report 1947-48, p. 110.

### 6.7. The effect of the War, and the end of the housing drive

The building industry was one of the first to be affected by war conditions, and by early 1940 a scarcity was already being experienced. Import of materials, particularly timber, from the continent was impossible, and metal imports from Britain were severely restricted. Coal, pig metal and scrap metal imports from Britain practically ceased; even a commodity like cement, which was normally supplied from Irish factories, became difficult to source. Stored supplies meant that building work could continue for a certain period, but as these stocks dwindled, work on many housing schemes ground to a halt.<sup>130</sup> Large backlogs of housing and other infrastructural work occurred, such as the opening of Sligo's new county hospital, finished in 1940, but not opened until 1942, due to lack of metal for beds and wiring, and boilers.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Dept. of Industry and Commerce, *The post-war building programme* (Dublin, 1945), p. 2.

<sup>131</sup> Sligo Board of Health, Minutes, June 1942.

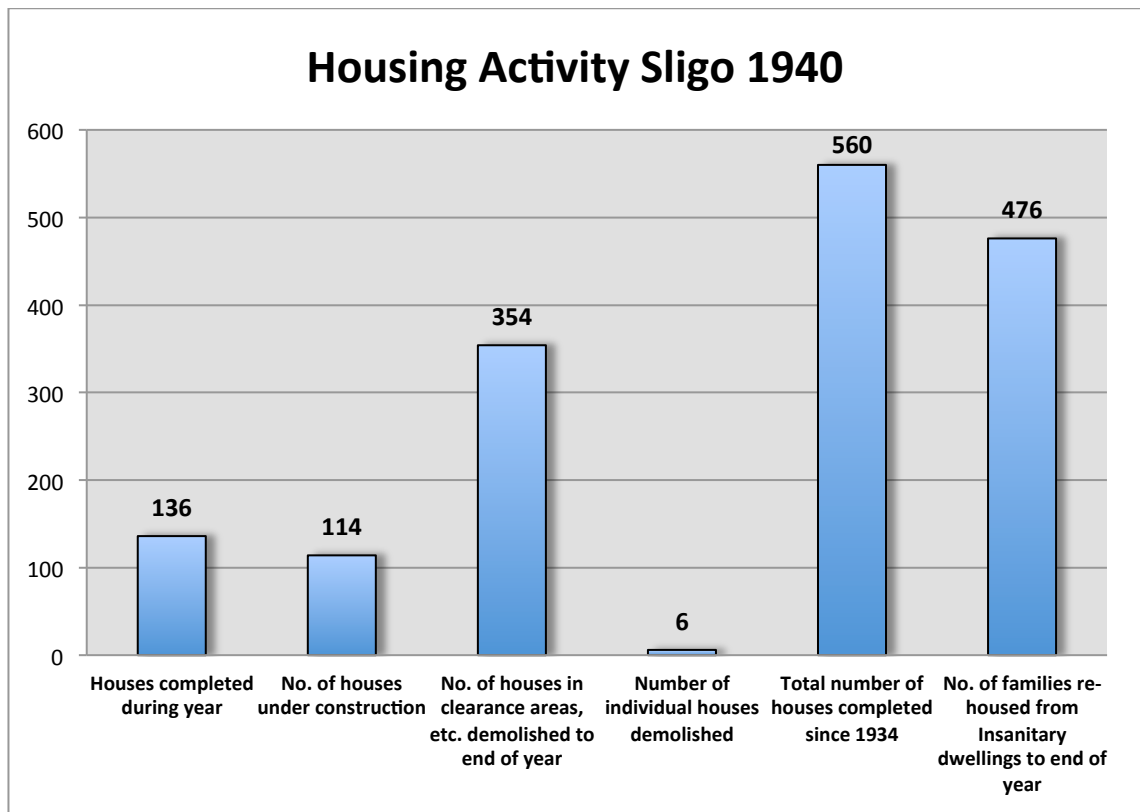


Figure 6.19 Housing activity in Sligo Borough 1940. An example of the detail contained in the annual reports of the county medical officer. Source: Annual Report of the medical office for Co. Sligo, 1940.

Wages and prices were adversely affected by the outbreak of the war. Rationing meant there was a slump in business, with knock-on effects across the economy. The *Sligo Champion* reported soaring prices, shortage of goods, increasing unemployment and uncertainty in every trade and business. A sharp increase in the price of coal was the first indication of the things to come. In 1939 a hundredweight of coal (51 kg), cost 2s 7d; by February 1941, with rationing and import restrictions from Britain, this had increased to 3s 9d.<sup>132</sup> Sligo's traders reported a drastic drop in the number of country people coming to shop in the town, and the rationing of petrol meant that transport was more difficult. Black-marketeering was problematic in Sligo, as elsewhere, and in June 1943, sixty-eight Sligo traders were summonsed at the circuit court for various charges of profiteering, mostly in regards to tea, bread and sugar.<sup>133</sup> Local alderman, Cllr John Fallon, was outraged at this exploitation, because for 'many people, tea and bread were their main diet, three times a day'.<sup>134</sup> It can be seen by this indicator of poverty, that housing provision alone was not going to solve the problem of poverty. A medical surveys carried out in Dublin during the 1940s drew connections between poverty,

<sup>132</sup> *Sligo Champion Seisquicentenary edition*, p. 74.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

malnutrition and family size.<sup>135</sup> Reports from the county medical officers supplement this survey. The findings ascertained that ‘wartime austerity made it difficult for a large number of families to provide a basic adequate diet’, but this there was already a culture of poor and inadequate nutrition in many slum areas before the war shortages.<sup>136</sup> Typically, up to half of all slum families in the survey spent less than 7 shillings a week on food, and the size of the family dictated individual nutritional intake. Bread was predominant, as it was filling, but low in nutritional value; but vegetables and dairy intake for children in particular, were inadequate, hence the popularity of the free school milk schemes of the period. As late as 1946, cooked meals consisted often of just potatoes and eggs, and children in poorer families survived mainly on bread and jam or butter, supplement with tea.<sup>137</sup>

Despite the war, housing construction continued apace in Sligo in 1940, and was of vital importance to the local economy in a time of falling income. Of the 136 houses completed in Sligo during 1940, some 92 houses consisted of two living rooms and three bedrooms, at a rent of 6s 6d, (plus the borough rates); 30 houses had one living room, a scullery, and three bedrooms, at 6s per week, plus rates; and 14 houses of one living room, and three bedrooms, at 4s per week, plus rates. All the houses had gardens attached.<sup>138</sup> The spaciousness and modern conveniences of the new houses was very apparent to those families still on the housing list, and there was great anxiety to secure a tenancy as soon as possible. Rents in clearance areas through the town were similar; varying between 3 shillings and 6d, to 6 shillings for larger houses.

In the matter of making recommendations for the tenancies of the new houses, consideration had to be given to the danger of overcrowding; a family with a small weekly income could only afford rent on one of the smaller houses, but if that family was a very large one, there would still be overcrowding. The income of the tenants varied significantly. There were 18 families in the new schemes completed in 1940, which had a weekly income of less than 20 shillings, meaning that the risk of rental default was high.<sup>139</sup> This was a common occurrence in some of the earlier schemes, and was a constant source of administrative problems for the corporation. Forty-nine families had weekly incomes of between 20 and 40 shillings, 55 tenants had between 40

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<sup>135</sup> Moira J. Maguire, *Precarious childhood in post-independence Ireland* (Manchester, 2009), pp 27-28.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29

<sup>138</sup> Kirby, *CMO Annual report 1940*, p. 53.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

and 60 shillings, and 14 tenants had weekly incomes exceeding 60 shillings. Average yearly income would have been less than £200 per annum. In 1936, the 45 hour week had been won, and, for example, laundry-workers - mostly women- had a minimum wage of 32s 6d a week secured.<sup>140</sup> In 1938, the average weekly wage for unskilled labourers was calculated at between 59 shillings and 64 shillings.<sup>141</sup>

The medical officer, Dr Kirby, noted that persuasion and coaxing had to be used to encourage women in particular to move to a new area of town, even if they were in dire need of new accommodation. Because of low earnings, the distance of the new housing schemes from work, and the inherent unwillingness to change to a new district, 'some families succeed in remaining in clearance areas, and the very best use is not made of the houses available'. This unwillingness to move to what were perceived as 'distant parts of the borough', and the desire of many young mothers to be near their own mothers, was to be a constant theme in the re-housing of Sligo's working class throughout the 1930s and 1940s. It manifested itself in illegal occupations of newly completed houses, un-authorized swapping of tenancies, and the dreaded 'overcrowding' scenario, as a low-waged family who were given a house by the corporation frequently took in a boarder, or a family member who did not have a place to live. The doctor also noted some of the behavioural problems associated with the transfer of people to modern housing, unused as they were to maintenance and to meeting the standards of hygiene and domestic economy expected of them. 'But, in general, the good houses provided, have made good tenants out of what had been bad tenants in bad houses'.<sup>142</sup> This was very much in keeping with the social thought of the time, linking poor housing to many social evils, responsible for physical ill-health and moral failure.

The benefits of 'bright, airy houses with clean surroundings and open space' were extolled. These benefits were reflected in the improved health of children, according to the medical officer. 'Most families strive to live up to their new environment, apart from the few who are degenerate and need constant watching'. It was felt that it would be advisable to teach the new residents of housing schemes how to make the best use of their new modern homes.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> M. Jones, *These obstreperous lassies: A history of the IWWU* (Dublin, 1988), p. 176.

<sup>141</sup> DLGPH, *Report of the Local Government tribunal, 1938*, p. 25.

<sup>142</sup> Kirby, *CMO Annual report 1940*, p. 54.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Despite the outbreak of war in 1939, work continued at the eastern end of the town, on a site overlooking the Garavogue River, and intriguingly constructed around a Neolithic stone circle. Garavogue Villas was the largest housing scheme undertaken by Sligo corporation when it opened in November 1940, and indeed one of the largest schemes undertaken in the west.<sup>144</sup> A total of 136 houses were built in an ambitious layout, which included the luxurious installation of running hot water from the kitchen ranges. The scheme was completed in difficult circumstances, as the outbreak of hostilities in September 1939 made it difficult to source materials from England. Tenders for ‘136 houses in Abbeyquarter’ were issued in July 1937, and accepted by the corporation, but the department refused the tender as being too expensive, at £400 per house; this was considered to be due to the difficulty of the site, and the ground-works involved.<sup>145</sup> A revised scheme was advertised again in February 1938.<sup>146</sup> An eventual tender for the houses of £55,223 was accepted from Kilcawley, Maloney and Taylor, and a clerk of works was appointed. However, the eventual cost of the scheme was over £60,000.



**Figure 6.20. Garavogue Villas seen from the air, ca. 1950. The use of the back gardens for sheds and horticulture is clearly seen. Photo, courtesy of the Irish Defence Forces.**

Garavogue Villas was officially opened by the Minister for Local Government, Mr Rutledge TD, in November 1940, when he noted that over 426 houses had been built by the corporation to date, and when the current schemes were completed, the corporation would have completed over 700 houses.<sup>147</sup> The presence of the minister

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<sup>144</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 16 Nov. 1940.

<sup>145</sup> *Leitrim Observer*, 30 Oct. 1937.

<sup>146</sup> *Irish Independent*, 15 Feb. 1938.

<sup>147</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 16 Nov. 1940.



was indicative of the importance of the completion of the Sligo scheme to the department, and the housing programme at large. Minister Rutledge was also struck by the scenic location of the houses overlooking Lough Gill and the Garavogue River, and the modernity of the scheme, 'with its fine broad roads, the scheme stands out as an example of the most modern town planning methods'.<sup>148</sup>

The Garavogue Villas houses were constructed in three different types; eighty per cent of the scheme was large-type houses containing four to five rooms, the remainder having three rooms and a scullery. The houses were built in concrete, roofed with Killaloe slates, with windows are timber sliding sashes window. A feature of the houses was that turf- burning ranges, lined with asbestos, were installed. However in December 1940, major complaints were being made to the corporation about the state of the new ranges. They were malfunctioning badly in nearly all of the 136 houses. The ranges were considered to be the most up-to-date available, and were designed to provide the houses with running hot water, - an unheard of luxury at the time. But only a month after the new tenants moved in, many of their kitchen walls were blackened with smoke from the ranges and there was no hot water available.

#### **Schemes at Riverside and Armstrong's Row, 1941-1944.**

The corporation had sought approval for a large development along the river before the war, but it was not until 1941 that clearance orders were issued for older houses at Abbeyquarter, Armstrong's Row and Back Lane, paving the way for a large scheme of houses along the Garavogue River<sup>149</sup>. The condition of the older houses at that time was very poor, with no running water or inside toilets. In addition, many of the families were quite large, and it was a struggle to find enough space in the small houses. A compulsory purchase order was made in 1940, and the new scheme of 38 houses was put out to tender in December 1941, and divided into two schemes: 22 houses in Armstrong's Row, and 16 at the Riverside (now St. Asicus' Terrace). The corporation accepted the tender from Messrs Kilcawley, Maloney & Taylor of Ballisodare for £22,858, which allowed £200 for the use of material from the demolished buildings. The cost of each individual house was eventually £534 10s each, which marked a large increase from the cost of the houses in the James's Street and Vernon Street dwellings.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1943-44*, appendix xxxiv, p. 241.

Due to this increased cost, the architects made several alterations to the scheme in order to keep the price lower. Some of the alterations they recommended were; the omission of all hot water services, including copper boilers and tanks; the dropping of the plaster to the masonry wall at the rear of the site; the substitution of a concrete wall, instead of pedestal and iron railings around each house; the substitution of wood-lattice for iron gates; installation of concrete floors instead of wooden ones; leaving out all distempering of walls; reducing the quality of the material in the built-in presses in the kitchens, and reducing the weight of reinforcements to foundations through the scheme. The amended tenders were accepted, and the first families moved into the houses in 1944. The scheme was named 'St. Joachim's Terrace' to honour a local Sister of Mercy, known for her ministry to the women of the slums. The second portion of the scheme was named 'St. Asicus' Terrace' to honour the patron saint of the diocese of Elphin.

There was frequently huge opposition to the ban on the keeping of small animals in the backyards of the newly-constructed council houses in Sligo in the 1940s, as observed by the county medical officer at that time. While tenants were encouraged to grow vegetables in their garden plots, domestic animals were prohibited for health reasons. But tenants frequently kept chickens for eggs, and small piglets for fattening, and a blind eye was generally turned. Residents at Garavogue Villas were told in 1941 that the corporation would consider building stabling nearby for those whose livelihood depended on horses.<sup>150</sup> Requests were made by Riverside residents to erect boathouses for those who made their living from the lake-transport and fishing trade. A jetty and slip was later built at the entrance to Cleveragh estate to accommodate the boat builders and lake men.

No local authority houses were completed in Sligo during 1942, although 70 were under construction. Just six houses were demolished in the borough during the year, bringing to 417 the total number of houses demolished since 1932. The Riverside scheme was under construction throughout 1943, but would not be completed until May 1944. The final full year of war, 1944, was a pivotal one for housing in the borough. The large government-funded schemes were nearing completion. Just 32 houses were finished in that year. A total of 472 dwellings in clearance areas had been demolished since 1932,

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<sup>150</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 4 June 1941, p. 454.

and 712 new houses built under the terms of the 1931 Act.<sup>151</sup> A total of 628 families had been rehoused from insanitary dwellings in that period, probably representing close to 5,000 people, based on Dr Kirby's survey of an average of 8.39 persons per house in the new schemes.<sup>152</sup> Significantly, as noted by Dr Kirby, the new schemes also suffered from overcrowding, which paradoxically was one of the evils they were trying to avoid. A survey was undertaken of all the houses in the new schemes, identifying the percentage of houses overcrowded, and the average number of persons per house. Dr Kirby based his overcrowding figure on two persons per bedroom, excluding all infants under one year.<sup>153</sup> (See figure 6.21).

<i>Scheme</i>	<i>No. of houses in scheme</i>	<i>No. of houses overcrowded</i>	<i>Average no. of persons per house</i>
St. Edwards Tec.	78	30	8.20
St. John's Tec	66	33	8.68
Benbulbin Tec.	28	20	7.70
St. Joseph's Tec.	112	62	7.66
St. Bridget's Tec.	114	33	8.60
Garavogue Villas	136	39	8.45
Jinks Ave	100	36	9.20
St. Anne's Tce.	68	22	7.75
St. Asicus Road	16	3	9.30
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>718</i></b>	<b><i>278</i></b>	<b><i>8.39</i></b>

Figure 6.21. Rate of overcrowding in new corporation schemes, Sligo, 1944. Source: Dr. Michael Kirby, County Medical Officer of Health, County Sligo, annual report on health and sanitary conditions, 1944, p. 45. (Sligo Local History Collection, LGOV 800),

Clearly, overcrowding in the new houses was considered chronic and problematic at the end of 1944. Over 130 houses were still overcrowded, and Kirby insisted that an extra 353 houses would be needed to eliminate this scandal. A total of 492 houses would be required to eliminate overcrowding and replace the remaining houses deemed to be unfit for human habitation.<sup>154</sup> However, finance for another scheme was not yet available. This level of overcrowding was inevitable, given the large families of the

<sup>151</sup> Kirby, CMO, *Annual report 1944*, p. 45.

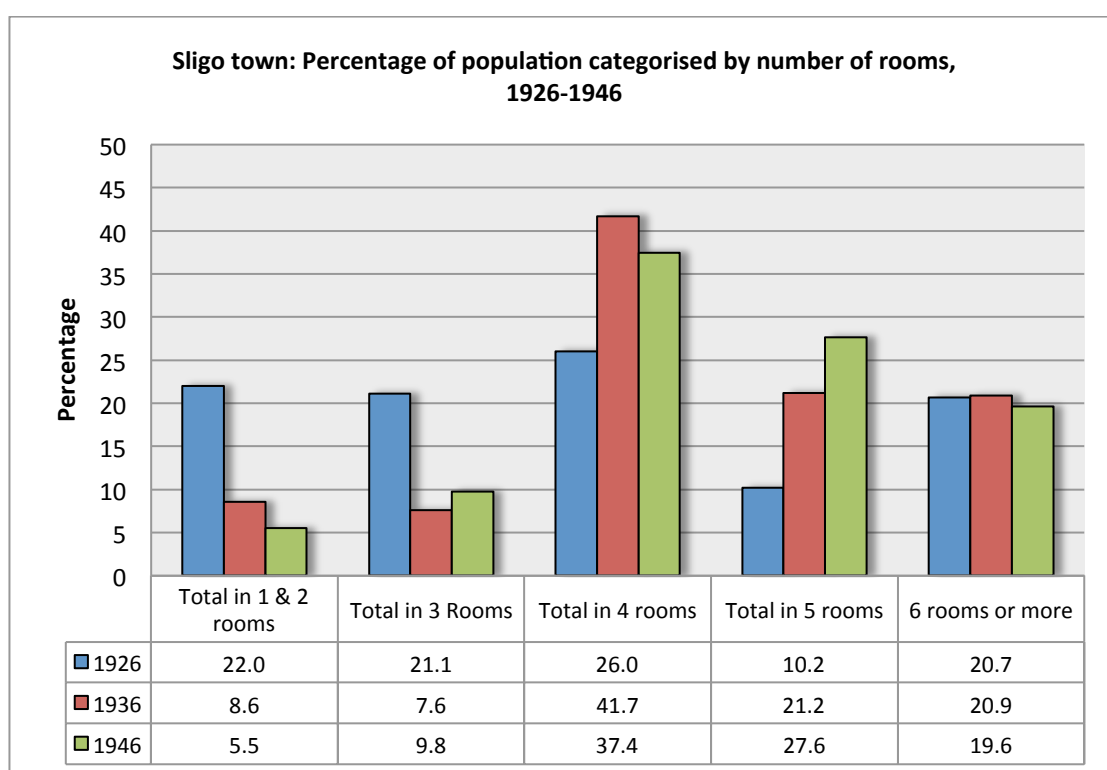
<sup>152</sup> Ibid. Probable total number of persons is based on an average of 8.39 persons per house, and excludes the older 1888 public scheme at Emmet Place, (The Artisans). Kirby's probable total number of rehoused persons (6,700) is based on an average of 8.39 persons per house, as estimated by his survey in 1944, but this may be too high. A low average of 5 persons per new house gives 4,000 people. The final total is probably in the region of 5,000 persons re-housed over the period.

<sup>153</sup> Kirby, *CMO Annual report 1944*, p. 46.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

period, and the fact that some families took in lodgers in order to help meet the weekly rent.

The number of people living in dwellings of two-rooms or less, decreased dramatically in the Sligo municipal area over the twenty year period between the 1926 census and the 1946 returns, as is clear from figure 6.22. In 1926 over 22 per cent of the population lived in dwellings of two rooms or less, dropping to 8.6 per cent in 1936, some four years after the start of the major housing schemes, and by 1946, just before completion of the last major Sligo scheme at Tracey Avenue, only 5.5 per cent, or 538 persons in private families, lived in dwellings of two rooms or less.<sup>155</sup>



**Figure 6.22. Sligo town, 1926-1946. Percentage of population living in dwellings of less than 2 rooms, 3 rooms, 4 rooms, 5, rooms, and 6 rooms or more, showing the decrease in the number of one and two-roomed dwellings during the period. Sources: *Census of Saorstát Éireann, 1926, vol. iv, Housing; Census of Eire, 1936, vol. iv, Housing, and Census of Eire, 1946, vol. iv, Housing.***

Of even more significance is the fact that the total percentage of the Sligo town population in private families, living in dwellings of three rooms or less, had dropped

<sup>155</sup> Note: the total population of Sligo town in the 1946 census was 12,926. The total number of people enumerated as living in 'private families', was 9,762. A private family was defined as a person or group of persons living as a single household. This statistical definition excluded all those who lived in institutions, boarding schools, hotels, boarding houses, and business establishments with three or more resident workers. The rather large difference of 3,164 between the two figures in 1946, can be accounted for by the fact that Sligo was home to a number of large institutions: the district lunatic asylum, county hospital, county home, a jail, several hotels and three large boarding schools.

from 43.1 per cent to 16.1 per cent, or just under 1,500 people. This is clearly due to the rehousing of a large number of families in the new corporation schemes, which typically had two (or sometimes three) bedrooms upstairs, two living rooms and a toilet downstairs. The total percentage of people in dwellings of four rooms rose from 26 per cent in 1926 to almost 42 per cent in 1936, but dropped slightly to 37.4 per cent in 1946, largely due to the increase in numbers moving into the newer type of corporation house, which had five rooms. By 1946, the percentage of private families living in dwellings of five rooms had increased almost three-fold, from just around 10 per cent, to over 27 per cent. The population of Sligo during the same twenty-year period had increased by fewer than 1,500 people; the number of persons in private families had increased from 8,520 in 1926, to 9,551 in 1936, and to 9,762 in 1946.<sup>156</sup>

An acute housing shortage still prevailed in 1944, despite the spirited endeavours of the corporation, and a huge waiting list had developed. Contemporary commentators wrote of the ‘house hunter’s problem’, and the high price of renting for the middle-class. This was a section of the workforce which earned between £3 and £4 per week, and thus did not qualify for the subsidised housing. Asking rents for speculative housing were often in the range of 30 shillings a week, out of the range of even the better-off worker, and rents for flats in town-centre buildings ranged from 13 shillings to 30 shillings per week. The unfortunate office worker or shop worker was caught between the professionally-waged and the low-waged, and they struggled to find accommodation, many postponing marriage for this reason.<sup>157</sup> With this middle-class in mind, attention shifted to their needs, and a scheme of twenty-three ‘better-class houses’ was erected on the eastern side of Pearse Road (the former Albert Line), in April 1945, at an approximate cost of £1,045 for each house. Originally called St Dominic’s Terrace, they were subsequently re-named as Pearse Crescent. The rents were calculated as about 23 or 26 shillings a week, putting them firmly out of the reach of the working class.<sup>158</sup>

Despite the fact that 638 families had been rehoused to the end of 1945, the medical officer reported that ‘the number of overcrowded houses in the town is now out of all proportion to the number of insanitary houses which should be demolished’. It was considered that many families had the means to build better houses if they could raise a

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<sup>156</sup>*Census of Saorstát Éireann, 1926*, vol. iv, *Housing*; *Census of Eire, 1936*, vol. iv, *Housing*, p. 184; *Census of Eire, 1946*, vol. iv, *Housing*, p. 196.

<sup>157</sup> *Western People*, 25 Jan. 1941, p. 8.

<sup>158</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 21 Apr. 1945.

reasonable building loan, or mortgage. The medical officer suggested that the local sanitary authority, (the corporation), should encourage this sort of private enterprise, and that this would release houses for the working classes.<sup>159</sup>

The corporation considered there was still a need of over 450 houses in the borough in May 1945. The Knappaghbeg II (Tracey Avenue) scheme, on the western outskirts of town, was proposed as early as 1937, but refused repeatedly by the minister until the town centre slums were cleared. It finally received approval in 1945, and would provide 106 houses when eventually finished in 1948. But the social aspect of widespread new housing was touched upon at the corporation meeting of May 10<sup>th</sup>, when Alderman Fallon – always notable for getting to the point – said ‘that there were many young people in Sligo who were anxious to get married, but they were unable to do so because they found it impossible to get houses’. At the present time, ‘the town was overcrowded with boarders and people living in lodgings’. A house recently up for let in St Patrick’s Terrace had a list of 40 applicants for the lease.<sup>160</sup>

## Conclusions

Sligo had a persistent and entrenched slum problem by 1926, with 22 per cent of its people living in dwellings of just two rooms, accompanied by high levels of urban infant mortality and frequent disease outbreaks in the slum areas. Health conditions in many areas was a constant source of concern, and compared unfavourably with the national averages. The re-location of hundreds of families to newer, cleaner housing during the period of this study had little effect on the overall incidence of children dying before their first birthday. Other authors on the subject have emphasised the many health problems faced by mothers and their babies in the formative years of the Irish state.<sup>161</sup> The issue of poor housing was only one of the factors. In the 1930s children up to one year old died mainly of birth complications, congenital malformations, pneumonia, diarrhoea and infectious diseases such as measles, meningitis and whooping cough. Infant mortality rates nationwide showed no improvement for many years. The

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<sup>159</sup> Kirby, CMO, *Annual report 1945*, p. 42.

<sup>160</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 12 May 1945.

<sup>161</sup> See, Moira J. Maguire, *Precarious childhood in post-independence Ireland* (Manchester, 2012); Ruth Barrington, *Health, medicine, and politics in Ireland, 1900-1970* (Dublin, 1987), p. 180; Lindsay Earner-Byrne, *Mother and child; maternity and child welfare in Dublin, 1922-60* (Manchester, 2007).

death rate among children under one-year-of -age would rise to 79 per thousand births in 1944 before anyone ‘kicked up a row about it.’<sup>162</sup>

Despite the election of many councillors with strong labour-movement backgrounds to the corporation in the local elections of 1926, there was insufficient public finance for re-housing the large mass of poor working class population before the generous subsidies of the 1932 Housing of the Working Class Act. Sligo corporation showed its mettle in acting decisively as early as 1931, when its members actively pursued and managed a small scheme of 28 working-class houses in the old Barrack’s Yard. With the extra subsidy incentives offered in 1932, the corporation threw itself behind a major housing drive for Sligo, a very difficult task given the scale of the problem. Large swathes of slum housing were examined, condemned and clearance orders passed. The worst areas with the most needy tenants were tackled first, but not without procedural and legal difficulties.

Relationships with the Department of Local Government were not always easy, and significant experience was required in administering and executing projects of such a scale. The corporation solicitor, who did not always have the understanding or gratitude of the council members, undertook an enormous volume of necessary legal work. Members had to educate themselves in methods of dealing with architects, contractors, suppliers, and prospective tenants. They had to manage loans, set rents, and ensure that weekly rents were collected in a timely fashion.

Corruption reared its ugly head in 1934, with the dubious allocation of new houses to unqualified tenants, sitting councillors and their families. Members of the corporation learned their lesson the hard way, once the minister and department dealt with their indiscretions in a public and humiliating fashion, when the Sligo housing scandal made national headlines. This was an important, if inevitable part of the processes of learning modern governance, where local authority had to be seen to be fair, accountable and answerable, to both electorate and central government, who were the main financiers.

Deciding which families were to get new houses as each scheme progressed was a difficult and contentious task. In the present time, this process would be overseen by an administrative staff with a clear qualification process, but in the 1930s it was the

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<sup>162</sup> Barrington, p. 131.

councillors themselves who voted publicly on each applicant family. For the most part the most needy benefited first; the clearing out of small lanes and the rapid eradication of the one-roomed dwelling between 1932 and 1936 is proof of that. Those who lived in designated clearance areas were qualified tenants under the 1932 Act for re-housing and most eventually received houses. In fact, Sligo corporation issued clearance orders on many houses which were never demolished or cleared, and which later became acceptable homes when renovated.

The quality of the material used in the houses declined as building supplies dried up after 1940, but on the whole, the quality of construction was good – with the exception of the problematic windows and doors – and the 800 plus houses are modern functioning homes to this day, eighty years after they were first erected, most having been renovated and extended over the decades.

There is no real evidence of social segregation happening in Sligo after the building of the new houses, as many schemes were constructed on the sites of existing neighbourhoods. Minor existing divisions were maintained to a large degree, but these were not significant in a town as small as Sligo, where most people came together to worship, shop and be educated in the same schools, and where there was a wide inter-family network. Most of the middle-class in Sligo were small shopkeepers, merchants, and clerical workers who were not all that far-removed from working-class roots. The professional class, doctors, lawyers, solicitors and civil servants, generally lived in individual private houses scattered throughout the town, and had a lively social circle that frequently over-lapped with that of the middle-class; it was mostly their jobs that brought them into contact with the working-class poor, but there was no real segregation, with corporation schemes frequently sharing the same road with the houses of the better-off.

The hopes of Sligo corporation for the clearing of its historic slums and a better life for the working class were substantially realized by the end of the housing drive. By the onset of war in 1940 over 500 houses had been erected in a major construction push. Between 1932 and 1938, Sligo corporation received a total of £147,366 in housing loans; by March 1947 that total would rise to £356,963.<sup>163</sup> Sligo had over 240 families living in one-roomed dwellings in 1926; a decade later the concentrated housing drive

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<sup>163</sup> DLG, *Annual report 1945-47*, appendix xvi, p. 114.



had eradicated this type of accommodation almost totally, with less than one per cent of the town's population suffering this ignominy.<sup>164</sup> This is testimony to the tenacity of the corporation in targeting and successfully dealing with this immediate problem.

At the end of 1947, the period of major local authority house building in Sligo was drawing to a close. Dr Kirby, the medical officer, could report with satisfaction that 771 houses had been completed under the 1932 Act, and the evils of slum dwellings and poor health had been mostly eradicated in the previous two decades.<sup>165</sup> Between 1932 and 1947 Sligo removed well over 2,500 people from unhealthy houses, the second highest clearance rate in the provincial towns after Drogheda.<sup>166</sup> Almost 5,000 people were re-housed within the borough in the same period, that is almost 45 per cent of the population, resulting in an unprecedented improvement in the quality of life for so many people.<sup>167</sup>

The urban fabric of Sligo was changed utterly, but the street plan remained substantially intact, due to the careful siting of the new schemes. There was little sentimentality about the passing of an era, a mood summed up by a contemporary writer following the demolition of the last thatched cottages in the borough in late 1941:

Only a few years ago there were many thatched houses to be seen in Sligo town, but with the passing of places like the Ropewalk, they have disappeared. Terraces of new houses have sprung up to keep pace with the slum-clearance drive and thatched roofs and white-washed walls have crumbled for ever in the march towards better housing. They are relics of old Sligo which no one regrets the passing, and there is little sentimentality in the leave-taking of those who leave them. A thatched and white washed cottage in the country may be a picture to gladden the eye....but there is neither comfort nor beauty in the huddled hovels of a squalid urban slum.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> *Census of Saorstát Éireann 1926*, vol. iv, *Housing*, table 13b, p. 54, 'Number of private families... in occupation of tenements of one room....showing also comparative figures for 1911'.

<sup>165</sup> Kirby, *CMO, Annual report, 1948*, p. 40.

<sup>166</sup> DLG, *Annual report 1945-47*, appendix xvii, p. 118.

<sup>167</sup> Kirby, *CMO, Annual report 1944*, p. 45. See calculations as discussed in footnote 147.

<sup>168</sup> *Western People*, 25 Jan. 1941, p. 8.

## Chapter 7

### Sligo's housing drive: a comparative assessment 1932-1947

‘The new houses.....well, they were a gift from God!’<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

The Housing Acts of 1931 and 1932 paved the way for a dramatic increase in the involvement of the local authorities in social housing in Ireland. The subsequent explosion of housing for the working class is generally considered to be one of the most successful social programmes pursued by the Fianna Fáil government and the Irish State.<sup>2</sup> The boom in house construction between 1932 and 1947 resulted in a total of 53,327 new local-authority dwellings being erected in urban areas throughout the Republic.<sup>3</sup> The bulk of these new homes, 40,591, or 76 per cent, were built between April 1933 and March 1940, when wartime shortages began to bite. In addition, a further 66,000 houses were erected by private grants funded under the housing acts.<sup>4</sup>

In Sligo the period between 1932 and 1942 saw the greatest rate of construction to date, with over 530 houses built.<sup>5</sup> In the major towns of the state, excluding the city boroughs, the total number of houses erected was in excess of 12,000 over the same period. Living conditions improved, overcrowding eased, and the citizen developed an expectation of the right to decent housing at a fair rent. However, while the provincial towns benefited most from this massive expenditure, Dublin city in particular was to continue to have an intractable slum problem until the late 1960s.

The very detailed annual reports of the Department of Local Government and Public Health give us an insight into the progress and nature of this unique housing programme. The particulars and extent of housing activity, described by individual towns and urban area, were published at the end of each financial year demonstrating

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<sup>1</sup> Interview 24 Apr. 2014, with Phyllis McGee (1926-2016), one of the first tenants of the new houses at Jinks' Avenue, Sligo in 1936.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Daly, *The buffer state: The historical roots of the Department of the Environment* (Dublin, 1997), p. 219.

<sup>3</sup> DLGPH, *Housing- A review of past operations and immediate requirements* (Dublin, 1948), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Housing- A review of past operations*, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Annual figures for the towns can vary in different reports. This is due to discrepancies arising from the difference between the financial and calendar years, and whether figures included completed houses only or also houses under construction during that period.

publicly that the state was committed to the allocation of resources to the labourers and poorer sections of society. This chapter will examine these reports, deriving statistics from them, and comparing the progress in Sligo with that of the other provincial towns.

### **7.1 The decline of the one and two-roomed dwelling.**

The housing situation in the second tier of Irish towns, including Sligo, was to change dramatically in the decade after 1932. The most immediate difference, as the reports of the Department of Local Government reveal, was the rapid decline in the number of one-roomed dwellings, and in the number of families inhabiting them. The second major change was in the quality of the homes of the working class. Old, damp dwellings, with poor light and ventilation, their open fire-places still used for cooking, were quickly eradicated. In their place rose neat terraces and avenues of two-storey homes, frequently with a small garden front and rear, with two or three bedrooms, a kitchen and living room, and serviced with running water and flush toilets. The physical transformation was nothing short of revolutionary. Overcrowding in the new dwellings, however, was to continue to be problematic, predominantly due to the large size of most families.

In the Free State, the number of families residing in one-roomed dwellings dropped from in excess of 51,000 in 1911 to just over 34,000 in 1946. But it is clear from these figures that despite the efforts of the government in re-housing the people, the number of families living in over-crowded accommodation nationally was still excessive. In 1946, almost 88,000 persons were still living in one-roomed houses; 74,584, or 84 per cent of these people were in the urban areas.<sup>6</sup> Though still a high number, this was nevertheless a reduction of 12,500 on the number of people inhabiting one-roomed dwellings in the 1926 census.

In the study towns, the public housing schemes after 1932 targeted the slum areas first, namely, the districts which had an overwhelming percentage of one- and two-roomed houses. The success of this approach can be seen in the sharp decline in the number and percentage of dwellings of one room between the 1926 and 1946 censuses, with the greatest drop occurring between 1926 and 1936. This is a reflection of the huge scale of

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<sup>6</sup> *Census of population, Ireland, 1926, 1936, 1946, housing volumes.* Total urban population (population of aggregate towns) in 1946 was 1,119,180. Of these, 74,548 still lived in one-roomed dwellings.

the slum clearance undertaken in provincial towns in just a five-year period. Sligo, with over nine per cent of its population, (a total of about 770 persons), living in one-roomed accommodation in 1926, was the town with the greatest proportion of its population living in one-roomed slum dwellings, followed by Galway and Tralee. Kilkenny and Dundalk both had a low percentage of their families living in one-roomed accommodation in 1926, but a greater percentage living in two-roomed dwellings. This appears to have been due to greater housing activity in previous years, with Dundalk erecting over 230 houses, and Kilkenny 187, before 1919.<sup>7</sup> Sligo erected only 54 dwellings in that same period.

In Sligo town, according to the 1911 census, 38 families, or 121 persons were living in one-roomed dwellings; by 1926 that number had increased to 242 families, an indicator of the desperate housing situation.<sup>8</sup> However, by 1936 the percentage the population living in one-roomed dwellings in Sligo had dropped to just under 2 per cent, or fewer than 140 persons. This followed an intense period of state-assisted slum clearances, which targeted the worst areas first, giving priority to eradicating one-roomed houses.

In comparison, the decline in other country towns was not as dramatic, and in the case of Tralee the percentage of one-roomed dwellings actually increased. Tralee UDC provided 331 houses up until March 1936, compared to 429 in Sligo town, of which 154 had been built in 1936 alone.<sup>9</sup> Sligo corporation was in receipt of £5,763 per annum in rents and rates for its houses, Tralee just £3,271. Drogheda received nearly £7,000 in rents accrued over the period. Galway corporation was by far the greatest receiver of rents and rates at £7,600, from a total stock of over 600 houses.<sup>10</sup> But Galway still had almost four per cent of its population housed in one-roomed accommodation in 1936. In comparison with the other study towns, Sligo had the greatest percentage decrease of its population living in one-roomed dwellings by 1936, a reduction of over 8 per cent. (See figure 7.1). Dublin city borough had almost 28 per cent of its inhabitants in the same class of house, followed closely by Limerick with just under 13 per cent.

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<sup>7</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report, 1927-1928*, appendix xxiii, p. 178.

<sup>8</sup> *Census of Saorstát Éireann 1926*, vol. iv, *Housing*, table 13b, 'Number of private families... in occupation of tenements of one room... showing also comparative figures for 1911', p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1935-1936*, appendix xxxviii, p. 336b.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

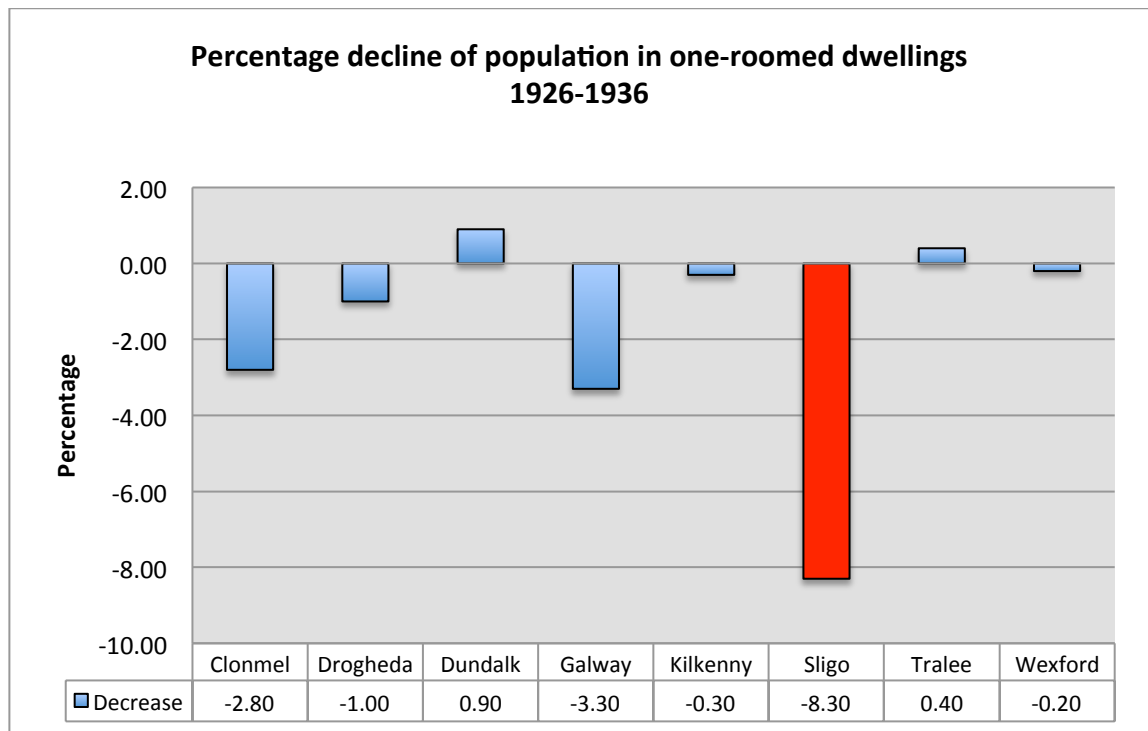


Figure 7.1. Percentage decline in population inhabiting one-roomed dwellings, 1926-1936, in the selected study towns, Irish Free State. Sources: *Census of Irish Free State, 1926, 1936, vols. iv, Housing*.

With the exception of Dublin there was clearly little difference in the scale of the slum-housing problem between the larger cities and the provincial towns. Dublin was to lag far behind the provincial towns in terms of slum clearance; in 1938, there were still 23,000 families living in one-roomed tenements.<sup>11</sup> Dublin's slum problem was of a different magnitude, and attracted much attention, resulting in a very public media campaign and pivotal housing inquiry between 1939-43.

In Sligo town in 1926 there was a total of 1,097 people residing in accommodation comprising of just two rooms, with a further 777 living in one-roomed accommodation. This amounted to over 22 per cent of the population in private families living in dwellings of two rooms or less.<sup>12</sup> Sligo ranked fourth in this classification, with Drogheda a considerable way ahead at almost 29 per cent. Clonmel and Tralee also had a significant proportion of their housing stock in this category, at 24 and 25 per cent respectively. This was inevitably the result of lack of construction; Tralee UDC had erected only 30 houses between 1919 and 1926, Drogheda 106, and Sligo just 54.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Report of inquiry into the housing of the working classes of the city of Dublin 1939-1943*, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> *Census of Irish Free State, 1926, Housing*, vol. iv. Calculated from table 208, Sligo town, p. 126. Percentage is based on population in private families, and not the total population, which includes those in institutions, boarding houses, etc.

<sup>13</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1927-1928*, appendix xxiii, p. 174.

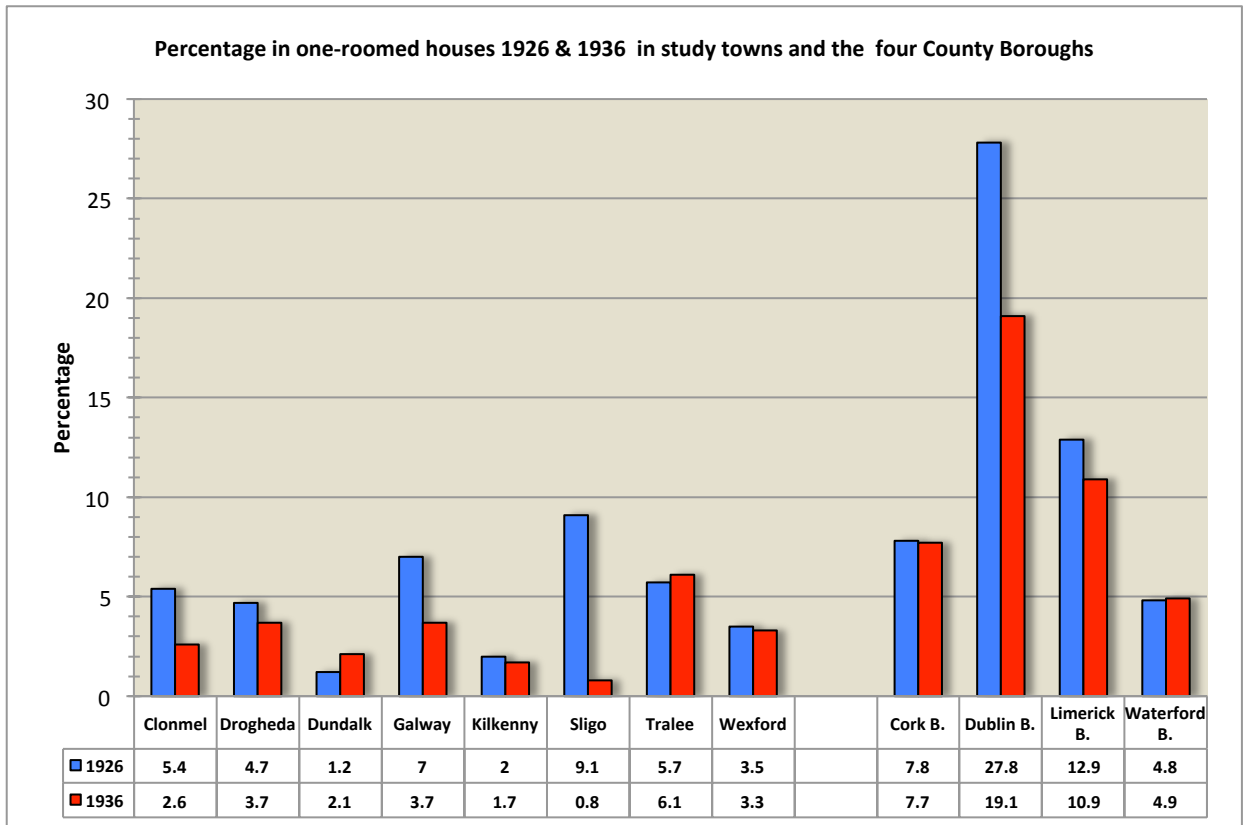


Figure 7.2. Percentage of different towns' population living in dwellings of one room, 1926-1946. Source: Censuses of Ireland, 1926, 1936, and 1946. Derived from Tables 20a, and 13b, showing persons in private families in each town of 5,000 or more inhabitants, classified according to size of family and number of rooms occupied.

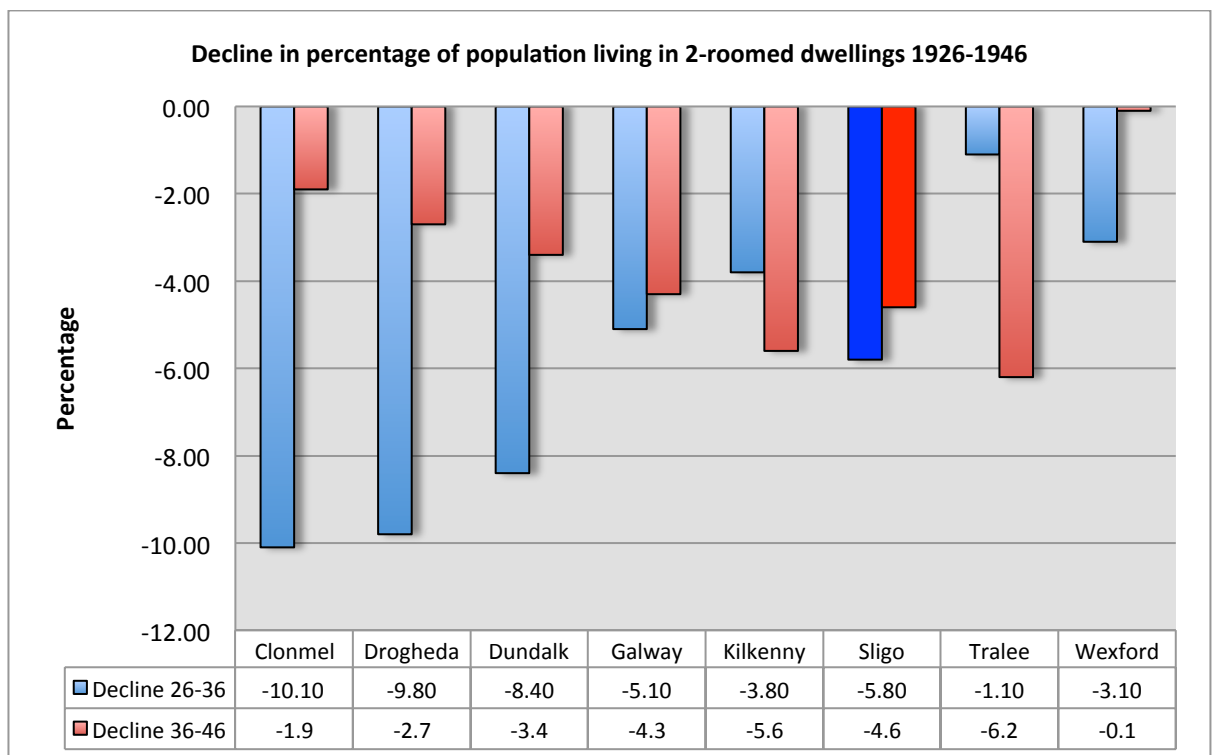


Figure 7.3. Percentage change in the numbers of persons inhabiting dwellings of just two rooms in the provincial towns, between 1926 and 1946. Sources: *Census of Saorstát Éireann, 1926, Vol. IV, housing*; *Census of Ireland 1946, Vol. iv, Housing*.

There was also a significant decline in the percentage of each town's population living in dwellings comprising of just two rooms: Sligo achieved a decline of over 10 per cent in the period 1926-1946, while housing activity in both Clonmel and Drogheda resulted in drops of over 12 per cent for both towns. Figure 7.3 illustrates that this drop happened mostly in the period 1926-1936, again indicating a sustained period of slum clearance under the post 1932 legislation, and the construction of houses comprising of four rooms or more.

The other significant findings to be gleaned from the housing returns of the 1936 and 1946 censuses are the dramatic decrease in the number and proportion of persons living in dwellings of two rooms or less, as distinct from dwellings of just one or just two rooms. This is essentially the aggregate of the total of one-roomed and two-roomed houses, but is a significant statistic in itself, as some towns had a large number of two-roomed houses, but not necessarily a large number of dwellings of just one room. Kilkenny had more tenement houses than Sligo, so one building may have had multiple families, sometimes occupying two rooms in the building, sometimes just one. Therefore the number of persons per room is a good barometer of overcrowding, as can be seen from figure 7.4. Figure 7.5 shows the overall decline in the number and percentage of the population inhabiting dwellings of two rooms or less in the twenty-year period between 1926 and 1946, in each of the provincial towns selected for study. The greatest change took place in the period between 1926 and 1936, with Dundalk's sub-standard dwellings falling by 24 per cent, and Sligo's by over 12 per cent. By 1946, towards the end of the major schemes, the Sligo housing stock of one and two-roomed houses stood at only 4.2 per cent of its total stock - an impressive decline of almost 18 per cent. In fact, Sligo had the second-largest drop in this category of house, in the twenty years between 1926 and 1946. These statistics illustrate the level of commitment by both local and national government to eradicating the slums in provincial towns.

<b>Town</b>	<b>% &lt;2 PPR</b>	<b>Average PPR</b>
<b>Clonmel</b>	20.8	1.02
<b>Drogheda</b>	32.7	1.23
<b>Dundalk</b>	24.2	1.16
<b>Galway</b>	25.5	1.14
<b>Kilkenny</b>	19.4	1.00
<b>Sligo</b>	28.8	1.19
<b>Tralee</b>	29.7	1.32
<b>Wexford</b>	16.8	1.02
<hr/>		
<b>Dublin Borough</b>	45.3	1.55
<b>Cork Borough</b>	29.2	1.22
<b>Waterford Borough</b>	28.6	1.18
<b>Limerick Borough</b>	36.8	1.36

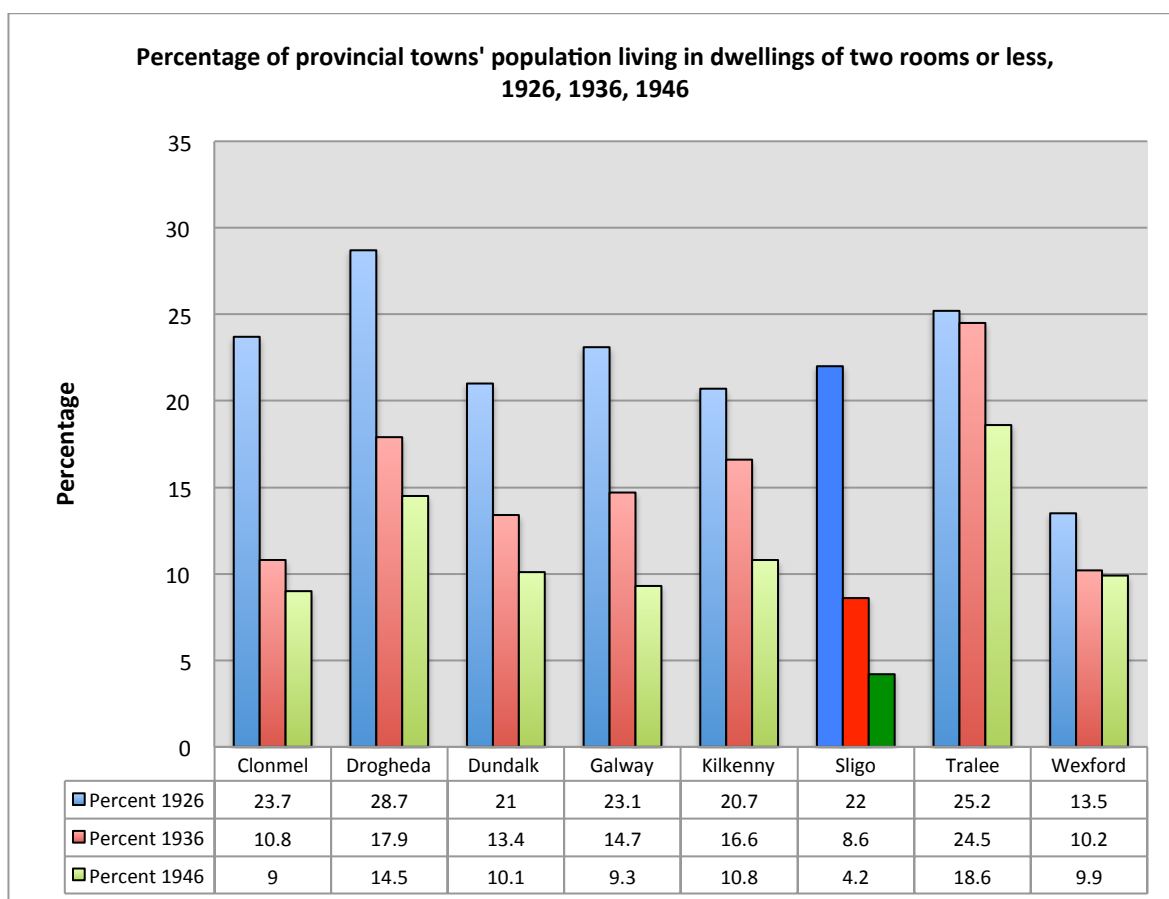
Fig. 7.4. Case study provincial towns, showing the percentage of population living in accommodation with more than two persons per room, (PPR), and the average number of PPR. The four city boroughs are also shown for comparison. Source: *Census of Saorstát Éireann, 1926, Vol. IV, housing.*

Overcrowding was endemic in the Free State, with over 580,000 people, or 20 per cent of the population, living in dwellings of two rooms or less.<sup>14</sup> Even more disconcerting, was the fact that a total of 1.37 million or 49 per cent of the population nationally was living in dwellings of three rooms or less. This was out of a total population of 2.3 million. Further examination shows that if the number of persons living in dwellings of four rooms or less are tabulated, then an overwhelming majority of the population, 72 per cent, or just under 2 million people, lived in dwellings of four rooms or less.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Census of Irish Free State, 1926, vol. iv, Housing*, calculated from table 15, p. 160.

<sup>15</sup> The census defined occupied rooms as 'usual living rooms, including bedrooms and kitchens, but excluding bathrooms, sculleries, etc.'. This probably indicates that some of these dwellings with four rooms may have also had a small scullery or toilet.





**Fig. 7.5. Case study provincial towns, showing the decline in the percentage of the population living in dwellings of two rooms or less, between 1926 and 1936. Sources: *Census of Saorstát Éireann, 1926, Vol. IV, housing*; *Census of Ireland 1936, Vol. iv, Housing*.**

According to the 1926 census, the most overcrowded urban areas by census definition in the Free State, were Dublin (45%), Edenderry (38%), Limerick City (37%), Kildare (35%), Newbridge and Newcastle West (34%), Tullamore, Drogheda and Clara (33%), Tipperary (32%), Ballinasloe (31%), Carlow, Athy, Tullow, Kilrush Listowel, Tuam and Tralee (30%), and Sligo and Waterford (29%). The urban areas of the province of Connacht had an overcrowding rate of 25.2 per cent. The census definition for overcrowding was a dwelling which had more than two persons per room.<sup>17</sup>

## **7.2 Summary of the activities of the various urban authorities over the period, 1932-1947**

The years 1931 and 1932 were pivotal in the Irish housing programme. The Cosgrave government of Cumann na nGaedheal called an election in late January 1932, confident that it would be returned to power; however, an effective campaign by DeValera led to

<sup>17</sup> *Census of Ireland 1926, vol. iv, Housing*, p. 83, table 15.

the formation of a new Fianna Fáil minority government. This was the first change of government in the new Irish Free State, and despite fears about the transfer of power to the losers of the civil war of a decade earlier, the transition proved remarkably smooth and enduring, and Fianna Fáil began a sixteen-year period in power.

The annual reports of the Department of Local Government and Public Health during this period give an insight into the comprehensive nature of the housing programme, and the extent of fiscal investment in housing stock. In the decade between 1932 and 1942, some 82,000 houses, both urban and rural, were constructed, and the housing debt of local authorities rose from £7.8 million in 1926 to £18.6 million in 1936.<sup>18</sup>

### **1931-32**

The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act which became law on the 24<sup>th</sup> December 1931, in the dying days of the Cosgrave government, made considerable changes to the existing housing legislation. It provided a quicker method for the clearance of unhealthy areas, and the repair or demolition of houses unfit for human habitation.<sup>19</sup> Before this the local authority could ensure the clearance of an unhealthy area only by purchasing the land and premises, and then demolishing the condemned buildings. Under the 1931 Act, the local authority could secure the clearance of an unhealthy area by two means: firstly by using its legal powers to direct the owners of condemned houses to compulsorily demolish them and clear and level the site. The second method was for the local authority to buy the land and building in a designated clearance area and carry out the demolition work itself.<sup>20</sup>

An important change was also effected in relation to the assessment of compensation for the land acquired by the local authority in an unhealthy area. From 1932 onwards, the cost of demolition and site clearance carried out by the local authority was to be deducted from the compensation value of such clearance areas. Radical changes were also effected by the 1931 Act in terms of acquisition. From 1932 councils and corporations were empowered to acquire lands for housing under the terms of the housing acts. This was by means of passing a ‘compulsory purchase order’, which was then confirmed by the Minister for Local Government. Any objections to these ‘CPOs’ could be addressed by means of an official inquiry process. The minister’s order was

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<sup>18</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 221.

<sup>19</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1931-1932*, p. 107.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

final, and could only be challenged by a very expensive appeal to the High Court. More stringent powers were provided to enable local authorities to ensure the repair or demolition of unhealthy dwelling houses. These powers gave the corporation tough controls over reluctant landlords and tenants.

State assistance to enable the local authorities to provide houses under the 1931 Act were provided by way of a percentage of annual local charges, varying from 15 to 40 per cent. The total amount of loans sanctioned for the purposes of the housing of the working classes under the various acts between 1890 and 1931 totalled just £1.55 million.<sup>21</sup> Dublin and Cork corporations were able to issue stock to raise capital, but other local authorities were unable to raise loans in this way.

Only 82 houses were constructed in Sligo under all the housing acts between 1890 and March 1932. Clonmel erected 199, Drogheda 337, Dundalk 302, Galway 293, Kilkenny 233, Tralee 118, and Wexford 235 (see figure 7.6). Other smaller towns outside the study towns frequently erected more, such as Tipperary town, which erected 183 houses, Longford 124, and Enniscorthy 146.<sup>22</sup> Waterford corporation was one of the most active of Irish towns in the advancement of working class housing. Between 1879 and 1923, the corporation had constructed a total of 415 houses, most of them before 1920.<sup>23</sup> Sligo clearly performed badly under the pre-1932 acts and financial structures. A substantial number of these dwellings were erected by private individuals, and extensively grant-aided. During the period between 1924 and 1931, the state operated an assisted private enterprise grant to enable private citizens to build their own houses. By 1931 over two-thirds of all the houses erected with state assistance in the previous decade were privately owned.<sup>24</sup>

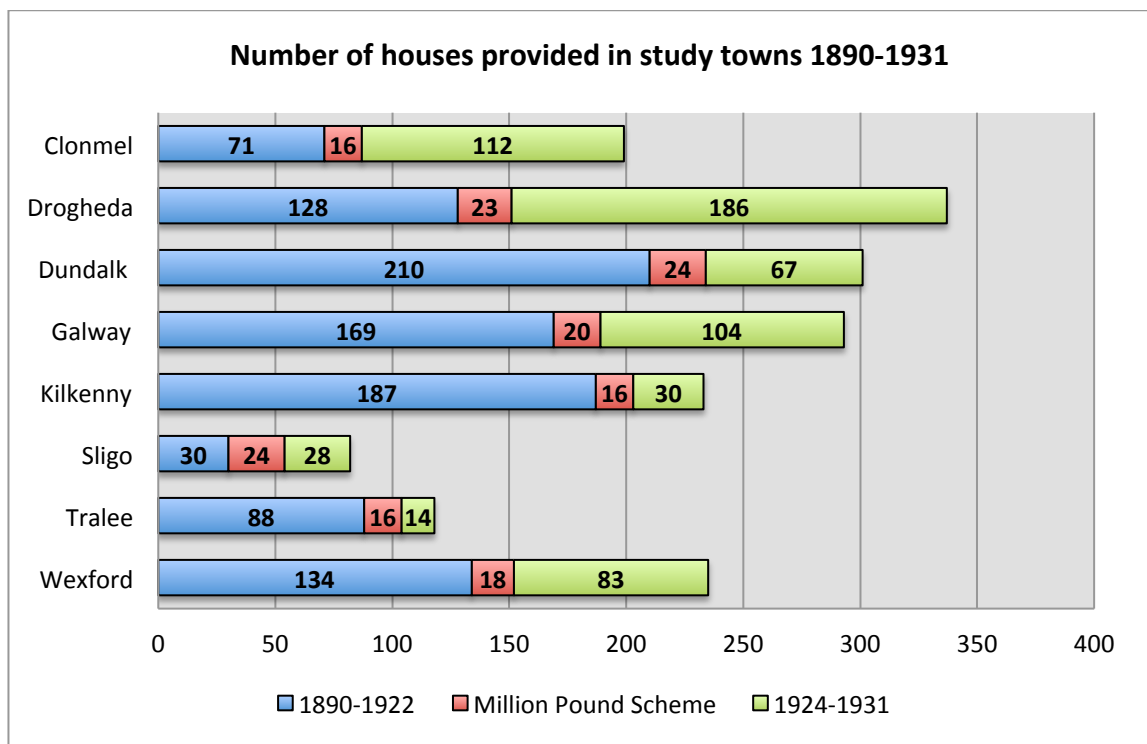
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<sup>21</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1930-1931*, appendix xxxix, p. 250.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, appendix xxviii, p. 258.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Potter, *The municipal revolution in Ireland: A handbook of urban government in Ireland since 1800* (Dublin, 2011), p. 343.

<sup>24</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 218.



**Figure 7.6.** Number of houses provided under all Housing acts 1890-1930, as of March 1932. Source: DLGPH, *Annual report 1931-32* p. 260, appendix xxxi. Both public funded and private assisted figures are included.

Under the pre-1932 acts, the local authorities also received annual grants to enable the building of houses which were leased, or more frequently, sold to tenants. Virtually all of the people who benefited by this grant were in a secure income situation, as weekly rents were high. During the period some 17,032 houses were completed, with the majority – 11,882 – being erected in rural areas, with a mere 1,319 in the provincial urban districts, and 3,582 in the five county boroughs.<sup>25</sup> In Sligo town only 52 private houses were erected under this grant; the rural areas of the county benefited from the erection of 466 houses in the same period. The total amount issued in grants by the state up to the end of March 1932 was over £1.09 million pounds, of which £740,786 was allocated to rural private housing, and just £97,400 for housing in the towns with urban district councils and town commissioners. By the end of March 1934, over 16,706 private houses had been erected in rural areas under this scheme, with a mere 2,714 built in the provincial towns, and 5,880 in the county boroughs.<sup>26</sup> The housing grant system throughout the first decade of the state’s existence therefore was heavily weighted in favour of the better-off middle class rural dweller. Mary Daly notes that by

<sup>25</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1931-1932*, p. 112, and appendix xxxiii, p. 266. The city boroughs were Dublin, Dun Laoghaire, Cork, Waterford and Limerick.

<sup>26</sup> DLGPH, *Annual Report 1933-1934*, p. 118.

1931, 'groups other than slum dwellers had come to expect state assistance for housing as a right', and these schemes were politically popular.<sup>27</sup>

Under the provisions of the 1931 Act, an 'assisted private enterprise grant' to the sum of £45, was to be given to private individuals who erected houses. Houses erected under this grant were required to have at least three rooms, and a floor area of not less than 500 square feet, and not more than 1,250 sq. ft.<sup>28</sup> The dwellings had to be commenced before 1<sup>st</sup> April 1931 and completed by 20<sup>th</sup> February 1932 in order to qualify for the grant. This grant was later extended annually. A year later, in March 1933, this method of granting assistance to those who could afford larger rents, (and by extension, better quality housing), was altered somewhat. The total of the grants made fell to £191,058, with only 3,021 houses being erected; of these only 1,688 were in urban areas.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the much-lauded advances of the state-aided building programme, it is clear from these figures that the private better-off individual still benefited more from the system of subsidies than did the poorer classes. Deep disagreements ensued throughout much of the 1930s between the Departments of Finance and Local Government over the level of such subsidies, with Finance pushing hard to have these grants terminated or reduced greatly.<sup>30</sup> But grants for private housing proved enormously popular, and despite the fact that grants for private housing in urban areas were reduced in 1936, those for rural areas remained unchanged. Grants were again reduced in 1937, and were scheduled to end in 1938, but successful lobbying by builders caused a deferral of this plan.<sup>31</sup>

### 1932-3

While the 1931 Act was initiated by Cumann na nGaedhail, it was the incoming Fianna Fáil government in March 1932 that was to be the political beneficiary, when it increased the subsidies available to the local authorities. A new, amended Housing Act was passed in August 1932. The Housing (Financial and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1932, repealed the provision of the 1931 Act, and increased the state subsidies available to local authorities providing houses for the working class, particularly those living in slum or clearance areas.<sup>32</sup> The revised maximum rates were set at 66.6 per cent of the

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<sup>27</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 218.

<sup>28</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1933-34*, p. 118.

<sup>29</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1932-33*, p. 113.

<sup>30</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 224.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>32</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1932-33*, p. 105.

loan charges, for houses erected to re-house those living in slum or clearance areas. A further rate of 33.3 per cent of the loan charges was borne by the government for the erection of houses for the better-paid worker who was still unable to pay a full economic rent. Certain limits were placed on the all-in costs for each house on which contributions from central government would be paid. For Sligo and the other provincial towns this was initially £300 per dwelling. The Act also encouraged the use of Irish materials and local labour, as far as possible.

On August 1932 the details of the new financial terms under an amendment to the 1931 Act was circulated to the various local authorities, who were informed that the government aimed to fully satisfy the national housing needs of the people within ten years.<sup>33</sup> Housing loans sanctioned under the new acts in the period March 1931-March 1932 stood at £603,000, a rise of over 70 per cent from the previous year.<sup>34</sup> By March 1933 there were housing schemes in progress in 81 out of 87 of the municipal districts throughout the country. 1,053 houses had been completed by that date, and a further 2,419 were in construction, including 52 in Sligo, 110 in Clonmel, 94 in Drogheda, 64 in Dundalk, 24 in Kilkenny, and 42 in Wexford. Encouragingly, over 6,600 houses were in planning for construction. Large tracts of land, totalling over 110 acres had been compulsorily acquired for local authority schemes throughout the country, at a cost of £16,500.<sup>35</sup>

Compulsory acquisition of land, and the passing of subsequent clearance orders accelerated in 1933-4, and tenders were sanctioned for the erection of 1,054 three-roomed houses, and 1,498 four-roomed dwellings nationwide during the period. The power given to the local authorities in the 1931 Act to clear unhealthy areas and demolish houses was extensively availed of in 1932, with 642 houses being demolished, and a further 2,896 houses, containing almost 4,000 families being scheduled for demolition.<sup>36</sup> A circular letter was sent to all local authorities in November 1933, urging that special consideration be given to the installation of electricity in the new dwelling houses, wherever the electricity supply was available locally.<sup>37</sup> This directive would cause controversy in Sligo, as the councillors felt it pushed the tender price of the houses too high. Sligo corporation received approval for the tender on the Barrack

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>34</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1931-32*, p. 4, and p. 107.

<sup>35</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1932-33*, p. 111.

<sup>36</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1933-34*, p. 118

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.126.

Street site in February 1933; the tender was for £285-1-10.<sup>38</sup> Electricity was not installed.

A housing board was established in November 1932, its duties being to ‘examine housing conditions thoroughly, and to advise and assist the Minister in the solution of the present housing shortage’.<sup>39</sup> Its original purpose was as an agency, to centralise the administration of the housing programme and assume some of the powers of the local authorities if they were found lacking in their duty or commitment to the aforesaid programme. Seán T. O’Kelly, the Minister, had a fear of fraud, non-adherence to minimum standards, and lack of competence and political will on the part of the various local authorities in their implementation of the housing schemes.<sup>40</sup> However, a hostile reaction from local councils, town commissioners and elements of the Department itself, led to the abandonment of the original plan, and the resultant housing board was a much-reduced beast. Its brief from 1932 included persuading lax councils and corporations to push ahead with schemes, helping with understanding the financial implications of the programme, and assisting when labour shortages and strikes threatened to delay or derail progress. The housing board was the major channel through which the public made complaints, and Sligo county council came under criticism in 1936 for failing to construct sufficient labourers’ cottages in the smaller towns in the county.<sup>41</sup> Throughout the Board’s existence there was always a level of tension between it and the Department, due to the uncertain relationship between the Board and the local authorities in terms of finance, supervision and progress of the state housing programme.<sup>42</sup>

### **The ‘frenzied period’, 1933-40**

The seven years between March 1933 and March 1940 were to see a frenzied burst of house building in the selected provincial towns. Sligo capitalised on the subsidies made available by the 1932 Act, and erected over 420 houses during the period, with forty more under construction. In the same period nationwide there were 3,300 houses constructed. Sligo corporation had two further scheme-tenders approved by the end of

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<sup>38</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1931-32*, appendix xxxiii, p. 265.

<sup>39</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 234.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

March 1934; one for a scheme of 3-roomed houses costing £202 each, and one for a 100-unit scheme of 5-roomed houses costing £260 each.<sup>43</sup>

Year End March	Clonmel	Drogheda	Dundalk	Galway	Kilkenny	Sligo	Tralee	Wexford
1933	32	56	26	19	0	59	30	14
1934	110	128	141	40	33	120	0	42
1935	40	90	51	187	85	14	183	96
1936	36	104	78	42	0	154	0	0
1937	0	160	63	31	162	60	0	136
1938	101	18	161	12	8	36	68	18
1939	47	22	98	12	0	0	0	62
1940	2	150	78	5	45	40	130	8
1941	32	32	15	15	0	136	70	14
1942	0	6	0	4	54	60	0	14
1943	0	0	32	30	0	4	0	25
1944	0	0	0	40	0	69	0	0
1945	0	0	52	0	0	42	0	0
1946	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
1947	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	400	774	795	437	387	794	481	429
<b>Totals 1932-47</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>735</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>421</b>

Figure 7.7. Total number of houses completed in the study towns, in each of the financial years from March 1933 to March 1947. Source: DLG, Annual report, 1945-1947, appendix xvii p.119 . Discrepancies arise between the individual annual reports and the final total given in the Annual Report in 1947.

Kilkenny received a boost in 1933, when a start was made on wiping out the slums in the city. A site was cleared for the construction of 85 working-class houses; the importance of the scheme was underlined by the presence of most of the corporation members in full robes as the RC Bishop of Ossary blessed the site. The mayor noted that the bishop's presence was an 'encouragement to the corporation to make a special effort to alleviate the appalling housing conditions' that existed in many parts of the city. In the period since 1930 Kilkenny corporation had constructed 171 houses.<sup>44</sup> 'Good housing inspires' were the words Bishop Collier used to describe the new housing schemes, stating the people could hardly expect that 'good civic spirit or the best moral conditions to prevail' in the slum areas where the surroundings 'tend to lower and pull down, rather than elevate' the people. 'Good houses, neat cottages,

<sup>43</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1934-35*, appendix xxxvii, p. 349.

<sup>44</sup> *Irish Press*, 3 Oct. 1933, p. 9.



beautiful within and without, with a proper spirit in them, were in themselves an inspiration to good'.<sup>45</sup> This was a reflection of the nineteenth century social thought on the moral issues surrounding the poorer classes and the link between bad housing and low morals.

By the end of March 1934, the Department of Local Government reported progress on the take-up of the new loans subsidies by all of the local authorities in the state, with almost 3,000 houses completed in the total urban areas by the end of that financial year.<sup>46</sup> The operations of the various urban authorities between 1933 and 1939 were confined mostly to the rehousing of persons living in unhealthy areas or unfit houses. The payment of annual loan charges by the state, was made conditional on the use of materials and appliances manufactured in the Irish Free State. By 1934, the proportion of Irish-origin materials used in the construction of new houses was about 45 per cent, although there was much concern about quality.<sup>47</sup> This was evident in the Sligo schemes, as noted in the many complaints to the corporation regarding leaking windows and doors, and problems with cooking ranges.

In March 1935, over 6,433 houses were in progress nationally, of which 212 were under construction in Sligo.<sup>48</sup> Between 1932 and March 1935, over 1,904 slum houses had been demolished, containing 2,243 families.<sup>49</sup> Clearance and demolition orders had been passed on a total of 4,486 houses through the urban areas of the state. Tralee in particular enacted over 13 clearance orders in 1934, mostly on the unsanitary lanes adjacent to the town's core.<sup>50</sup> However, the high cost of labour in Tralee was to push the cost of housing construction upwards in 1936.<sup>51</sup> In many towns a shortage of skilled labourers and tradesmen resulted not only in delays in construction, but in numerous disputes with contractors when outside skilled labour was hired. Sligo building sites had frequent incidences of walk-outs and 'tools-down' when disputes arose with contractors.

The thirst for change was gathering pace in other, smaller, country towns by 1936, due in no small part to the progress made in towns like Sligo. In October 1936, a UDC

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1933-34*, p. 118.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1934-35*, p. 140.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>51</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 235.

councillor in Tipperary town petitioned *The Irish Press* to send a representative to the town to observe first-hand the ‘shocking conditions in which our people are living’. Joseph Cahill, secretary of the Tipperary Workingmen’s’ Protective and Benefit Society, told the paper that in one are of the town, ‘we have about 30 houses, with back-to back doors, and one lavatory to accommodate about 90 people. It’s like being in the middle-ages’.<sup>52</sup>

At the time of the passing of the Housing Act of 1932, it was estimated that 75,000 new houses were required. By the end of March 1936, a total of 36,097 houses had been erected, both private-assisted and local authority dwellings.<sup>53</sup> Remarkably, 4,145 of these dwellings had been erected in the previous twelve months. Sligo borough had exceeded 154 houses, and over twenty-two clearance orders were passed in the same year for the Borough, indicating the appetite for change.<sup>54</sup> 1934 and 1935 are notable for the large volume of clearance and demolition orders nationally; in excess of 75 were made, though not all demolitions were executed. A total of £1.8 million was sanctioned in loans for houses in urban areas in the financial year ending March 1936, which was a record year for the number of houses erected in urban areas, namely 4,145 to March 1936.<sup>55</sup>

The department reported that in the year ending March 1937 the local authorities continued to display ‘commendable activity’ in their efforts to eradicate slums and relieve overcrowding.<sup>56</sup> In the course of the previous financial year, 1,599 houses in clearance areas were demolished, 3,277 houses were completed in urban areas, and 3,747 houses were under construction.<sup>57</sup> Over 18,000 houses in different schemes were in preparation by 44 local authorities, and tenders had been approved for over 3,573 houses, 1,961 of these being four-roomed.<sup>58</sup> As a condition precedent to the payment of subsidies under the 1932 Act, all houses had to be let at rents approved by the minister.

The Department of Local Government reported that in the period between 1932 and year ending March 1938, 10,855 houses, occupied by 13,933 families, were ordered to

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<sup>52</sup> *Irish Press*, 30 Oct. 1936, p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1935-36*, p. 125.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>55</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1936-37*, p. 117.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* This urban total included the study towns, the county boroughs, and all other census-designated urban municipal areas.

<sup>58</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1936-37*, p. 117.

be demolished by the relevant local authority. However, only 8,433 houses containing 10,841 families were actually demolished. Over 6,000 of these demolished houses were in designated clearance areas.<sup>59</sup> Housing loans totalling £1.04 million were sanctioned during the year ending March 1938, with considerable sums being made available to smaller towns, such as Dungarvan, which received £50,000 in loans. Other notable loans were to Galway (£50,000), Tralee (£44,500), Athlone (£40,100), and Arklow (£32,928).<sup>60</sup>

Demolition and clearance continued apace in Sligo town in 1937 and 1938. The corporation had received a total of £147,366 on loans from 1932 to 1938. Numerous demolition orders were issued in that year for Old Mail Coach Road, Old Pound Street, and Vernon Street, and compulsory acquisition of land was ordered for the same areas, along with James Street, all in the south-eastern quarter of the town.<sup>61</sup> The annual report of the department shows that Sligo had completed just 36 houses in the financial year ended March 1938, but that 40 more were in the course of construction. In all, Sligo had erected 525 houses in the period between 1890 and March 1938.<sup>62</sup> In the other study towns the situation was similar, with a small number of houses completed during the 1937-38. However, Clonmel had completed 101 houses, during an intense construction period. Galway had a large scheme underway, with 491 houses under construction, as did Tralee with 129. In all the municipal districts of the state there were 5,408 houses in the course of construction in March 1938, and 2,104 had been erected during the course of the year.<sup>63</sup> The total number of houses condemned since the passing of the 1932 Act was given as 9,154, which were occupied by 11,489 families. In March 1938 there were 125 schemes in operation throughout the country, in 53 of the 88 municipal areas. Thirty-seven local authorities had schemes in preparation, which comprised 17,338 houses. The use of Irish manufactured housing material was repeatedly stressed; the payment of contributions to the annual loan charges was conditional on the use of such materials wherever practical.<sup>64</sup> By the end of March 1938, there had been 591 houses erected in the city boroughs, 422 by the study towns, 869 by the urban district councils, and 222 in the smaller towns.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1938-39*, p. 59.

<sup>60</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1937-38*, appendix xxvii, pp 196-7.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, appendix xxix, pp 202-3.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 202-7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, appendix xxxi, pp 212-15.

The pace of house building continued unabated as war clouds gathered over Europe. The number of houses erected by all local authorities, (both urban and rural), was 6,932, for the fiscal year ended March 1939, the largest number erected in one year to date. 4,065 of these dwellings were erected in urban areas, with Dublin corporation erecting 2,336 of these.<sup>66</sup> Housing loans totalling £2.95 million pounds were sanctioned by the department in the year ending March 1939, with over £2 million of this going to Dublin corporation alone.<sup>67</sup> A large number of schemes were in progress or in planning, comprising a total of 8,696 houses, of which 3,765 had already been started.<sup>68</sup> However, in the study towns, actual completion numbers were down for this period. Clonmel completed just 47 houses, and while Sligo completed none in the period, 40 were in the course of construction, and the department had approved construction of a 136 further houses.<sup>69</sup> Departmental report totals from some of the urban centres offer us a glimpse into the steady pace of assisted house building over the previous half-century, (see figure 7.8).

<i>Urban Area</i>	<i>No. of houses</i>
<b>Ballina</b>	519
<b>Clonmel</b>	563
<b>Drogheda</b>	915
<b>Dundalk</b>	894
<b>Killarney</b>	229
<b>Galway</b>	637
<b>Mallow</b>	235
<b>Mullingar</b>	220
<b>Navan</b>	321
<b>Portlaoise</b>	140
<b>Sligo</b>	535
<b>Tralee</b>	399
<b>Tullamore</b>	358
<b>Wexford</b>	603

**Figure 7.8. The total number of new dwellings, (public and private assisted) erected between 1890 and 1939 in various towns of the Irish Free State. Source: DLGPH, Annual report 1938-39 (Dublin, 1940), p. 160, appendix xxiii.**

<sup>66</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1938-39*, pp 58-60.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, , appendix xxi, p. 153

<sup>68</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1938-39*, pp 58-60.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, appendix xxv, p. 168,

In the period 1890 to 1939, Sligo corporation had received £157,266 in sanctioned state loans, for the purpose of erecting workers' housing.<sup>70</sup> The other study towns had received similar amounts, with the exception of Dundalk, which borrowed £303,552 over the same period. Construction costs continued to rise throughout 1937, mostly due to the ending of cheap cement imports, and the change to domestic-made cement.<sup>71</sup>

The outbreak of war in September 1939 seriously affected the house-building programme, but urban authorities still managed to erect 3,121 houses, thanks to careful management of supplies.<sup>72</sup> The Department could boast that the number of houses erected and reconstructed in the period 1922-1940 under a native Irish government, stood at 120,000, compared to just 50,700 erected between 1883 and 1922.<sup>73</sup> House completion numbers in the study towns stood at 458 dwellings, with Sligo having completed 40 dwellings, with 136 in the course of construction. Tenders were approved in 1939 for the erection of a further 1,274 four-roomed houses throughout the country.

#### **1940: Slow down of construction**

The slow-down in building which started in early 1940 manifested itself more fully by March 1941, the first year under full war-time conditions. There was a decline in the number of houses erected in urban areas of over 48 per cent, just 1,629 houses being erected compared with 3,131 the previous year. Shortages of timber and glass were problematic, as was the difficulty in transportation of materials, due to the restriction on petrol.<sup>74</sup> Tenders were approved for the erection of 2,775 dwellings in 1941, with 2,469 of these being four-roomed houses. In Sligo, compulsory acquisition of land was passed on the Riverside and Abbeyquarter schemes to the east of the town centre. The minister also approved the rents for the letting of 90 houses in Sligo at 4s 1d per week, 32 houses at 3s 7d per week, and 14 houses at 2s 7d per week, all exclusive of rate charges.<sup>75</sup> One hundred and thirty-six new houses were completed in Sligo by March 1941, with £62,600 of a housing loan being sanctioned by the minister, out of an overall total of £1.46 million in loans nationally.<sup>76</sup> Of all the study towns, Sligo had the largest number of completed houses in this financial year. A further 114 houses were in the

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<sup>70</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1938-39*, appendix xxiv, p. 164.

<sup>71</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 234.

<sup>72</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1939-40*, p. 58.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

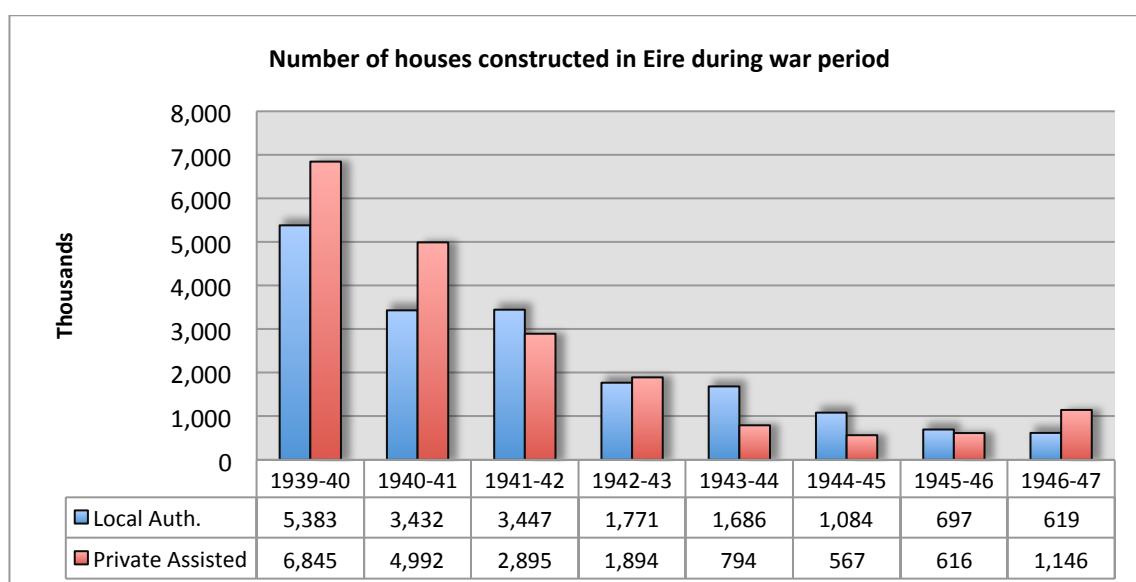
<sup>74</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1940-41*, p. 63.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, appendix xxiv, p. 170,

course of construction in March 1941.<sup>77</sup> Completion and construction in the other provincial towns was slow in comparison: Clonmel completed just 32 houses, with none in preparation, Dundalk just 15 houses, and Kilkenny none. Tralee UDC was more active, completing 70 houses, but with no more in the course of construction. Clearly, Sligo was ahead in re-housing its urban poor, despite the difficulties caused by the commencement of war.

Construction numbers went into steep decline in the financial year ended March 1942. Dublin corporation managed to complete 1,210 houses in this period, with Limerick building 368. The total number of houses completed in the study towns was down to 138, with 60 of those in Sligo and 54 in Kilkenny. A further 148 were in the course of construction, 58 of these in Sligo.<sup>78</sup> In all the provincial urban areas, outside the four city boroughs and Dun Laoghaire, only 218 houses were erected. This is in stark contrast to the 2,026 houses erected in the same urban areas in the year ending March 1936.<sup>79</sup> There was a corresponding decline in the erection of private assisted housing. During this period, there was experimentations with alternative methods of construction, reducing the number and quality of timber joists, and re-enforcements, in order to economise with materials.



**Figure 7.9. The declining number of houses constructed in Éire during the War years, showing the contrast between public funded houses and private assisted houses. Private-assisted did not have the same levels of contraction until 1944, and were quicker to recover after 1946. Source: DLGPH Annual Report 1944-45, Appendix xxxi, p. 216.**

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., appendix xxviii, p. 182.

<sup>78</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1941-42*, appendix xxxi, p.206.

<sup>79</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1935-36*, appendix xxxviii, p. 338.

It is important to acknowledge the sheer scale of the work completed by the early 1940s. Between 1932 and 1940, forty-two individual urban districts had each constructed one or more schemes of at least 100 houses. In most urban districts of the state, up to 90 per cent of all the housing constructed up to 1940, had been erected by the local authority. Of the 44,000 houses constructed by March 1941, over 12,000 had been erected in the urban areas outside the cities.<sup>80</sup> A further 18,400 had been constructed in rural areas, under the 1932 Act; the rural still trumped the urban.

As the war dragged on, and building supplies from Britain were cut, there was a continuing decrease in the number of houses erected by the local authorities. In the year ending March 1943, just 1,771 houses were completed as compared to 3,447 in the previous year. Of these, 1,044 were in urban areas,<sup>81</sup> and in rural areas 727 dwellings were constructed. This was far short of what was considered necessary, but given the economic situation it represented a substantial contribution to the alleviating housing needs. Sanctioned loans during the year amounted to £688, 990, under the 1932 Act. Building schemes were in progress in nine municipal areas, and tenders had been received for the erection of a further 411 four-roomed houses nationally.<sup>82</sup> Sligo completed just four houses by the end of March 1943, with a further 125 in construction. It was a similar story in the other study towns, with Galway completing 30 dwellings, and Dundalk 32. Only 91 houses were completed in the eight study towns for this period, with Sligo having the only substantial number under construction.<sup>83</sup>

There was a decrease of 5 per cent in the number of houses erected by local bodies in the year 1943-44 over the previous financial year; a total of 1,686 houses as opposed to 1,771.<sup>84</sup> In rural areas the decrease was profound, over 60 per cent. Just 291 rural homes were built in the year.<sup>85</sup> In view of the difficulties encountered, the department considered this to be an excellent effort on the part of the local authorities. A rudimentary survey was carried out during the course of the year to estimate the remaining housing needs throughout both rural and urban areas of the state. An approximate total of 53,000 houses was arrived at, with many further houses requiring

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<sup>80</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1940-41*, appendix xxviii, p. 184.

<sup>81</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1942-43*, p. 74.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, appendix xxvii, p. 192.

<sup>84</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1943-44*, p. 83.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

extensive alterations and improvements so as to bring them up to a proper standard.<sup>86</sup>

The department speculated that in post-war conditions a very large house-repairing and re-conditioning programme would be required.

In the study towns, 109 houses were completed during the financial year ending March 1944, but building only took place in two of the towns: 69 in Sligo and 40 in Galway.

There were no activities in the other towns. However, tenders were approved for the erection of 794 four-roomed houses throughout the state, and smaller urban centres were beginning to show signs of progress. Arklow erected 124 houses in 1943-44, Carlow 61 and Letterkenny 30. Schemes were in progress in six municipal areas, with the total number of dwellings comprising of over 5,000 houses.<sup>87</sup> Tuam, in Co. Galway had erected 305 houses since the 1890 Act, most of these between 1932 and 1939.<sup>88</sup>

Over the period 1932 to March 1944, a total of 8,482 houses were erected by private-assisted grants. In Sligo, 34 houses were built at a cost of £1,800, and a surprising 582 in Galway, which cost almost £30,000 in state grants.<sup>89</sup> Only the affluent Dun Laoghaire borough surpassed this total of private-assisted housing, building 718 houses at a cost of £37,549. Cork and Limerick erected only 640 dwellings between them.<sup>90</sup>

There were no houses under construction in any of the study towns by March 1945, some weeks before the end of the Second World War.<sup>91</sup> In all only 163 houses had been erected in the aggregate urban areas of the state during that year, excluding those constructed in the city boroughs. The total number of houses built and reconstructed by local authorities and with assisted private grants for the year ended March 1945, was 1,651. Significantly, 1,084 of these were erected by municipal authorities. This was the lowest number constructed since the passing of the 1932 Act, compared with an average output of 14,634 per annum in the five-year period between 1935-1939.<sup>92</sup> Despite the desire of many local bodies to initiate new housing schemes, as is evidenced by the number of clearance orders issued, most authorities were unable to commence any new schemes after 1940, instead concentrating on completing previously-approved and financed schemes.

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>88</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1939-40*, appendix xxiii, p. 163.

<sup>89</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1943-44*, appendix xxxiv, p. 241.

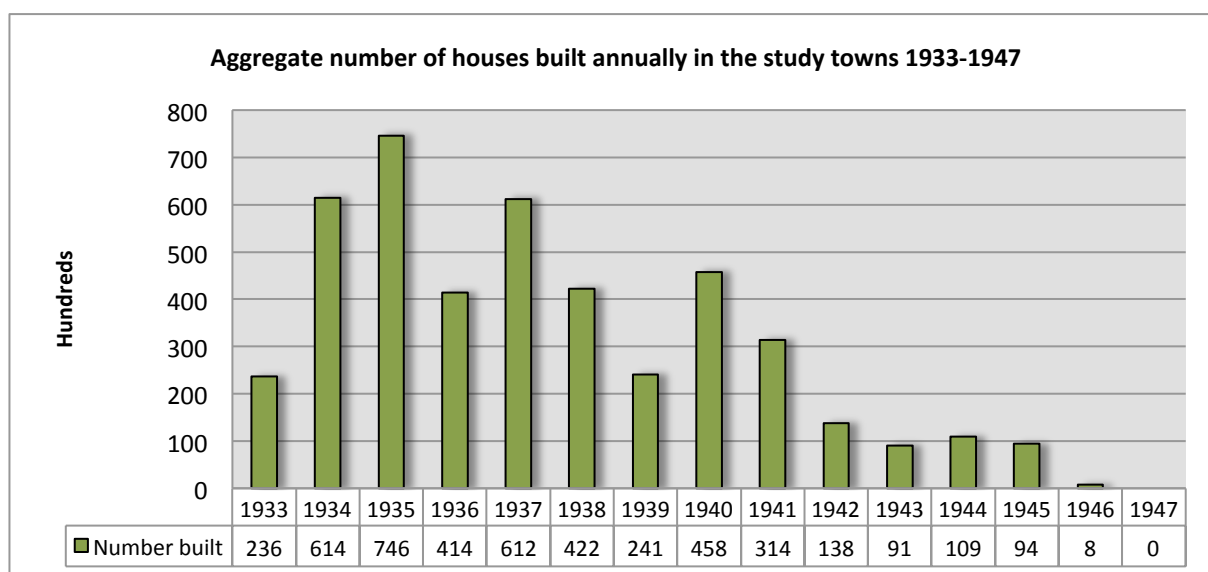
<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, appendix xxxiv, p. 241.

<sup>91</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1944-45*, appendix xxix, p. 210.

<sup>92</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1944-45*, p. 68.



By March 1945, Sligo corporation had constructed over 735 houses under the terms of the 1932 Act, in comparison with 13,333 in Dublin city. The other city boroughs had totals of 1,876 in Cork, 1,646 in Limerick and 838 in Waterford.<sup>93</sup>



**Figure 7.10.** The aggregate number of local authority houses provided between 1933 and 1947 in the study towns. The huge initial push between 1933 and 1941 can be seen, as well as the sudden slowdown in construction caused by the scarcity of material after 1941. Source: DLGPH, Annual reports, 1933-1947. Figures for 1947 only include the first quarter of that year.

### The end of the ‘Emergency’: A Re-evaluation of the housing programme

No annual report was issued by the Department of Local Government and Public Health for the financial year 1945-46. Instead the report issued in March 1947 covered the entire period from April 1945 to March 1947. Only 1,316 houses were completed nationally in the period, the vast majority in Dublin.<sup>94</sup> Only private-assisted housing showed any increase from the previous three years’ figures. The aftermath of the war was reflected in acute shortages of labour, materials and equipment. The report noted that since the passing of the 1932 Act, a total of 14,498 houses had been ordered to be demolished in urban areas. Of this original number, 12,451 were actually demolished, and they had housed 16,188 families of various sizes.<sup>95</sup> The number of insanitary dwellings demolished under slum clearance provisions was 8,065. Using an average multiplier of 4.5 persons per family, one can speculate that up to 36,000 people were rehoused out of slum areas in the fifteen-year period between 1932 and 1947. At the

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., appendix xxix, p. 210,.

<sup>94</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1945-47*, appendix xvii, p. 118.

<sup>95</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1945-47*, p. 44.

end of March 1947, local authorities had 81 schemes in planning for the erection of a further 8,926 dwellings, but not all of these were to come to fruition. Local authorities were urged, in view of the widespread scarcity of housing accommodation, to take immediate steps to get individual housing schemes underway.<sup>96</sup> ‘The pressing need for new houses for the working class can only be met by vigorous action on the part of local bodies, and their staffs, and measures should therefore be taken consistent in scope and speed with the size and urgency of the problem’.<sup>97</sup>

To meet the extra burdens which arose from the increased costs of site development and building in the aftermath of the war, lump sum payments were made available from the Transition Development Fund for houses undertaken by local authorities from April 1945 to December 1948. This fund was aimed at encouraging councils and corporations to finish schemes that had been sanctioned by the department, but not started due to the Emergency. The average grant amounted to about £250, which was estimated to represent 25 per cent of the average all-in cost per house.<sup>98</sup> Of the study towns, five took advantage of this grant, to the sum of £56,360, but Sligo did not avail of it. Sligo corporation was however, sanctioned for loans to the sum of £7,500 from Irish Assurance Ltd. for a period of 35 years, in the financial years 1945-46 and 1946-47, for the funding of the Tracey Avenue scheme at Maugheraboy.<sup>99</sup>

Private housing showed a quicker recovery, even in the austerity conditions after the war. A total of 742 houses were erected nationally in 1945-47, under the scheme providing grants for private persons and public utility societies.<sup>100</sup> The total number of dwellings erected under this provision between 1932 and 1947 was 34,816, of which only 11,051 were erected in urban areas. This grant was overwhelmingly taken up by the well-to-do farming classes. Erection of dwellings in rural areas was at an all-time low in the period 1945-7, with just 41 cottages erected.<sup>101</sup> Between the passing of the Housing (Financial and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1932 and March 1947, demolition orders were passed on 14,498 houses in urban areas of the Free State. Of this total, 12,451 houses formerly occupied by 16,118 families were demolished.<sup>102</sup> In the

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>102</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1947*, p. 44.

designated urban clearance areas, the number of houses ordered to be demolished was 9,840, of which 8,605 houses were actually demolished.<sup>103</sup>

### 7.3 Rents and Rates

Rents and rates were an important and often contentious issue for the local authority's house building plans in the various towns across this period. The setting of rents was directly proportional to the amount of loans borrowed by each council, and it required delicate balancing to set affordable rents for the tenants, whilst still collecting sufficient revenue each year to pay back the local proportion of the loans on each house. The state subsidy of 66.3 per cent of the cost of each house ensured that the greater proportions of the repayments were met by the state. In 1934, the first year in which substantial numbers of new houses were rented out, standard rents, which had to be approved by the Minister for Local Government, were set individually for each urban area. Many councillors had reservations about the cost of housing, and the cost of loans, as they were acutely aware of the low-waged nature of those living in condemned areas. An increase in weekly rent for those families moved to the new schemes would likely lead to rent arrears and possible evictions. Some of the worse accommodation in Sligo in the period to 1932 had correspondingly low rents, as low as 1s. 6d in some cases, and it was feared that the jump to a weekly rent of even four shillings would be too much for many families.

Sligo corporation had received loans amounting to £71, 720 by March 1934. The bulk of this – £60,000 – was from the state, with £11,540 from bank loans. Annual repayments, with interest, were £1,047 to the state and a similar amount to the banking institutions.<sup>104</sup> Over 260 houses had been constructed in the course of the previous year.<sup>105</sup> The annual rent from these houses inclusive of rates was £3,382.<sup>106</sup> In 1933-34 rents in the new houses in Sligo varied between 3 shillings and 16 shillings, with the latter the rent for larger better-class houses, erected in Temple Street. Previous rents had been set on the Barrack's Street scheme at between 4s 6d and 6 shillings a week, depending on the number of rooms in each house.<sup>108</sup> Even the lowest rent was problematic for some tenants, particularly in this area where a sizable proportion of the

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>104</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1933-34*, appendix xxxv, p. 272.

<sup>105</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1933-34*, appendix xxxiv, p. 269.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., appendix xxxii, p. 262.

<sup>108</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 28 July 1932, p. 253.

men worked as dockers, with the inherent irregularity of wages that went with this type of employment. There are frequent mentions in the corporation minutes of considerable rent arrears in the Barrack street schemes right through the war years. In addition, borough rates were also added on to the rents; these were even more problematic to collect.<sup>109</sup> Sligo corporation was in receipt of £3,382 rental income on all local authority housing at the end of March 1934.<sup>110</sup> By March 1939, Sligo corporation had collected £4,530 in rents, and a further £2,144 in rates from 508 houses. It was only £246 in arrear for the financial year, in comparison with Wexford, which was £600 in arrears from a similar number of rented dwellings.<sup>111</sup>

In Clonmel rents varied between 3s 9d per week, and 4s 6d, depending on the number of rooms in each house. Dundalk was letting houses for 4s 3d and 3 shillings per week, including the municipal rates. Tullamore had let 54 three-roomed houses at 2s 6d per week in 1934. Westport was letting better-class houses for 13s 6d per week, a cost utterly out of reach for most labourers.<sup>112</sup> In the corporation towns, rentals and rates were crucial to maintaining loan repayments and funding for new water and sewerage services to the housing schemes. The total income from all the new houses in the state on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1934, was £378, 672, inclusive of rates.<sup>113</sup> Arrears were frequent, with Sligo running arrears of £141 in March 1934, and Wexford running a shortfall of £333. It was a similar situation in the other provincial towns, with Dundalk over £244 in the red, and Tralee just £94 in arrears. The total amount of arrears for all the new houses in the state on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1934 was £31,556.<sup>114</sup> This was the situation that had been feared by many councillors throughout the country before the building of the schemes; the struggle by tenants to pay their rents was a significant one, and tenants regarded any increase in municipal rates as an increase in personal rents as well. Sligo borough rent collector Pat McSharry, reported in October 1936, that tenants in St. John's Terrace on Forthill were threatening to withhold rents, so bad were the footpaths in the area.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 1 May 1935

<sup>110</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1933-34*, appendix xxxiv, p. 269.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., *Annual report 1938-39*, appendix xxiii, p. 160

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 21 Oct. 1936, p. 101.

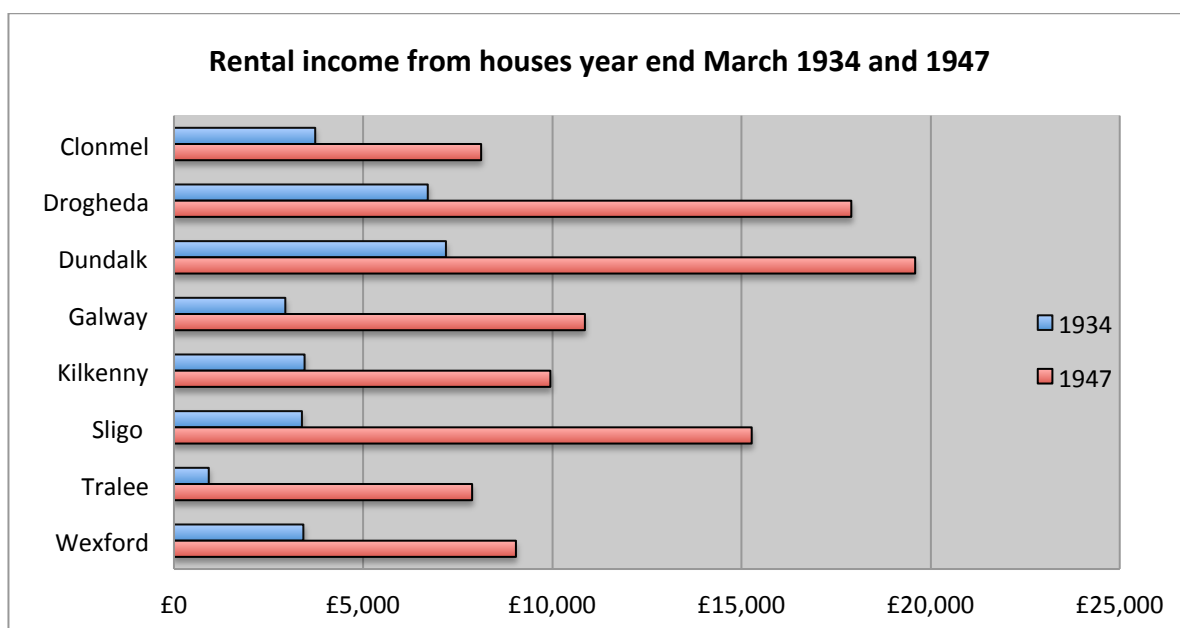


Figure 7.11. Rental income from new local authority houses in the study towns, at year-end March 1934 and March 1947. Sources: Extracted from Appendix XXXIV, DLGPH Annual Report 1933-1934, p. 268, and Appendix XVI, DLGPH, Annual report 1945-47, p. 115.

However, as may be expected scandals did arise; the Sligo housing tribunal has been previously discussed, where new, subsidized housing was allocated to families who already lived in good-quality (but high-rent) houses.<sup>116</sup> In Tralee in 1934, the high construction cost of subsidised houses was blamed on a ‘ring of builders determined to get rich quick’.<sup>117</sup> Galway corporation, in 1935, leased 201 houses to tenants at the subsidised rate of 3s 6d per week, exclusive of rates, and Kilkenny let 85 houses, at 4s 6d per week. Tralee’s progress can be measured in the letting of 180 houses – a mix of three and four-roomed dwellings – at 3s 7d per week, and 2s 9d per week.<sup>118</sup> Rental income varied over the course of the housing programme. By 1940, Sligo corporation was in receipt of £7,964 annually in rents (inclusive of rates), from the new houses. This was the average amount for most of the provincial towns, but Drogheda and Dundalk had incomes over twice that, at £16,354. Several other smaller towns had rental income of about £5,000 annually, notably Thurles, Tipperary and Athlone, indicating increasing rates of house building in the smaller urban centres.<sup>119</sup> Rents for new houses rose after the war, in line with departmental recommendations, due to the rise in the cost of materials and labour. New basic rents were to be set at no more than fifteen per cent higher than the comparable pre-war rent for a similar dwelling.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>116</sup> *Irish Press*, 5 May 1934, p. 7.

<sup>117</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 229.

<sup>118</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1934-35*, p. 144.

<sup>119</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report, 1939-40*, appendix xxv, p. 164.

<sup>120</sup> DLG, *Annual report 1945-47*, p. 104.

	<i>Clonmel</i>	<i>Drogheda</i>	<i>Dundalk</i>	<i>Galway</i>	<i>Kilkenny</i>	<i>Sligo</i>	<i>Tralee</i>	<i>Wexford</i>
CPW	£148,835	£282,183	£332,403	£244,176	£172,689	£294,131	£180,333	£176,223
Banks	£12,390	£28,104	£23,389	£18,614	£172,698	£21,187	£12,350	£16,723
Other	£8,000	£32,654	£51,014	0	0	£41,650	0	£16,723
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£169,225</b>	<b>£342,941</b>	<b>£406,806</b>	<b>£262,790</b>	<b>£345,387</b>	<b>£356,968</b>	<b>£192,683</b>	<b>£209,669</b>

**Figure 7.12. Loans received by the local authorities of the study towns for the construction of houses under the 1932 Act. CPW is the Commissioners for Public Works, (the State). Source: DLGPH, Annual report 1945-47, appendix xvi, p.114.**

The total amount of loans received by all the urban local authorities in the state under all the housing acts since 1898, stood at £21.9 million in March 1947. Of this only 10 per cent had been spent in the study towns; the vast majority went towards constructing houses in the five county boroughs. The numerous smaller urban areas scattered throughout the provinces consumed 16 per cent of this budget.<sup>121</sup> By 1947, Sligo corporation had borrowed a total of £356,968 from several sources to finance its housing programme. It was thus the second-highest investing local authority in the study towns over the period 1898-1947, exceeded only by Dundalk. (See figure 7.12). These loans were required to be paid back over a period of between 35 and 50 years, and many local bodies were consistently in arrears, despite the high level of grant-aid. For the year ending March 1947, Sligo corporation had collected £15,300 in rents, the state contribution was £10,800, leaving arrears of £3,150 to fall on the borough rates.<sup>122</sup> This was an average burden on the rates for most of the study towns, but Galway ran arrears of almost £8,000. The onus was on the local councils to collect the rents efficiently and on time, something that was often problematic. The total housing loan arrears falling on municipal rates stood at more than £317,000 by March 1947.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., appendix xvi, p. 114.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., appendix xvi, p.117.

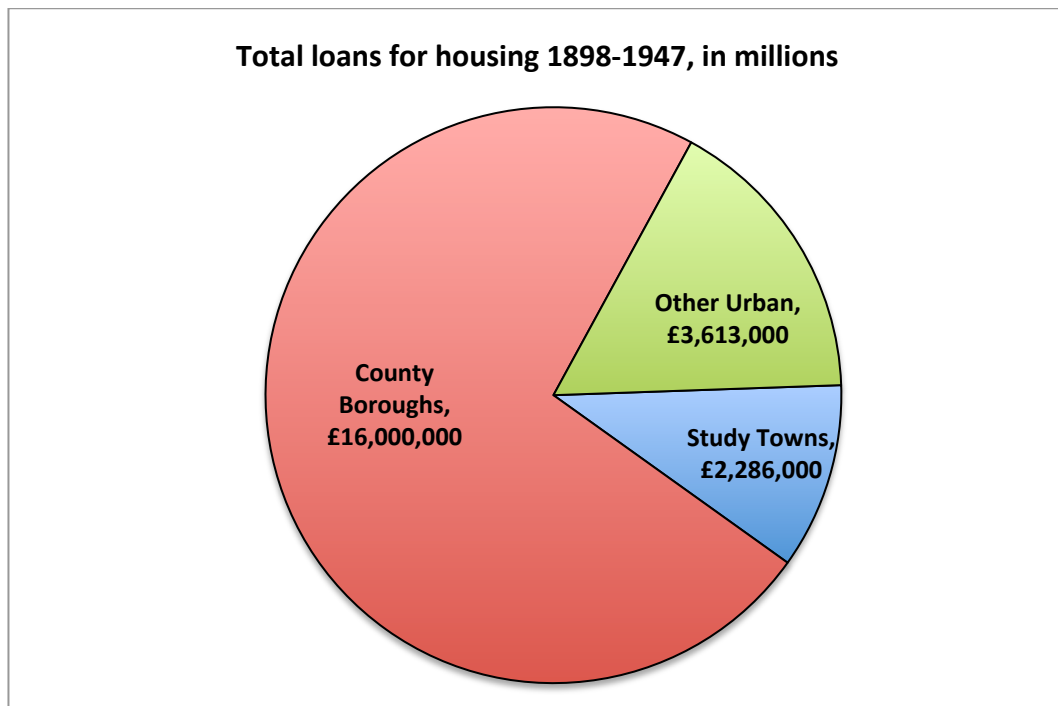


Figure 7.13. The total amount of loans secured for housing under the all the housing acts, 1898 to 1947, by the relevant local urban authorities. At the end of 1947, the total sum borrowed was £21.9 million for all the urban areas of the state. The vast majority of this was spent in the five County boroughs, (Dublin, Dun Laoghaire, Limerick, Cork and Waterford. (73%). Only £2.28 million was spent in the study towns, constituting 10% of the overall total. Source: DLG, Annual report, 1945-47 Appendix xvi, p.116.

One of the main issues that concerned many of the towns and local authorities around the country was the setting of rents, which could be afforded by those of limited and uncertain means. It was widely accepted that among those classified as ‘working class families’ there was a wide variety in income. The Dublin housing survey of 1939-43 revealed that amongst 10,000 working class families, 20 per cent had very low-end incomes of less than 20 shillings a week.<sup>124</sup> Overall, fifty-four per cent of the working class had less than 50 shillings a week. The situation in Cork was similar, with fifty-seven per cent of working class families having less than 40 shillings a week income.<sup>125</sup> It was clear that even moderate rents on state housing would be too expensive.

Cork corporation adopted a means test scheme in 1934, which apportioned subsidies on houses, depending on the total income of the household. The rent could be revised at the request of the tenant, if unemployment, sickness, or other reduction in income ensued. By 1949 the city manager had concluded that the system had worked ‘surprisingly well’, despite the ‘invasion of family privacy’ involved with the visitation of the ‘Means

<sup>124</sup> *Housing of the working classes of the city of Dublin 1939-1944*, p. 54.

<sup>125</sup> Phillip Monahan, ‘Housing’ in *Christus Rex: an Irish Quarterly Journal of Sociology*, vol. 3, no.3 (1949), p. 8.

Investigation Officer'. This system of means-testing was very new in the period, and was considered somewhat intrusive interference by the state into the privacy of the family-sphere. For the most part, however, the system was judged fair by those families who benefited from it, and most families dependent on casual-labour were unemployed at some periods of the year.

One concern expressed by the Cork city manager, but echoed in housing debates in the newspapers of the period, was that of social mix. The allocation of houses should be not just to the family 'who had allowed itself to sink to the lowest and most unfit accommodation', but also to those families which by its own efforts had maintained itself in decent surroundings.<sup>126</sup> The re-housing of slum-dwellers in new estates should ensure that there would be a mix, a 'characteristic sample of the working-class community, including a reasonable proportion of the well-to-do and the poor; such a grouping of families is a source of social strength'.<sup>127</sup> This was a view which was expressed at many levels, locally and nationally, and while it may seem to be a throwback to the notion of the 'deserving poor', and the 'not so-deserving', it was grounded in reality. There were many local authority tenants all across the country who were considered 'vicious...who frequently break and destroy'. There were certain families who encouraged and sustained what we now call anti-social tendencies. A perusal through the pages of the *Sligo Champion* for the period 1933-50 sees many such cases, with the same family names turning up again and again. Serious rent arrears and wilful damage or neglect to council houses were frequently reported, along with an expectation that the corporation would pick up the bill for all types of maintenance and repairs. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the move to tenant-ownership in subsequent decades was not a priority for many of this class of tenant, and the conditions of many council houses deteriorated over the decades, right up to the early 1980s.

#### **7.4 1947: A review of houses built and projected immediate requirements**

The White Paper on housing laid before the Dáil in 1948 set out in clear terms the achievement of the housing policy of the Irish government over the previous fifteen years. Given the dismal economic performance of the inter-war period, and the upheavals of the Second World War, these achievements are quite remarkable. The

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 16.



paper also set out long-term objectives for the housing programme in terms of providing for the growing needs of the working class, numbers of houses required, and the finances needed to provide them.<sup>128</sup> Elimination of overcrowding was still a major concern of the authors of the White Paper, with Dublin city suffering chronically from this malaise.

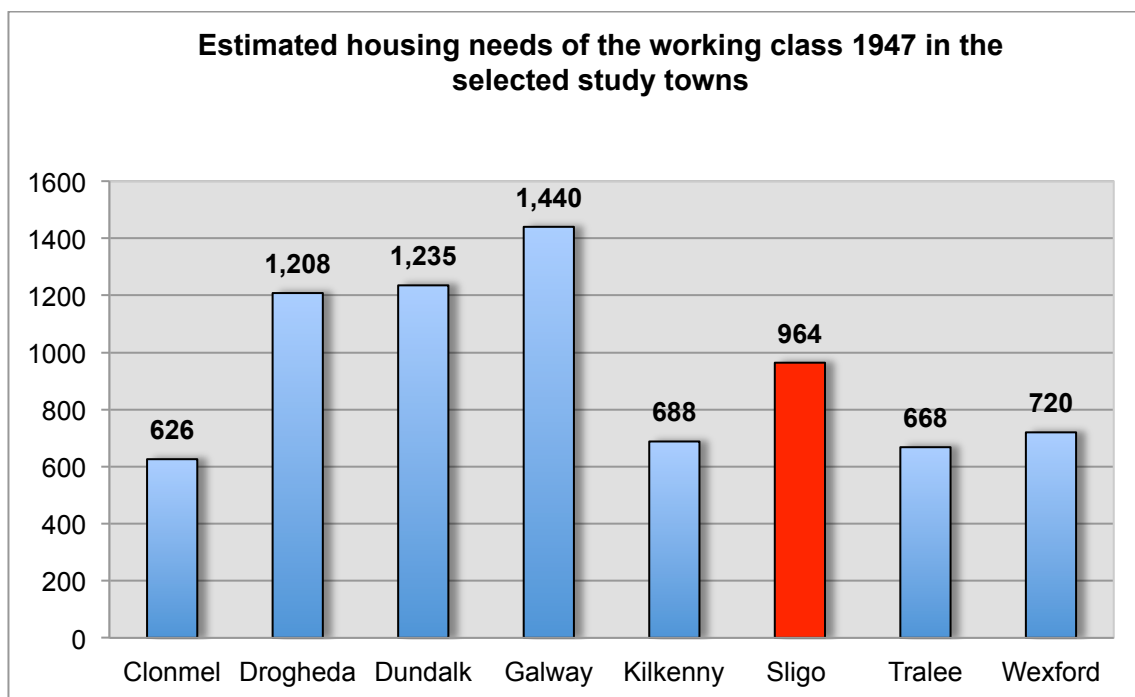


Figure 7.14. Estimated housing needs of the Irish working class in Éire as of March 1947, in the selected study towns. Source: DLG, *Housing: A review of past operations and immediate requirements* (Dublin 1948), p. 26.

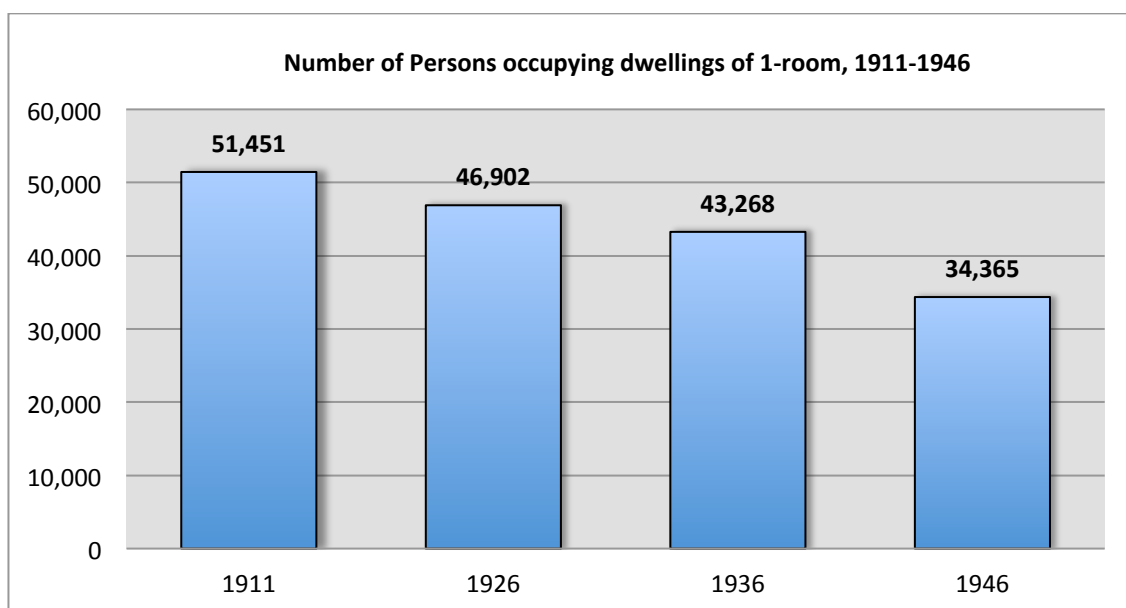
Between the passing of the 1932 Housing Act, and March 1947, 53,327 dwellings were provided by the local authorities, at a cost of more than £22.5 million pounds. Of this the state assumed a capital liability of about £10.5 million. The onset of the ‘Emergency’, on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939, affected the rate of construction, but nevertheless, 12,737 dwellings were erected between March 1940 and March 1947. Over 5,000 of these were in Dublin, and 3,184 in the other urban areas.<sup>129</sup>

One of the major achievements of the Free State housing programme was the sharp decline in the number of families occupying one-roomed dwellings. (See figure 7.15). In the 1911 census over 51,000 families, or 155,000 persons inhabited this class of

<sup>128</sup> DLG, *Housing - A review of past operations and immediate requirements 1948*, pp 5-10.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

dwelling, but by 1946 this had fallen to just over 34,000 families, or 88,000 persons.<sup>130</sup> This figure however, includes all those living in rural cottages; the figure for the urban areas show a different picture, with areas of high overcrowding persisting right through the 1940s. In the aggregate urban areas of the state over 110,000 people still lived in one-roomed dwellings in 1926, comprising about 11 per cent of the urban population.<sup>131</sup> By 1946 this had dropped dramatically to 25,000 persons, or just 2.2 per cent of the urban population.<sup>132</sup> This change is directly attributable to the clearance of slum areas in the urban centres. However, Dublin city still had over 12,000 people living in one-roomed tenements in 1946.<sup>133</sup>



**Figure 7.15. Number of persons in one-roomed dwellings, Irish Free State/ Eire, 1911-1946. Source: Census of Population, (1911-46, various volumes).**

The achievement of both the pre-1922 housing schemes and the post-1932 schemes can be clearly seen in figures 7.16 and 7.28. Most notable is the huge numbers of rural houses constructed before 1922 – over 40,000 of them. This dropped to just over 20,000 under the terms of the 1932 Act. However, the aggregate of all the houses in the provincial towns for the period 1932-1947 is a mere 13,600; for Dublin corporation area, 14,440 dwellings were erected. The primacy given to the rural areas is very

<sup>130</sup> *Census of Ireland*, 1926, 1936, 1946, vol. iv, *Housing*.

<sup>131</sup> *Census of Ireland*, 1926, vol. iv, *Housing*, table 15, 'Persons in private families classified by size of family and number of rooms occupied' p. 60.

<sup>132</sup> *Census of Ireland*, 1946, vol. iv, *Housing*, table 29, 'Persons in private families classified by size of family and number of rooms occupied', p. 46.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, table 30, 'Persons in private families classified by size of family and number of rooms occupied', pp 80-86.

evident from these statistics. Over 55 per cent of all houses built in the Free State area between 1883 and 1947 were in rural areas, where the majority of the population lived.

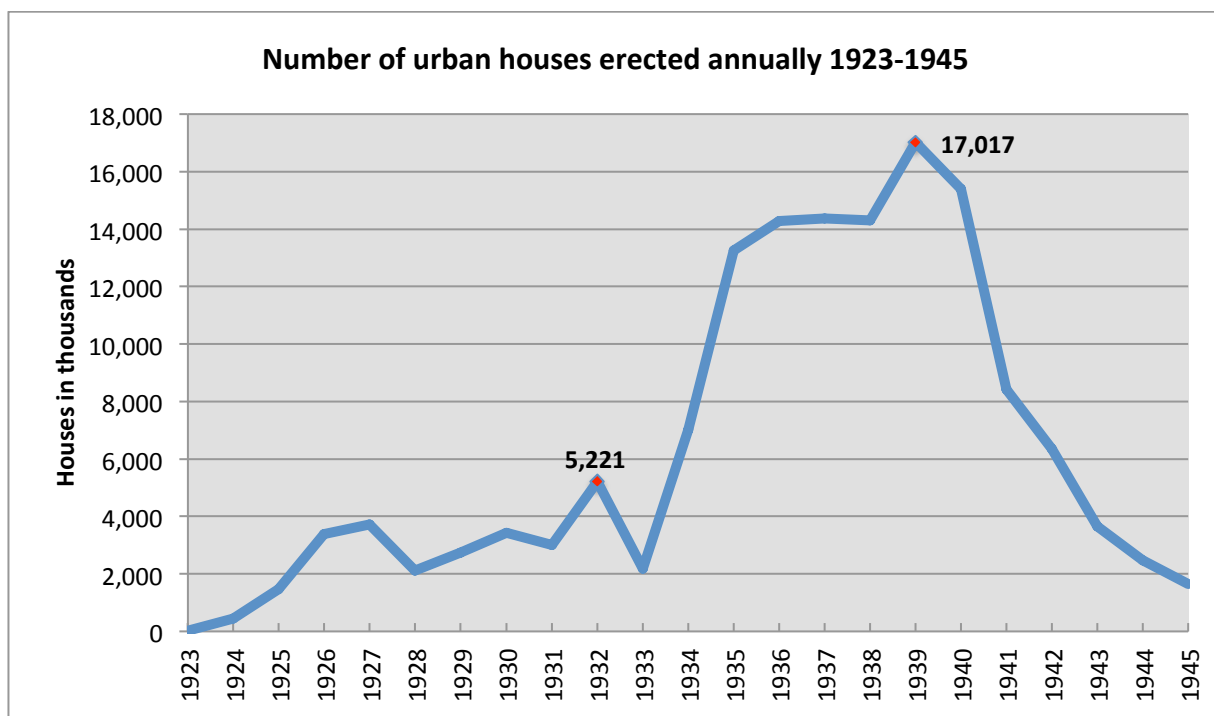


Figure 7.16. Number of urban houses erected annually in the Free State / Eire, between 1923 and 1945, showing totals for both private-assisted grant aid houses and dwellings erected by the local authorities under the 1932 Act. The sharp decline between 1939 and 1941 due to war shortages can be clearly seen. The totals include all urban areas, including the study towns and the County Borough cities. Source: DLGPH, Annual report 1945, appendix xxxi, p. 216.

### 7.5 Was Sligo more or less successful than other towns?

Sligo corporation embraced the opportunities offered by the 1932 Housing Act; a housing committee was set up early, and most of the corporation’s meetings for the entire period between 1932 and 1945 are taken up with housing matters. So enthusiastic was the engagement with the programme, that, by 1949, the corporation could boast that it had built one house a week for the previous nineteen years.<sup>134</sup>

In comparison with the other provincial towns in this study, Sligo was quite successful in re-housing its urban poor. In total, there were over 870 houses constructed between 1922, and 1947, with the majority of these erected between 1932 and 1942. The other

<sup>134</sup> *Irish Press*, 1 Feb. 1949, p. 6.

provincial towns lagged behind to a certain degree, with Clonmel erecting 500 houses in the same period, and Galway, with its greater population, just 731 local authority houses. However, Galway erected far more private-assisted houses than all the other study towns combined, at over 580.<sup>135</sup> In terms of sheer numbers of houses erected, Sligo performed third best, after Drogheda and Dundalk. Drogheda completed 535 houses in the period between March 1933 and March 1937, as opposed to Sligo's 407, but in this period Sligo managed to virtually eradicate its one-roomed houses.

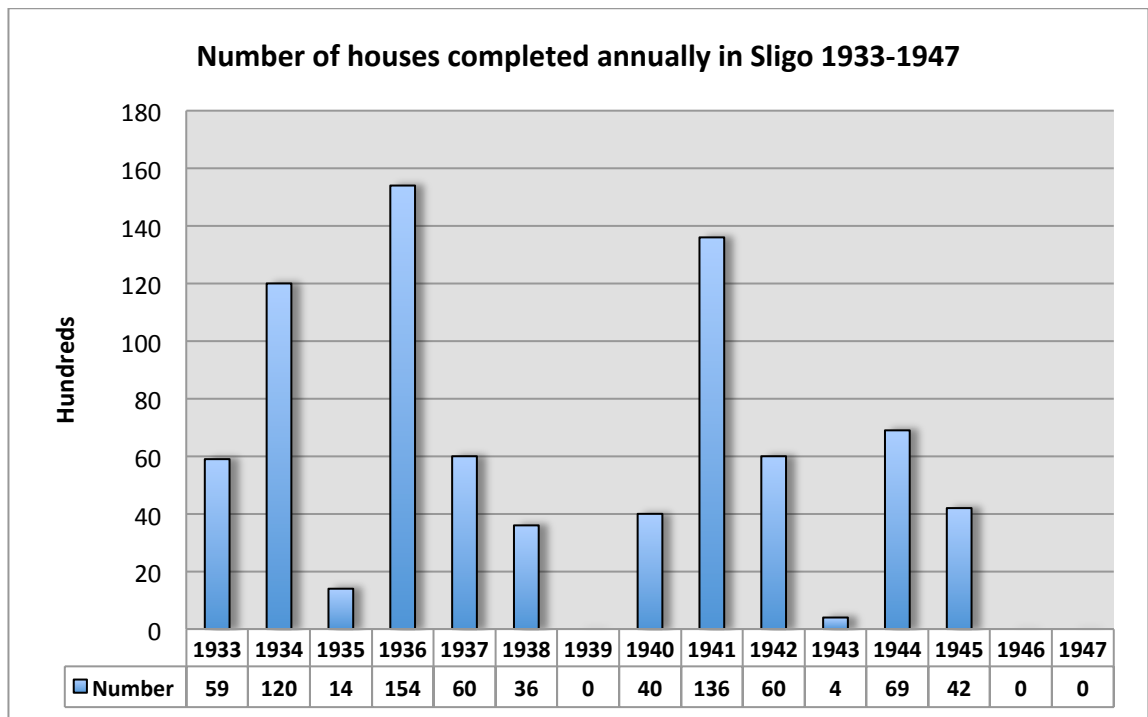
Sligo corporation kept up a sustained construction effort right throughout the period of the 'Emergency', and was eager in its attempts to get rid of the evils of overcrowding and unfit habitations. War on the slums was frequently compared to the war on the fronts, and demand for the new housing was high. Housing construction reached a low point in 1943, and many houses erected in this period were more expensive to construct, with consequently higher rents.



Fig. 7.17. The Jenkin's sisters, Charlotte Street, Sligo, ca. 1938. Waiting to move into the new Abbeyquarter scheme, under construction in the background. Courtesy, D. Foley, Sligo.

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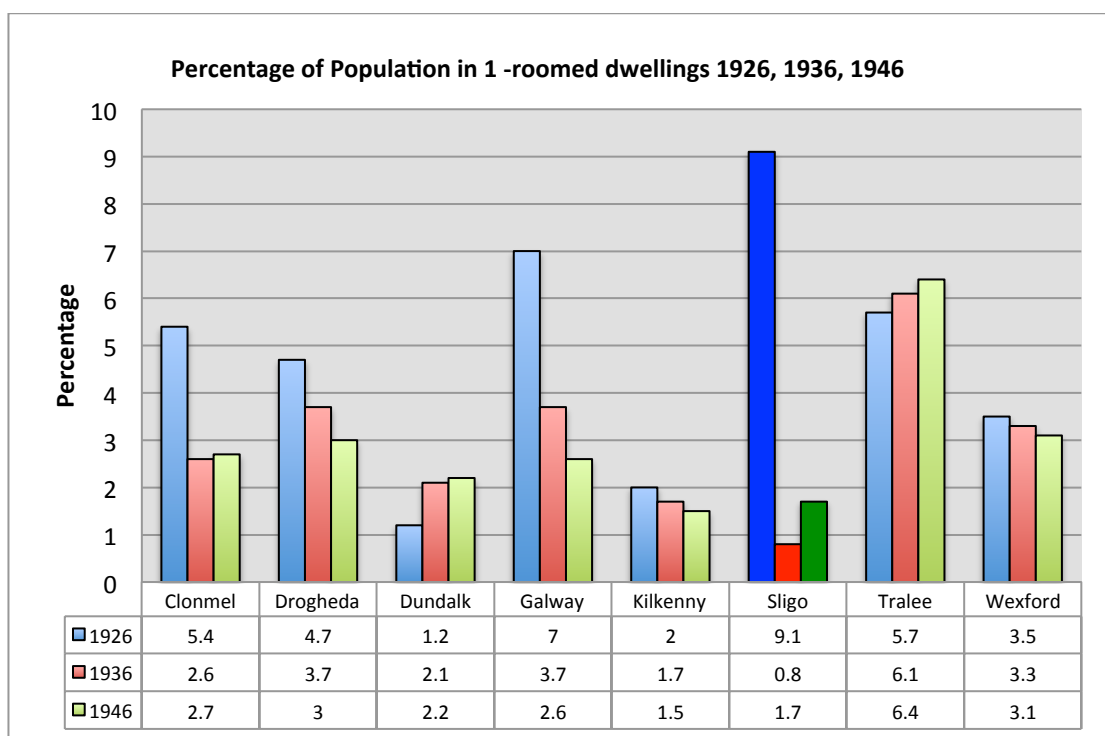
<sup>135</sup>DLG, *Housing - A review of past operations 1948*, p. 26.



**Figure 7.18.** Number of Houses constructed annually in Sligo March 1933 to March 1947. Source: Totals from Annual Report of the DLGPH, *Annual report, 1945-1947*, appendix xvii p.119 , and DLG, *Annual report 1947-48* P. 110. **Note,** by the end of 1947, a further 60 houses had been completed in the Tracey avenue scheme.

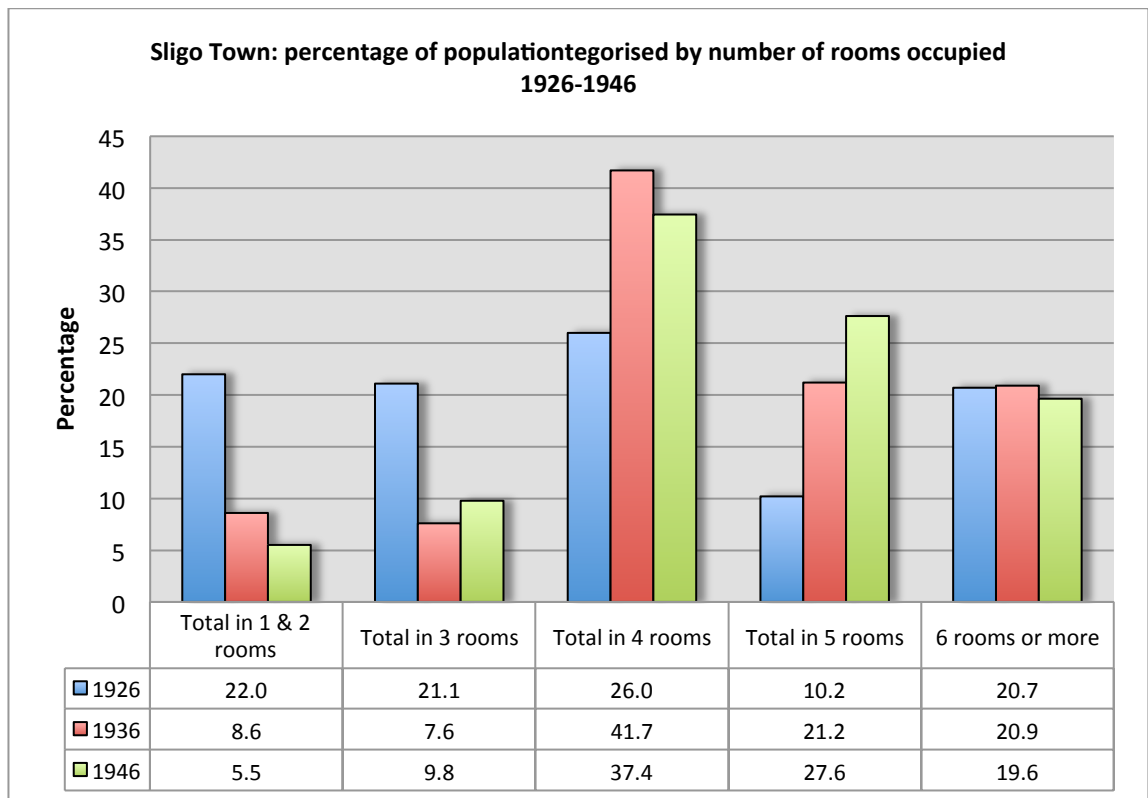
Where Sligo excelled over the other study towns was in its rapid eradication of one-roomed dwellings, most of which were gone by 1938. Sligo had over 9 per cent of its total population in private-families housed in one-roomed dwellings in 1926, in comparison with Cork city, which had just 7.8 per cent, and Waterford city, which had just 4.8 per cent before 1927.<sup>136</sup> Before the housing drive, Sligo thus had the highest proportion of its population in such overcrowded dwellings, in comparison with the other study towns, and also in comparison to the much larger city boroughs. In addition, the prevalence of one-roomed dwellings was much more visible in a small town than in a bigger city, where the problem was more localised, generally in large tenement buildings, and frequently at some remove from the better-class areas, or hidden behind the main thoroughfares. One-roomed dwellings in Sligo, as in the other study towns, overwhelmingly took the form of small cottages in rows, habitually thatched, lining the approach roads to town, and running behind the main streets. No visitor could be unaware of them.

<sup>136</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1926, 1936, 1946*, respectively, Figure derived from tables 20a, and 13b, showing persons in private families in each town of 5,000 or more inhabitants, classified according to size of family and numbers of rooms occupied.



**Figure 7. 19. The eradication of the one-roomed dwelling 1926 to 1946, showing the success of Sligo, which had the highest percentage of its private families in one-roomed houses in 1926, over 9 per cent. Sources, Census of Ireland, 1926, 1936, and 1946, vol. iv., Housing.**

The eradication of sub-standard two-roomed dwellings showed equal progress in all of the study towns in the period 1926-1946. Sligo however, displayed the biggest drop in the number of dwellings of two-rooms or less, (this includes the figures for one-roomed dwellings), falling from 22 per cent of its private-family population, to just 4.2 in 1946. If the figures for the one-roomed dwelling are subtracted from these statistics, we find that in 1926, almost 13 per cent of Sligo's population lived in two-roomed dwellings, but this had fallen to 2.5 per cent by 1946. Again Sligo did well in this category by 1936, and so too did Clonmel and Drogheda which managed a decrease of 10 per cent of their respective populations who were living in two-roomed dwellings.



**Figure 7.20. Sligo town, 1926-46. Percentage of population living in dwellings of less than 2 rooms, 3 rooms, 4 rooms, 5 rooms, and 6 rooms or more, showing the decrease in the number of 1 and 2 room dwellings during the period. Sources: Census of Saorstát Éireann, 1926, Vol. iv, *Housing*; Census of Eire, 1936, Vol. iv, *Housing*, and Census of Eire, 1946, Vol. iv, *Housing*.**

In figure 7.20, it is clear that the number of persons living in one and two-roomed dwellings in the Sligo municipal area decreased dramatically over the twenty year period between the 1926 census and the 1946 returns. In 1926, over 22 per cent of the population lived in dwellings of two rooms or less, dropping to 8.6 per cent in 1936, some four years after the start of the major housing schemes. By 1946, when the last of the major schemes was just completed, only 5.5 per cent, or 538 persons in private families, lived in dwellings of two rooms or less.<sup>137</sup> Of even more significance is the fact that the total percentage of the population in private families, living in dwellings of three rooms or less, had dropped from 43 per cent to 16 per cent, or just under 1,500 people. This is clearly due to the re-housing of a large number of families in the new corporation schemes, which typically had two bedrooms upstairs, two living rooms and a toilet downstairs. The total percentage of people in dwellings of four rooms rose from 26 per cent in 1926 to almost 42 per cent in 1936, but dropped slightly to 37.4 per cent

<sup>137</sup> Note: the total population of Sligo town in the 1946 census was 12,926. The total number of people enumerated as living in 'private families', was 9,762. The rather large difference of 3,164 between the two figures in 1946, can be accounted for by the fact that Sligo was home to a number of large institutions, such as the mental hospital, county hospital, county home, a jail, several hotels and three large boarding schools.

in 1946, largely due to the increase in numbers moving into the newer type of corporation house, which had 5 rooms. By 1946, the percentage of private families living in dwellings of five rooms had increased almost three-fold, from just around 10 per cent, to over 27 per cent. The population of the borough during the same twenty-year period had increased by fewer than 1,500 people; the number of persons in private families had increased from 8,520 in 1926, to 9,551 in 1936, and to 9,762 in 1946.<sup>138</sup>



Figure 7.21. Photo of old cottages at Shantalla, Galway in 1946. Photos, National Museum of Ireland, by P. Mac Dúbháin.

The housing programme in other provincial towns varied depending on the attitude and determination of the authorities in charge. In Galway, the housing conditions of the ordinary workers were vastly improved by the construction of extensive new housing to the west of the city, in Shantalla, Bohermore and the Claddagh, although the Shantalla scheme, started in 1943 was not finally completed until 1947.<sup>139</sup> Galway corporation played a less prominent role in the provision of public housing than in other Irish towns and cities, a fact that is reflected in the high number of private-assisted housing built there in the period between 1932-44. In 1961 there were 4,350 housing units in Galway, of which 32 per cent were being rented or purchased from the corporation.<sup>140</sup>

Drogheda constructed 128 houses for the working classes between 1898 and 1914, with a further 122 being erected between 1922 and 1930. After the passing of the 1932 Act Drogheda corporation erected in the region of 500 dwellings, most of them in smaller schemes.<sup>141</sup> Between 1932 and 1947, over 830 houses were built by Drogheda

<sup>138</sup> *Census of Saorstát Éireann*, 1926, vol. iv, *Housing*; *Census of Éire*, 1936, vol. iv, *Housing*, p. 184; *Census of Éire*, 1946, vol. iv, *Housing*, p. xx.

<sup>139</sup> Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, 'Galway in the modern period: Survival and renewal' in Howard. B. Clarke (ed.), *Irish cities* (Dublin, 1995), p. 146. Also *Dáil debates*, vol. 104, no. 1, 22 Jan. 1947.

<sup>140</sup> Potter, *The municipal revolution in Ireland*, p. 348.

<sup>141</sup> Potter, *The municipal revolution in Ireland*, p. 351.



corporation, the highest total in all the study towns.<sup>142</sup> In Wexford, the mass provision of social housing transformed the town. By 1961, there were 2,736 dwellings in the town of which 43 per cent were being rented or purchased from the corporation. The majority of these houses, almost 500, had been built during the 1930s and 1940s, with a further 400 being constructed during the 1950s.<sup>143</sup> The impact of local authority housing was less obvious in Clonmel than in Dundalk or Drogheda, with 386 units constructed between 1932 and 1947.<sup>144</sup> By 1961, over 42 per cent of the town's housing units were being rented or purchased from Clonmel corporation.<sup>145</sup>

	No. of houses erected to March 1948	No. of houses in construction	No. of unhealthy houses ordered to be demolished	Actually demolished	No of families re-housed	Approx. no of people re-housed
Clonmel	386	22	230	176	203	720
Drogheda	834	30	436	405	436	3,262
Dundalk	759	79	370	350	333	1,668
Galway	419	60	81	103	80	319
Kilkenny	411	126	385	374	418	1,846
<b>Sligo</b>	<b>735</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>2,190</b>
Tralee	451	146	550	365	691	3,294
Wexford	421	16	248	221	256	1,261

**Figure 7.22 . The relative housing successes of each of the study towns between 1932 and March 1948. The large number of houses erected by Sligo corporation can be seen, as can the high clearance rate, the highest of the eight towns. Source: DLG, *Annual report, 1947-48*. This report includes the full figure for 1947, and the first quarter of 1948.**

<sup>142</sup> Totals from DLGPH, *Annual report 1945-47*, appendix xvii, p.119, and DLG, *Annual report 1947-48*, p. 110.

<sup>143</sup> Potter, *The municipal revolution in Ireland*, p. 355.

<sup>144</sup> Totals from DLGPH, *Annual Report 1945-47*, appendix xvii p. 119, and DLG, *Annual Report 1947-48*, p. 110.

<sup>145</sup> Potter, *The municipal revolution in Ireland*, p. 359.

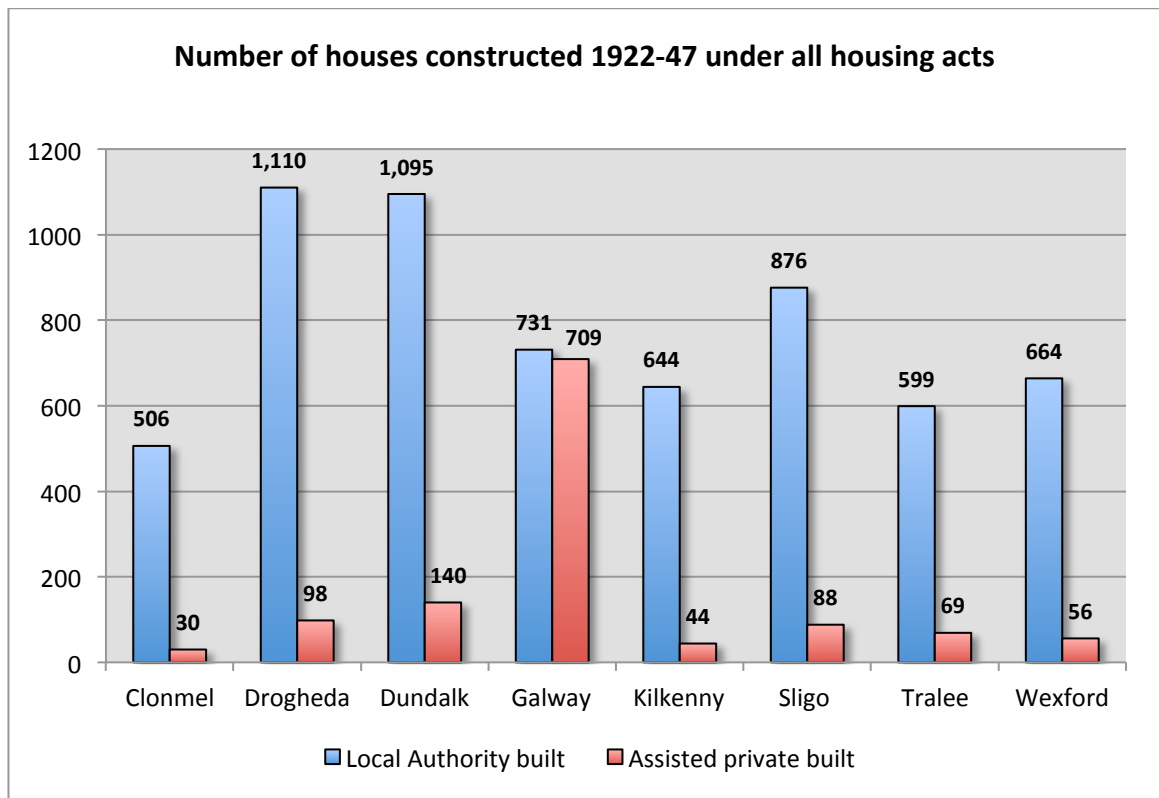
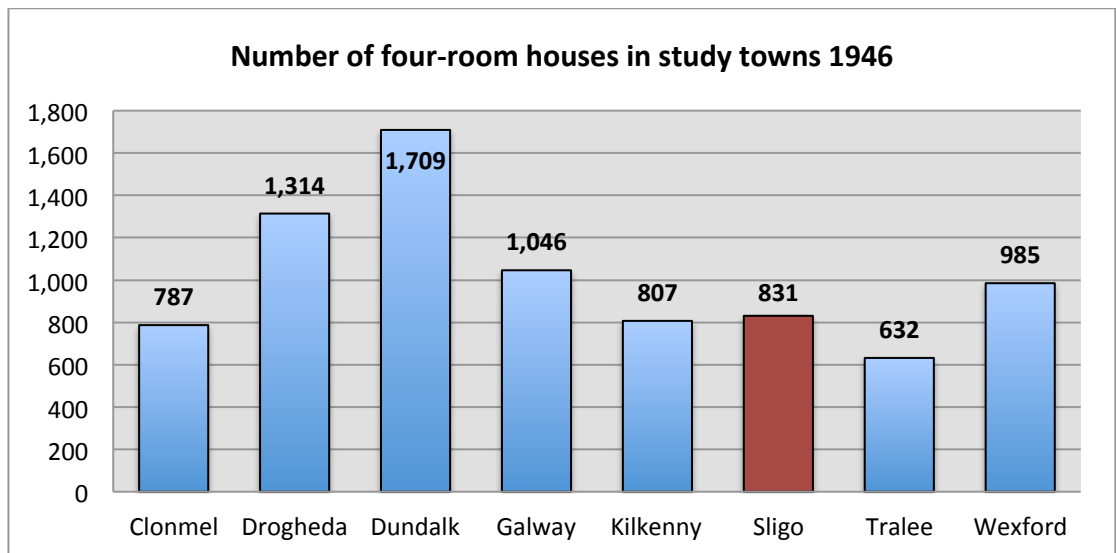


Figure 7.23 Housing position in the provincial study towns at the end of March 1947, showing the difference between the number local authority built houses, and those which were assisted private dwellings. Source: DLG, *Housing Review 1948*, p26.

## 7.6 The legacy of the schemes of the 1930s and 1940s.

What has the Irish state and society inherited from the building-blitz of the 1930s and 1940s? By 1940, the Irish Republic had reached a situation where 41 per cent of its housing stock had been built by local authorities, far higher than in England and Wales, when only 25 per cent was council-built.<sup>146</sup> The decline in dwellings of two rooms or less has already been noted, but the increase in the numbers of four-roomed houses in the study towns were also impressive. (See figures 7.20 and 7.24). Dundalk had a massive total of 1,700 four-roomed houses, and Sligo had 831. Most of these had been built after 1932, and comprised generally of two or three-bedroomed terraced houses, with a main living room and small scullery downstairs. Running water, toilets and electricity were now standard.

<sup>146</sup> Padraic Kenna, *Housing law, rights and policy* (Dublin, 2011), p. 40.



**Figure 7.24. Number of four-roomed houses in the selected study towns in 1946. Source: Census of Ireland 1946, vol. iv, Housing.**

In the eight study towns, over 5,200 dwellings were constructed between 1932 and 1947, and the local authorities throughout the state constructed over 53,000 houses in total during the same period, at a cost of more than £22.5 million.<sup>147</sup> That is almost ten per cent of the total houses erected. Over 3,339 families or approximately 16,000 persons were re-housed in these eight provincial towns. All urban centres of the state benefited from the 1932 Act, with the larger city boroughs constructing 18,800 dwellings, (35 per cent), and the remaining third-tier of smaller towns constructing over 8,000 houses or over 15 per cent of the total.<sup>148</sup>

The period after 1947 is generally seen as one of consensus amongst politicians and interest groups in giving top priority to housing.<sup>149</sup> Notwithstanding the considerable progress in providing for the working classes between 1932 and 1947, there were still major obstacles to the elimination of slum housing, particularly in Dublin. A White Paper, ‘The post-war building programme’, published in February 1945, set out policies for an infrastructural and housing programme for the state following the difficulties of the war years.<sup>150</sup> The Department of Local Government estimated that housing activities would cost over £41 million out of a total construction budget of £73 million. Housing would thus consume 56 per cent of the proposed budget. In contrast, water and sewerage was estimated at £3.3 million, roads at £13.7 million, and telephone and

<sup>147</sup> DLG, *Housing - A review of past operations 1948*, pp 5-10.

<sup>148</sup> DLG, *Annual report 1945-47*, appendix xvii, pp 118-121.

<sup>149</sup> Finola Kennedy, ‘Public expenditure in Ireland on housing in postwar period’ in *Economic and Social Review*, vol.3, issue 3 (1972), pp 373-401, at p. 373.

<sup>150</sup> Dept. of Industry and Commerce, *The post-war building programme* (Dublin, 1945),

telegraph services at a mere £680,000. Schools were allocated £4.3 million.<sup>151</sup> County Sligo was tabled to get a total of £1.1 million in building and infrastructural funds.<sup>152</sup> A ‘spectacular increase in public expenditure’ on housing in the five years to 1951 was greatly helped by an increased amount of capital in the economy, the availability of Marshall Aid funds and the enormous sum of £9 million from the Hospital Trust funds.<sup>153</sup> Low interest rates also helped. However, by 1953, this money had been largely spent, interest rates were rising, and there was a slowdown in public housing construction.

The 1948 White Paper on housing stated that ‘between one-fourth and one-fifth of all the inhabited housing in the state have been provided or reconditioned with state assistance’ in the fifteen years between 1932 and 1948.<sup>154</sup> Kennedy has observed that the ‘pattern of public expenditure on housing in the post-war period was largely a response to what the authorities considered to represent housing needs’.<sup>155</sup> However, the private-assisted sector was disproportionately aided in the period to 1939. Subsidies for this class of housing had reached £3 million by late 1939, or 75 per cent of the amount spent subsidising local authority housing in the urban areas.<sup>156</sup> In addition, two-thirds of expenditure on new housing grants went to rural areas, mainly to farmers.<sup>157</sup>

Sligo’s success can be seen clearly from two graphs. Figure 7.1, illustrates the dramatic and immediate drop in the percentage of Sligo’s population inhabiting one-roomed accommodation, from over nine per cent in 1926, to under one per cent in 1936. The small increase in 1946 was mostly likely due to families on the housing list experiencing overcrowding, before the completion of the last of the large schemes in 1948. Figure 7.25 shows the number of people in each of the study towns who were still living in two-rooms or less, in the 1946, census. It had the lowest number of people, 536, in this category, in comparison to Drogheda which still had over 2,200 people in such accommodation. This was despite the fact that Drogheda built almost the same number of houses as Sligo across the same period. However, Drogheda experienced a rise of 3,000 in its population in the two decades after 1926, increasing from 12,710 to

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>153</sup> Kennedy, ‘Public expenditure in Ireland ..’ p. 374,

<sup>154</sup> DLG, *Housing- A review of past operations 1948*, p. 6.

<sup>155</sup> Kennedy, ‘Public expenditure in Ireland.’, p. 399.

<sup>156</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 223.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid..

15,715, which indicates that while many were re-housed, there was still another tranche of labouring poor to take their place in the remaining low-quality houses. Ultimately, Sligo could congratulate itself in 1946, in having the fewest number of people living in two-roomed dwellings, in comparison with all the other study towns.

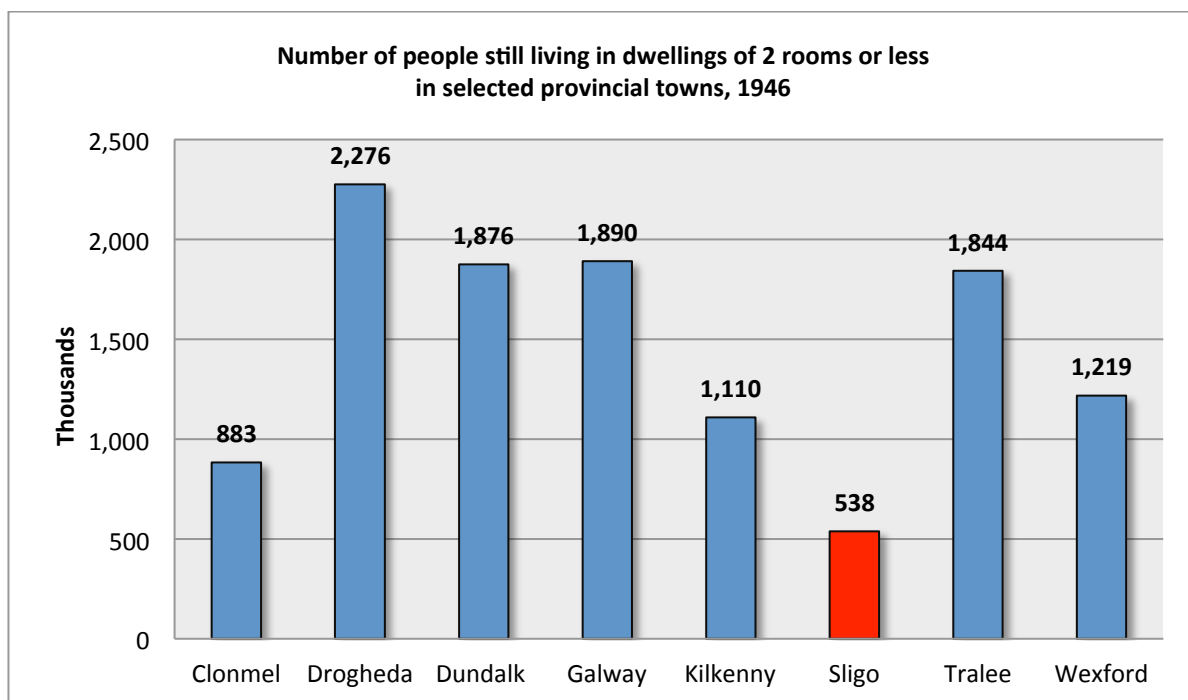


Figure 7.25. The number of persons still inhabiting dwellings of two rooms or less in the study towns, 1946. Sligo has the lowest number. Source: Census of Ireland, 1946.

Despite enormous sums being invested in publicly-funded housing for the working classes, particularly in the period post-1932, there was still more houses being erected with the grant-aided private assisted housing and the public utility societies. Public Utility Societies were key players in the erection of semi-private housing during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>158</sup> Ruth McManus’s research into this relatively un-studied phenomena regards them as ‘a specialist form of combined limited-dividend company and friendly society’.<sup>159</sup> While diverse in their individual make-up, they played a ‘significant role in the housing drive of the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in Dublin.’<sup>160</sup>

<sup>158</sup> Ruth McManus ‘The role of public utility societies in Ireland, 1919-1940’, in H.B. Clarke, J. Prunty, M. Hennessy, (eds.), *Surveying Ireland's past: multidisciplinary essays in honour of Anngret Simms* (Dublin, 2004), pp 613-38.

<sup>159</sup> Quoted in, Ruth McManus, ‘Not so private!: Public utility societies and semi-private developers’, in Joseph Brady and Anngret Simms (eds.), *Dublin 1910-1940, shaping the city and suburbs* (Dublin, 2002), p. 236.

<sup>160</sup> Ruth McManus, ‘Public utility societies, Dublin corporation and the development of Dublin, 1920-1940’ in *Irish Geography*, vol. 29, no.1 (1996), pp 27-37.

Designed to capture the substantial grants available under these various housing acts, few of these societies extended their task to the poorer classes.<sup>161</sup> With the exception of Dundalk, none of the provincial study towns had public utility societies.<sup>162</sup>

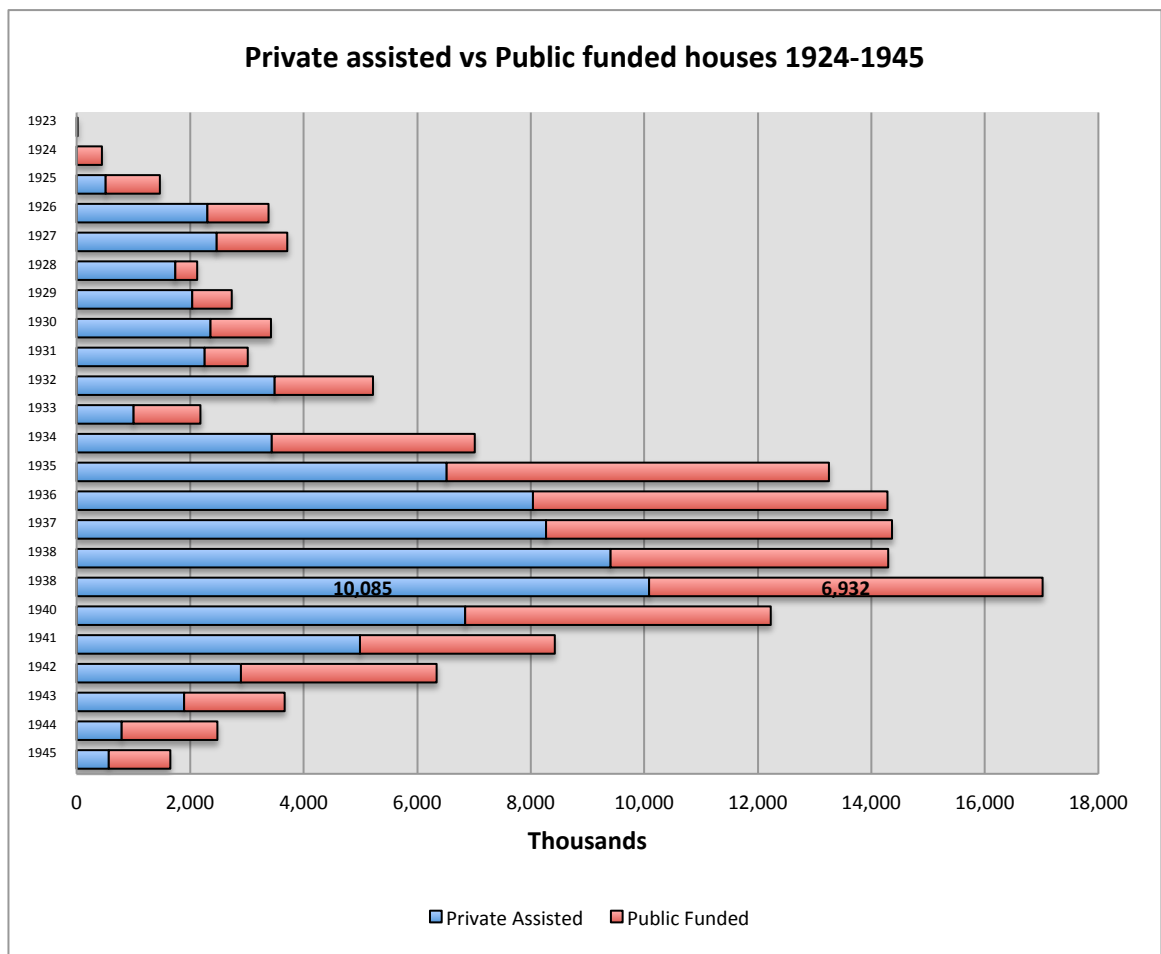


Figure 7.26. The number of private-assisted and public utility houses versus the number of Local authority subsidised houses erected in the Irish Free State/ Eire between 1923 and 1945. Source DLGPH, *Annual report, 1945*, appendix xxxi, p. 216. The 1944-45 report was the last of the DLGPH’s annual returns. From January 1947 the department was split into two, with health and social welfare becoming a separate ministry.

In the decade between 1922 and 1932 the sum of grants for private-assisted and public utility societies amounted to £1.07 million pounds, involving the construction of 17,000 dwellings throughout the state.<sup>163</sup> Very few of these were erected in the provincial towns, with the exception of Galway. Private house building was an overwhelmingly rural affair. Mayo built over 2,700 houses at cost of £217,356, while county Sligo built 801 rural grant-aided houses after 1932, at a cost of £62,494. These rural subsidized-

<sup>161</sup>Ruth McManus, ‘The Dundalk premier public utility society’ in *Irish Geography*, vol. 31, no. 2 (1998), p. 87.

<sup>162</sup>DLGPH, *Annual report 1944-45*, appendix xxxii, p. 217.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

houses formed 79 per cent of all the grant-aided houses in county Sligo between 1932 and 1945. Private grants were made in respect of 66 houses in Sligo town between 1924 and 1932, totalling £4,380.<sup>164</sup> Just 24 houses were built in Sligo by private persons at an average cost of £1,814, between 1932 and 1945 and none were constructed by public utility societies.<sup>165</sup> The total number of private-assisted houses constructed in all the provincial study towns for 1932-1945 was 780, at a total cost of £43,340, with Galway city accounting for 582 of this aggregate.

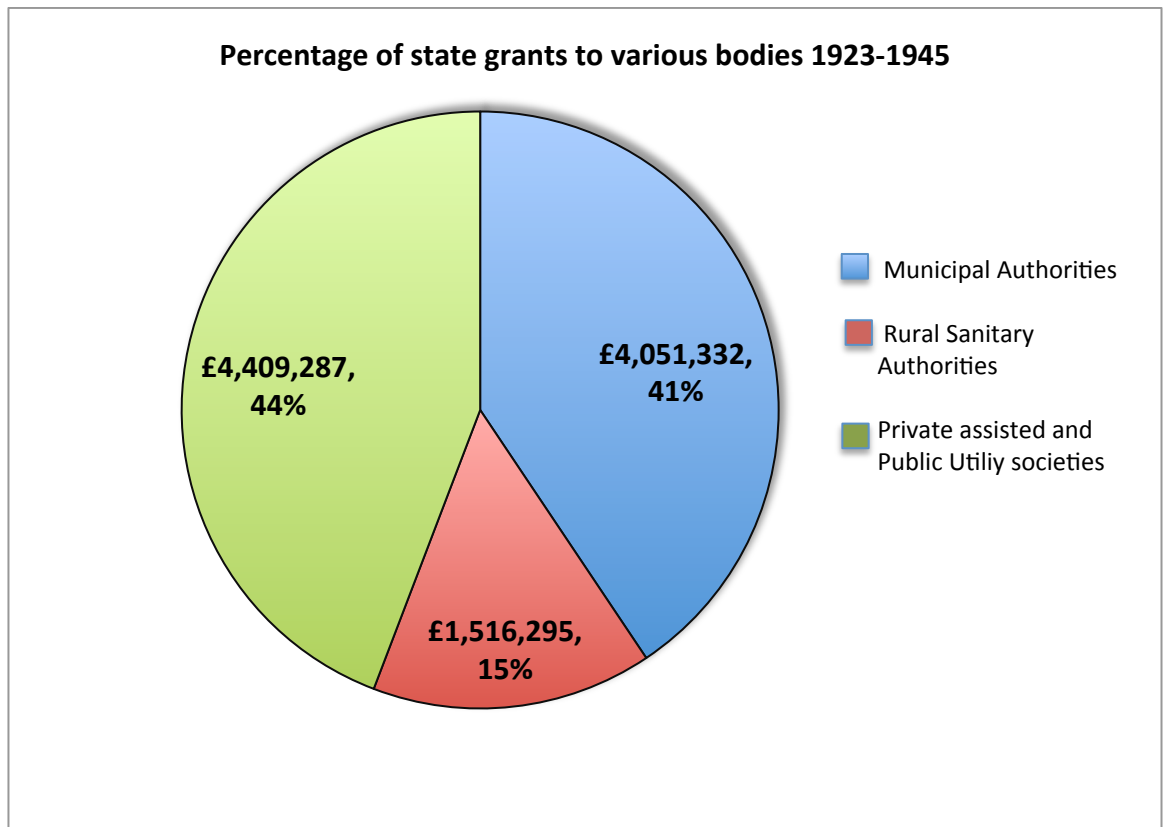


Figure 7.27. The percentage of state grants to private assisted housing, municipal authorities and rural authorities over the period 1923 to 1945. It can be seen that private assisted housing accounted for almost as much as the housing provided for the poorer working class. Source: DLGPH, *Annual report 1945*, p. 265.

Overall, in the Free State area, between 1923 and 1945 over 53,000 state-aided private houses were erected, including those erected by public utility societies. In contrast in the same period, the various local authorities erected only 60,000 houses for the working classes in urban areas. Despite a government-driven housing drive for the poorer classes after 1932, the provision of substantial financial incentives for private housing resulted in the better-waged availing of a greater proportion of the available state funds for housing.

<sup>164</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1933-34*, appendix xl, p. 287.

<sup>165</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1944-45*, appendix xxxii, p. 217.

## Conclusion

The central message of housing policy through the 1920s, was that its ‘function was first and foremost to assist private housing activity’.<sup>166</sup> This activity had been primarily a rural affair, leaving the towns virtually untouched. The policy changed radically in 1932, when the focus shifted to massive slum clearances, and the eventual creation of a large bank of state-subsidized housing. Much of this housing was eventually sold to their occupiers, following tenant-purchase schemes in the 1960s.

After a remarkable initial period of construction starting in 1932, there was a progressive decrease in the annual number of houses erected by local authorities after 1939. This decline continued throughout the war years. Construction tapered off sharply in 1943, with shortages of materials from Britain and a drop in the supply of male labour. A low point was reached in 1946, when as few as 563 houses were completed.<sup>167</sup> The cessation of hostilities in 1945 did not effect any material change in the position; the aftermath of the conflict was reflected in the acute shortages of labour, materials and equipment.<sup>168</sup> Overall, in the period 1939-46, the number of new private-assisted houses, – always of a better quality and with higher prices and rents – exceeded the number of local authority houses.

The main achievement in all of the study towns was the virtual eradication of the one-room dwelling, and a substantial reduction in the number of two-roomed houses in urban areas. Sligo was singularly successful in both of these aims, thanks to the diligence of the corporation and its officials in prioritizing the worst areas. Sligo arguably fared better than the other study towns. By March 1948, it had erected 735 new houses; another 108 were in the course of construction. Over 500 sub-standard houses in clearance areas had been demolished, and 546 families re-housed, an approximate total of over 2,000 people, (although the medical officer’s estimate of double that is probably more accurate). A new urban streetscape was created over large swathes of the town.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Cathal O’Connell, *The state and housing in Ireland: Ideology, policy and practice* (New York, 2007), p. 25.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>168</sup> DLG, *Annual report 1947*, p. 44.

<sup>169</sup> DLG, *Annual report, 1947-48*, appendix xvii, p. 110. This year included all the total number of houses erected throughout 1947, and the first quarter of 1948.



Despite the unprecedented number of houses constructed in the decade and a half between 1932 and 1947, a housing deficit was to persist right throughout the 1940s, and into the 1950s. Sligo had an estimated need of 964 houses in 1947, but Galway's lethargic approach to public housing can be seen by its estimated need of 1,440 houses, (see figure 7.14). By 1949, a recovery of sorts had commenced, and in many towns, there was a sustained period of house building up until the mid-1950s. Over 35,000 local authority houses were built between 1948 and 1954 nationwide.<sup>170</sup>

The White Paper on housing produced in 1948 anticipated a need for over 60,000 working-class houses in the Republic. This was despite the fact that between 1883 and 1947, a total of 114,200 houses had been built under the local authorities' housing schemes.<sup>171</sup> Many private houses had been built with public aid, and by public utility societies, totalling 36,816 between 1932 and 1946, at a cost of over £2 million.<sup>172</sup> But only about 11,000 of these homes were erected in urban areas. Housing erected by private means, even with some element of state aid, remained the preserve of the better-off rural or semi-rural family. It has been argued by some writers that the new Irish State 'discovered that the careful development and allocation of social housing could be a very useful means of social and political patronage, clientelism and control'.<sup>173</sup> Fianna Fáil policies of protectionism in the 1930s resulted in the state being obliged to increase its involvement in Irish industry and service provision, including that of mass housing. Lee considered that the 1930s building blitz saw the start of a long relationship between Fianna Fáil and the building industry, which came to be seen as an 'extension of the Fianna Fáil patronage system'.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> O'Connell, *The state and housing in Ireland*, p. 39.

<sup>171</sup> DLG, *Housing- A review of past operations 1948*, p. 10.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>173</sup> Kenna, *Housing law, rights and policies*, p. 39.

<sup>174</sup> J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, (New York, 1989), p. 193.

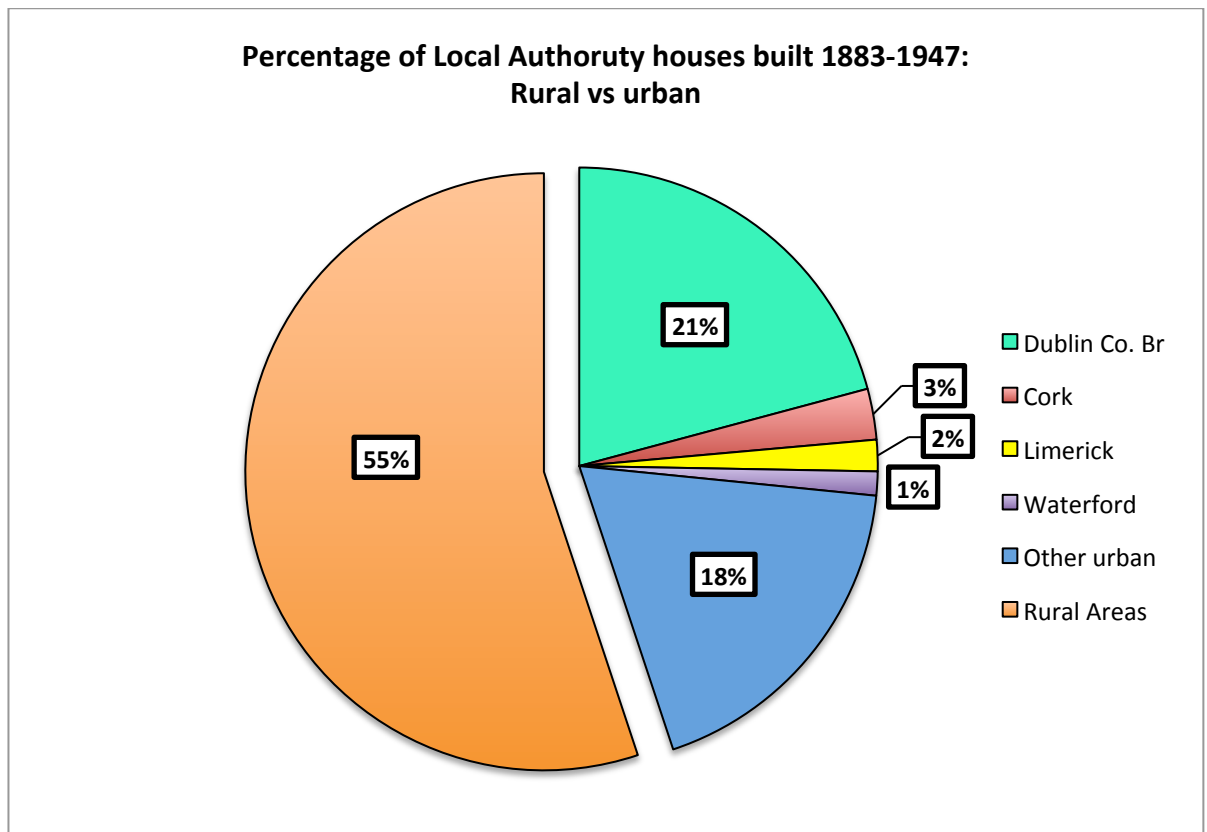


Figure 7.28. The percentage of local authority houses built between 1883 and 1947, showing the rural – urban divide. Rural areas are coloured green. The category ‘other urban’ includes the study towns, as well as the smaller municipal areas in the state. Source: DLG *Housing; A review of past operations and immediate requirements 1948*, p.10.

P.J. Meghen, himself a public servant and an enthusiastic supporter of community-led development,<sup>175</sup> wrote of the 1930s ‘building-bltz’ as ‘a particularly effective social policy, since it targeted directly...the most deprived sections of the community’. He suggested that the housing programme functioned as a Depression-era public works scheme, and along with other welfare reforms, encouraged working class support for state intervention and support in many areas of citizens lives.<sup>176</sup>

But for the 50,000 people re-housed in modern, warm, commodious and sanitary homes in all of the urban areas of the Free State outside of the four cities, the building-bltz was simply a godsend. Whatever their own political leanings or attitude to government, the housing programme of the 1930s and 1940s was a watershed. It changed their lives, and that of their children irrevocably.

<sup>175</sup> Seán Gallagher, ‘P. J. Meghen and approved local councils: A neglected experiment in community development’ in *Administration*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2000), pp 77-91.

<sup>176</sup> P.J.Meghen, *Housing in Ireland* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Dublin, 1965), pp 63-65.

## Conclusion

We can see the solution of our greatest evil in sight!

Minister for Local Government, 1940<sup>1</sup>

The origins, growth and persistence of poor-quality, insanitary housing in Irish provincial towns, and the long struggle to eradicate it over the period 1880-1947, is the subject of this thesis. A case study was made of one particular town, Sligo, in order to closer investigate the dreadful dwelling conditions endured by the poor at the start of the twentieth century. The thesis explores the social, political and economic conditions that led to these provincial slums. The central question posed by this research was to ascertain if Sligo suffered from the problem of sub-standard insanitary housing to a greater or lesser extent than other similar sized Irish towns? How successful were they in solving the housing issue, and did the subsequent transformation of Sligo have a lasting effect on the town and its people?

Section A of the thesis provides a context for the case study of Sligo. It illustrates that the problem of poor housing was a European one, and not just confined to Ireland or Britain. A review of the literature on European and British problems revealed many commonalities across all countries, despite quite differing situations. Ireland's particular history of poverty was examined through the lens of the provincial town, taking into account the political agitation of the late nineteenth century, which had a strong rural focus. The issue of poor urban housing and poverty in Ireland was looked at generally, both before and after 1880, and the policies and housing strategies of a native Irish government after 1922 were compared with the approaches taken by the Westminster government before that date. Several provincial towns were selected for closer study in order to assess if poor housing was as problematic and widespread in these urban areas, as it appeared to be in Sligo.

The origin and development of urban slums in Sligo from the 1790s, and the dramatic fluctuations in population from that date through to the 1880s, was reviewed as a prelude to the housing crisis of the Victorian age. The extent of urban poverty in Sligo as reported in the poor law records and other contemporary sources was examined, and compared with the rate of pauperism and deprivation in other Irish towns. The effect of the famine and the low

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<sup>1</sup> *Irish Press*, 12 Nov. 1940, p. 2.

level of Irish industrialisation were taken into account when examining the drift of unskilled labourers to Irish towns and cities after 1841.

Section B is a case study of Sligo town, from the time of the first state intervention in labourers' housing in the 1880s, through to the conclusion of the great housing schemes in 1947. The geographical distribution of the 'straggling irregular and cabin-built suburbs of the poor,' was mapped using the 1901 and 1911 censuses. The condition of Sligo's primitive housing between 1890 and 1930 was examined in detail and the rate of overcrowding measured at street level. Infant mortality was used as an indicator of public health and poverty, and then compared with similar rates in other provincial towns and the Free State in general. The efforts of Sligo corporation to tackle and eradicate the town's entrenched slums was scrutinised in light of that body's political makeup and commitment to the housing programme. A comparison was made between the housing situation in Sligo and the other eight study towns, using the records of the Department of Local Government and Public Health, over the period 1930 to 1947. Finally, a review was taken to ascertain if Sligo fared better or worse than these other provincial towns. The legacy of the state-sponsored housing programme in Sligo was evaluated in the light of progress in the eight study towns.

Several significant findings emerge from this research. From the statistical data gathered and analysed, it is clear that Irish provincial towns were home to slums that were every bit as bad as those found in the larger Irish cities, such as Dublin and Limerick. A burgeoning population and the absence of any significant industry in the greater part of Ireland, led by the 1850s, to a constant migration of a large numbers of the poor labouring-class into the provincial towns. Housing supply or quality did not keep pace with this influx. The result was a proliferation of straggling cabins on the outskirts and in the narrow lanes and courtyards of most Irish country towns. Despite a collapse in Ireland's population after 1847, Irish provincial towns retained a larger proportion of people than before, and these urban areas gained in economic and social importance by the 1880s. However, the lack of any major industry or significant economic base in most of these urban centres led to the polarisation of their populations into a poor labouring class, totally dependent on their own direct labour, and a more middling-sort of merchant shop-keeping class, which had access to more secure finances, and thus better housing.

This thesis provides an in-depth look at the housing and social conditions of the poor in a medium-size Irish country town – Sligo – over the period from 1850 to 1947. A survey and analysis of this scope has not been carried out on any other Irish provincial town before. There is significant evidence to support the fact that much of the miserable housing which was the abode of the poor was a century or more old, with its origins in the population pressures and complex tenurial leases of the late eighteenth century. Sligo had an abysmal record of erecting municipal dwellings under the working class housing acts between 1880 and 1932. Only 80 municipal houses were constructed in the borough during this period, in contrast to the other study towns, which had somewhat more active early public housing programmes. Sligo corporation was in a state of financial crisis for much of the period between 1890 and the Great War, and was effectively broke by 1917. It took an act of parliament in July 1918 to allow the corporation to raise the municipal rates, and permit more viable borrowing.<sup>2</sup>

Mapping the level of poverty in Sligo borough using the 1911 census illustrated that high levels of third-class housing existed in all areas of the borough, with notably dense concentrations on the peripheral hills and crowded back lanes. Many of these dwellings were at the very bottom of their recorded class, a fact that is confirmed by the graphic pictures of slum housing in Sligo re-produced in the 1914 housing report.<sup>3</sup> The analysis of the state of housing, health and infant mortality in Sligo compared with other study towns, suggests that Sligo had some of the worst conditions in this urban category by 1926, when overcrowding and poor quality housing had reached a critical point. Sligo, at this juncture, had 13 per cent of its population living in dwellings of just two rooms, and 9 per cent of its population inhabiting dwellings of just one room, the highest percentage in all the provincial towns. High levels of morbidity and frequent outbreaks of disease in the slum areas resulted in Sligo town having the highest infant mortality rate in the Free State by 1936.

Sligo corporation was very pro-active in initiating massive slum clearances as soon as financial incentives were in place. In fact it would end up with a much better re-housing record than most other towns. The working-class background of corporation members led it

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<sup>2</sup> Padraig Deignan, *The Protestant community in Co. Sligo, 1914-1949* (Dublin, 2010), p. 367.

<sup>3</sup> *Appendix to the report of the departmental committee appointed by the Local Government Board for Ireland to inquire into the housing conditions of the working classes in the City of Dublin*, H.C. 1914 [Cd. 7317], appendix xxxvii, p. 389/501.

to tackle the housing question immediately after the passing of the 1931 Act, and with the expansion of subsidies in 1932, it launched one of the most ambitious re-housing schemes in the state. The absence of any major property-holders or landlords on the corporation, made an agenda of change straightforward, and indeed attractive. The corporation threw itself behind a major housing drive for Sligo, a very difficult task given the scale of the problem in the town. This level of commitment by Sligo corporation to the housing programme is evident in the amount of money invested in the schemes. It was the second-highest investing local authority during the period 1898-1947, with loans totalling £356,969 for municipal housing. Large swathes of slum housing were cleared after 1931; the worst areas with the most needy tenants were tackled first, and the rapid eradication of virtually all Sligo's one-roomed dwelling between 1932 and 1936 is proof of that. Between 1926 and 1946, the percentage of Sligo's population living in one-roomed dwellings in Sligo fell from over nine per cent to less than two per cent. Sligo was the most successful of the study towns in the eradication of dwellings containing two rooms or less; by 1946, the percentage of the town's population living in such accommodation fell from 22 per cent to just over 4 per cent. Tralee's rate remained at eighteen per cent, Limerick had 9,000 people living in two-roomed dwellings, and Dublin still had 117,000 people inhabiting two-roomed accommodation in 1946.

By 1940, despite the onset of war, over 500 houses had been erected in Sligo in a major construction push, and by March 1948, 735 new houses had been completed and occupied, with another 108 nearing completion. Single-family homes were considered to be ideologically superior. Flats were avoided in the provincial towns; they were not considered socially desirable by either the corporation or the Department. Scheme layouts in Sligo were generally blocks of short terraces, with gardens front and rear, in line with official departmental plans. Low-density layouts were adopted to avoid the evils of overcrowding and disease. However, concern was still expressed by the Sligo medical officer in 1942 over the level of overcrowding in the new houses as families were quite large, and many tenants illegally, but understandably, sub-let a small room for extra income. Tenant allocation and the setting and collection of rents appear to have been a problem in other towns as well as Sligo, and many local authorities ran considerable rent deficits right through the war years.

Eight provincial, or country, towns in Ireland were selected for comparative study. Various data including the censuses and official reports were collated and analysed, revealing

common patterns of poverty, under-employment, high infant and general mortality rates, along with chronic overcrowding. All of the study towns suffered from the blight of abysmally poor housing by the 1860s, and the situation had reached a crisis point by 1926. The social and economic conditions in Irish provincial towns during the first three decades of the twentieth century ensured that many families experienced this period as one of endemic and relentless poverty, and even of destitution. Homelessness, eviction, and sub-standard housing, combined with insufficient income, poor diet, and large family size, resulted in what has been called a 'precarious childhood' for most working-class children.<sup>4</sup>

This study found that infant mortality in the eight study towns was found to be generally above the Free State average for much of the period between 1923 and 1948, as was the case in Sligo. Some of the study towns were reluctant to invest in housing programmes, such as Kilkenny and Tralee, but Sligo, after a some delays, forged ahead, completing over 350 houses by March 1936, the second highest total in the Free State. The main achievement in all of the study towns was the immediate eradication of the one-room dwelling, and a substantial reduction in the number of two-roomed houses in urban areas by 1940. Overcrowding was endemic in the Free State in 1926, with over 580,000 people, or 20 per cent of the population, living in dwellings of two rooms or less.<sup>5</sup> In the aggregate urban areas of the Free State over 110,000 people still lived in one-roomed dwellings in 1926, comprising about 11 per cent of the urban population.<sup>6</sup> By 1946 this had dropped dramatically to 25,000 persons, or just 2.2 per cent of the urban population.<sup>7</sup> This study establishes that this positive change is directly attributable to the clearance of slum areas in the urban centres.

Under the terms of the 1932 Act, 53,300 dwellings were constructed throughout the Free State between 1932 and March 1947.<sup>8</sup> However, only 13,600 of these were in the study towns, and over 20,700 in the rural areas. Urban areas were still playing second-fiddle to the rural vote. In the eight study towns, over 5,200 dwellings were constructed between 1932 and 1947, that is, ten per cent of the total number of local authority houses constructed

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<sup>4</sup> Moira J. Maguire, *Precarious childhood in post-independence Ireland* (Manchester, 2009), p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> *Census of Irish Free State, 1926*, vol. iv, *Housing*, calculated from table 15, p. 160.

<sup>6</sup> *Census of Irish Free State, 1926*, vol. iv, *Housing*, table 15, 'Persons in private families classified by size of family and number of rooms occupied' p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1946*, vol. iv, *Housing*, table 29, 'Persons in private families classified by size of family and number of rooms occupied', p. 46.

<sup>8</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1945-47*, appendix xxvi, p. 120.

during this period. Almost 35 per cent of these houses were erected in the four city boroughs, and a significant 15 per cent in the third tier of Irish towns, which were smaller than the study towns.

Few municipal authorities in Ireland made any concerted attempt to address the plight of the urban poor before the housing acts of 1890. Subsidised labourers' housing remained a rural privilege due to political agitation bound up with the land questions, and by 1914 over 50,000 labourers' cottages had been erected in the countryside. Ireland thus had the first large-scale public housing programme in the British Isles, and possibly Europe, but it left the urban areas virtually untouched.<sup>9</sup>

The birth of the Irish Free State in 1922 promised a fresh approach to housing the urban poor, but conservative politics, and economic recession meant that most subsidised housing erected in the period 1922-1932 catered for the better-waged classes, and the rural farming classes. Throughout this period, there were more private-assisted houses erected than public-funded houses.<sup>10</sup> The radical policy change in 1932, when the focus shifted to massive slum clearances, has been confirmed by this study to have led to the eventual creation of a large class of state-subsidised home-owners, as tenants gradually bought out their homes with a long-term state-sanctioned mortgage.<sup>11</sup> In August 1932, the government aimed to fully satisfy the national housing needs of the people within ten years.<sup>12</sup> This was a wildly ambitious claim, but was at least partially fulfilled. The public housing programme of 1932-1944 is still considered to be the most successful policy of the first Fianna Fáil government.<sup>13</sup>

This study has found that there was a preponderance of one and two-roomed dwellings in all of the study towns up until the early 1930s. Of these towns, Sligo had over 770 people living in one-roomed houses in the 1926 census, a close second to Galway's 808. On average a quarter of each study town's population lived in dwellings of two rooms or less in 1926. By

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<sup>9</sup> F.H.A. Aalen, 'Ireland' in Colin Pooley (ed.), *Housing strategies in Europe, 1880-1930* (Leicester, 1992), p. 138.

<sup>10</sup> DLGPH, *Annual Report 1933-1934*, p. 118, and *Housing- A review of past operations and immediate requirements, 1948*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Tony Fahy, *Social housing in Ireland; a story of success, failure and lessons learned* (Dublin, 1999), p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> DLGPH, *Annual report 1932-1932*, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> Mary E. Daly, *The buffer state: the historical roots of the Department of the Environment* (Dublin, 1997), p. 210; Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland, a new economic history 1780-1939* (London, 1995), pp 439-40.



1936, less than five years into the housing programme, this percentage had fallen significantly in all the study towns with the exception of Tralee, where there was negligible change. Towards the close of the programme in April 1946, all the towns had less than fifteen per cent of their populations living in this category of house, again with the exception of Tralee. This points towards a very targeted response to the problem of overcrowding. Galway stands out as having erected the greatest number of houses under private-assisted grants, and arguably having the worst record for erection of working class houses up to 1947. Its corporation also borrowed less; only £262,800, compared to over £400,00 by Dundalk corporation. Only 81 families were re-housed from clearance areas between 1932 and 1938, compared with Sligo's 418. Galway corporation's commitment to public housings was clearly lacking. However, it is important to acknowledge the scale of the work completed nationally by 1942. At least forty-two Irish urban districts had each constructed a scheme of 100 houses by March of that year. Between 1926 and 1936 the housing debt of the local authorities rose from £7.8 million to £18 million. An average of 2,000 new houses were built yearly between 1923 and 1932, rising dramatically to an average of 12,000 annually between 1932 and 1942.<sup>14</sup> This confirms that for most of this period the business of local government was all about housing.

The study has also found that the Irish housing programme of the 1930s held many lessons for the European scene, but there seems to have been little cross pollination of ideas, except with Britain. The Irish government had one of the most interventionist state housing policies in Europe at this time, and Sligo and the provincial towns were the beneficiaries. It was demonstrated that an immense investment into public housing, with financing spread over a very long period, could eradicate the worst of the slums in smaller provincial towns. The role of a local authority and in the housing programme was vital. Sligo had a populist, working-class corporation in 1932, many with a background in the labour movement. Several of the councillors lived in slum housing themselves, and were politically active in campaigning for their electorate. While not immune to corruption, they proved instrumental in the pursuit of slum clearances and new housing construction.

Government housing policies between after 1932, carried out through the channel of local government, transformed the Irish provincial towns, replacing the slum cabins with modern

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<sup>14</sup> DLGPH *Housing- A review of past operations and immediate requirements, 1948*, p. 5.

homes for the working class. These transformations had a more visible impact in these provincial towns, where the urban fabric was changed utterly. In many towns these were the first major construction projects since the 1850s. They transformed the lives of the working class families who were fortunate enough to be re-housed, and gave people a sense of having a social contract with the emerging Irish state. To many, the new houses were a visible and tangible result of independence. Many citizens saw the provision of good-quality state-subsidised housing as something the British government couldn't – or wouldn't – do, but that a native Irish government successfully tackled.

The housing programme of the Free State, and of Sligo, is however, not one of a clear linear progression, with a constant narrative of improvement over the period. There were problems with finance from the time of the first schemes in 1924. Dependence on the return from rents and rates to service corporation loans, and the reluctance to take out such loans, resulted in only a very small number of houses being built in Sligo between 1922 and 1932. The slum clearance schemes of the 1930s, while seemingly extensive, were in reality 'restricted by a government limit placed on total expenditure'.<sup>15</sup> The political, ideological and social backdrop of the 1930s must be seen as important factor in the style, layout and quality of the new housing schemes. Any social method of housing that may have suggested communism was shunned, and the quality of construction frequently suffered due to the avoidance of British materials, in an attempt to foster Irish industry.<sup>16</sup>

Contemporary Catholic social thought viewed 'good homes' as essential for the development of 'good citizens'<sup>17</sup> and thus the housing drive took on a moral character, often reflected in the religious nomenclature of large swathes of developments, such as St. Brigid's and St. Anne's in Sligo. The belief that improving their surrounds enhanced the moral character of an individual was not always borne out, and wilful damage to many corporation properties was recorded. The compulsory nature of the 1930s schemes is often overlooked; tenants living in clearance areas had no choice or say in the state-sanctioned demolition of their homes, or their subsequent re-housing, despite the altruistic nature of the programme. The urban labouring class was at the bottom of the social ladder in the new Free State, and social policies towards them tended to be paternalistic and dictatorial. In this

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<sup>15</sup> Ruth McManus, *Dublin, 1910-1940: shaping the city and suburbs* (Dublin, 2002), p. 160

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>17</sup> Dr M. Kirby, *Sligo County Medical Officer Annual report 1940*, p. 54

sense, the moral rectitude of the middle-class, ‘conservative-minded revolutionaries’ in charge of the new state, differed little from their British predecessors.<sup>18</sup> While this attitude changed somewhat after the appointment of Seán T O’Kelly as Local Government minister in 1932,<sup>19</sup> and when the political kudos of ‘housing the voters’ became apparent, the private home-owner was still seen as the true expression of model citizenry. Accordingly, the housing programme of the 1930s has been referred to as ‘second-class homes for second-class citizens’, and the tenants presented as the ‘poor relations with a troubled provenance’<sup>20</sup>. Slum clearance and replacement was given priority over catering for any expansion in the housing stock for the labouring class, or for the desire of the local authorities to construct ‘better-class’ houses.

It must also be acknowledged that there is another narrative in the history of housing provision; that of the private self-builder or small developer, who were investing in good-quality housing, often terraced, in Sligo from the 1860s onwards, and more especially after 1900. The fact that there was a class of people who could afford the higher rents demanded by such dwellings is often overlooked in the overarching story of the ‘great housing schemes’ of the 1930s and 1940s. Tracing the progress of this class of housing is difficult, and often only possible by looking at the style of house. But despite all the flaws, ‘the provision of housing for those who would have otherwise remained in the slums was a noble cause’.<sup>21</sup>

### **Issues raised and future work**

Some of the issues that were raised in this thesis need further investigation. The limitation of time and space prevented a comparative study of other provincial towns to the same depth as the case study of Sligo. Why for example, were some Irish towns already very pro-active in accessing the government housing funds in 1932 and 1933, while others were still looking to start schemes in the mid-1940s? The funds were available to all local authorities, but not all were in a position to borrow the 33 per cent required locally. This has been primarily a historic and topographical study, and further investigation using an economic and

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<sup>18</sup> Cathal O’Connell, *The state and housing in Ireland: ideology, policy and practice* (New York, 2007), p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Daly, *The buffer state: the historical roots of the department of the environment* (Dublin, 1997), p. 198.

<sup>20</sup> O’Connell, *The state and housing in Ireland*, p. xviii.

<sup>21</sup> Ruth McManus, *Dublin, 1910-1940: shaping the city and suburbs* (Dublin, 2002), p. 160

sociological lens may reveal patterns in the way the housing question was addressed in Sligo compared to the experience in other towns. Additionally, several towns not included in this study were the beneficiaries of large housing schemes, notably Mullingar, Athlone, Ballina, Enniscorthy, Carlow and Carrick on Suir. As smaller towns, the impact of the new housing schemes on their urban fabric must have been even more profound.

In terms of future work, it may be useful to explore in greater detail the issue of infant and child mortality in the provincial towns, with an emphasis on poor housing and public health measures. The records of the Sligo Board of Health are packed with insights into the working of the public health system during the period between 1923 and 1950. A paper based on this important class of records, across several towns, would make an interesting comparative study in itself.

It has been argued by some writers that the new Irish State discovered that the careful development and allocation of social housing could be a very useful means of ‘social and political patronage’, and that the 1930s building-bltz was a particularly effective social policy, since it targeted the most deprived sections of the community.<sup>22</sup> But for the 50,000 people re-housed in modern, warm, commodious and sanitary homes in the provincial towns of the Irish Free State, this housing programme was simply a godsend. It transformed their lives irrevocably.

‘We can see the solution of our greatest evil in sight!’ proclaimed P. J. Rutledge, then Minister for Local Government, in November 1940, on the occasion of the opening of a scheme of 136 houses at Garavogue Villas in Sligo. Acknowledging that the Irish government had re-housed half a million people since 1932, he said, ‘the housing problem is the greatest social evil of our time, and it is a magnificent achievement that its solution is in sight in our time’.<sup>23</sup> On the basis of this research it would be mean-spirited not to agree that it was undeniably a magnificent achievement. However, a full and final resolution of the Irish housing issue was still decades away. Indeed one could argue that the even at the time of writing, the modern housing needs of Sligo are still a major political concern.

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<sup>22</sup> O’Connell, *The state and housing in Ireland*, p. xvii; Murray Fraser, *John Bull's other homes: state housing and British policy in Ireland, 1883-1922* (Liverpool, 1996), p. 283

<sup>23</sup> *Irish Press*, 12 Nov. 1940, p. 2.

Between 1932 and March 1948, Sligo corporation erected over 870 state-financed modern houses. It demolished 500 condemned dwellings, and re-housed over 550 families. In the region of 4,000 people were moved to new accommodation within the borough in that period, representing nearly forty-five per cent of the then population. The hopes of Sligo corporation for the clearing of its historic slums and a better life for the working class were certainly well advanced by the end of the housing drive. Sligo's great housing schemes of the 1930s and early 1940s were representative of the type of large-scale slum clearance experienced by many provincial towns around country during this period. On the whole, the schemes started earlier and were more successful in Sligo than in other towns. The scale of these schemes had enormous impact on all the towns, and this impact varied depending on how peripheral or central the newer schemes were. Nenagh's scheme of 111 houses at St. Joseph's Park, completed in 1936, was described as 'a new town in miniature', and the social importance of the modern housing was noted as 'giving the poor, good proper sanitary housing accommodation, to enable them to live decent Christian lives, as God intended them to do'.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> McManus, 'A new town in miniature: Inter-war suburban housing in an Irish provincial town', in *2ha Magazine*, no.8, *Suburbia and modernism* (2015), pp 2-6.

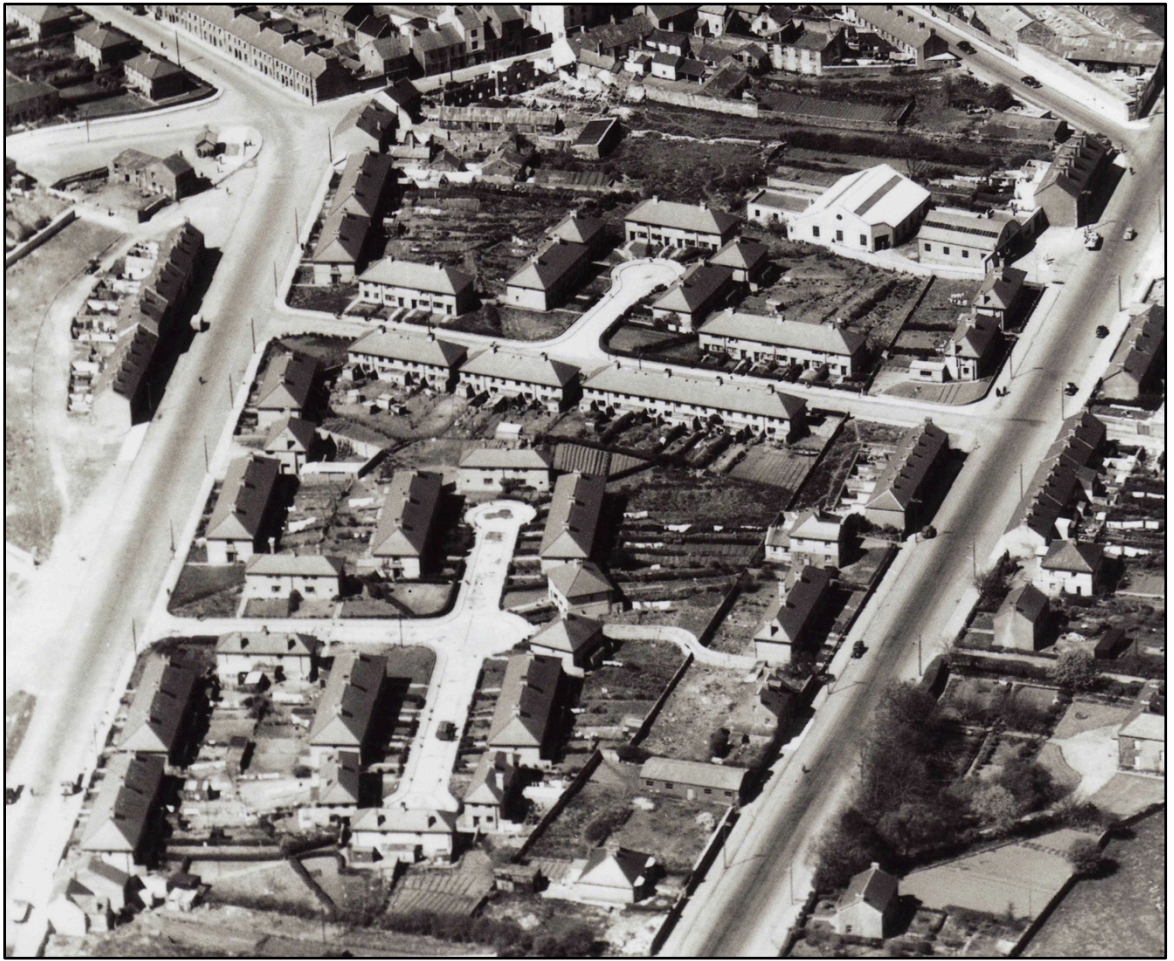


Figure 8.1. An aerial view of the completed schemes at Mail Coach Road and Vernon Street, (St Brigid's Place), Sligo, as photographed in 1958. Source: *Irish Independent* photographic archive, the Morgan collection, A405.

## Appendix 1

### List of relevant departments and Ministers 1919-1947

#### Ministers for Local Government 1919-1924

1. William T. Cosgrave	2 <sup>nd</sup> April 1919 to 9 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1922	SF
2. Ernest Blythe	30 <sup>th</sup> Aug 1922 to 15 <sup>th</sup> Oct1922	Pro Treaty
3. Seamus Burke	15-Oct-1923 to 2-June1924	CnaG

#### Ministers for Local Government and Public Health 1924-1947

1. Seamus Burke	2 <sup>nd</sup> June 1924 to 23 <sup>rd</sup> June 1927	CnaG
2. Richard Mulcahy	23 <sup>rd</sup> June 1927 to 9 <sup>th</sup> March 1932	CnaG
3. Sean T. O'Kelly	9 <sup>th</sup> March 1932 to 8 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1939	FF
4. P.J. Ruttledge	8 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1939 to 14 <sup>th</sup> Aug 1941.	FF
5. Sean MacEntee	18 <sup>th</sup> Aug 1941 to 22 <sup>nd</sup> Jan -1947	FF

Public health was separated into a new Department of Health in 1947, and the Department of Local Government surrendered control of this area. It was renamed the Department of the Environment in 1977.

## APPENDIX II

### Elphin Census data base extraction

A list of head of the profession of heads of household as returned in the 1749 Elphin census for Sligo town, the parish of Saint Johns. Figures were computed from the original returns, including only the area considered an urban part of Sligo town, and excluding rural townlands. Source: Census of Elphin 1749. (NLI, MF n.542.p.923).

Occupations	Papist	Mixed	Protestant	Grand Total
Ale Keeper			1	1
Ale Seller	2		8	10
Apothecary			3	3
Baker	3		6	9
Baliff		1		1
Basketmaker			1	1
Blacksmith	3		4	7
Boatman	2		3	5
Broguemaker	16		1	17
Butcher	10	1	6	17
Cabinetmaker			2	2
Carman	5	1		6
Carpenter	5	1	1	7
Chandler			1	1
Clothier	1	1		2
Collector			1	1
Comber			3	3
Combmaker	1			1
Confectioner			1	1
Cooper	3		2	5
Copper	2			2
Cotter	90	1	48	139
Currier			3	3
Cuttler			1	1
Distiller			2	2
Doctor			1	1
Dyer	1			1
Farmer	11	1	14	26
Fireofficer			3	3
Fisherman	20		2	22
Flaghter	1			1
Flaxdresser			2	2
Ganger			1	1
Gaoler			1	1
Gardener	2		3	5
Gent	2		12	14
Glazier			2	2
Glover	1		5	6
Haberdasher	1			1
Harnessmaker			1	1



Hatmaker	1		1
Hatter		1	1
Haymaker	1		1
Horserider	1		1
Innkeeper	2	5	7

Joiner	4	3	7
Labourer	96	3	99
Lawyer	1		1
Leathercutter	1		1
Mantuamaker	1		1
Mason	2	1 5	8
Merchant	4	7	11
Miller	1		1
Millmaker	1		1
Nailer		2	2
Not given	4	13	17
Painter		1	1
Peddler	1		1
Pensioner		14	14
Piper		1	1
Ploughmaker	1		1
Portman		1	1
Presser	1		1
Quilter		1	1
Reedmaker	2		2
Retailer	1		1
Saddler		4	4
Sailor	4	7	11
Schoolmaker		1	1
Schoolmaster		2	2
Schoolmistress	1	1	2
Servant		1	1
Shoemaker	1	12	13
Shopkeeper	12	16	29
Slater		1	1
Smith	2	4	6
Snuffmaker		1	1
Soapboiler	1		1
Spinner		2	2
Staymaker	1		1
Surgeon		1	1
Surveyor		1	1
Tailor	17	2	19
Tanner	1	4	5
Tinker	1	1	2
Upon-Charity		4	4
Vesterykeeper		1	1
Watchmaker		2	2
Weaver	16	1 25	42
Weighmaker		1	1
Wheel Wright	3	1	4
Wigmaker	1	4	5
Yarmaker	1		1
Grand Total	370	10 300	681

# Appendix III

Sample of page of the original Cess Books of St. John's parish, Sligo town, 1779.

(Page 7)  
Appellment of Church presented at Michaelmas Vestry to be  
Layd on the Town part of St. John's Parish, in the year, 1779. 14:12:10

Street	No.	Name	Rate	Name	Rate
Battling Street	1	15 <sup>th</sup> O. Bonlog	3 3	William Duke	3 3
	1	Mich. Brennan	4	Rich. Brown	1 7/8
	8	Dom. M. Donogh	6 1/2	Dom. Gallaugher	2 2
	10	M. Philip Cox	1 7/8	W. Doghan	1 1
	10	Robert Stanley	2 8 1/2	M. Henry	1 7/8
	10	Robt. Alexander	3	John Greenlow	2 8 1/2
	10	Peter Carville	6 1/2	Doct. Todd	2 2
	10	Sam. Cunningham	6 1/2	James Berry	1 7/8
	4	Shady Boyle	6 1/2	Doct. Gibson	2 8 1/2
	1	Shady Hussey	6 1/2		
	4	John Farley	8		
	2	Doct. Suckett	1 7/8		
	10	M. W. Bibbs	2 8 1/2		
	3	Henry King	0		
	Market Street	4	James Black	10 1/2	
1					
2					
1					
1					
2					
4					
1					
1					
2					
4					
1					
1					
2					
Castle Street		4	O. Donogh	3 3	
	8	And. Taylor	10		
	6 1/2	Sam. M. Garaghy	10		
	6 1/2	M. Boyle	0 10		
	6 1/2	Henry Burrows	10		
	4	Fre. Corran	1 1		
	4	John M. Dannel	1 1		
	10	Don. Simpson	8		



## APPENDIX IV

Sample extract for database of list of traders in Sligo town Database compiled from the various trade directories mentioned in the text. A pivot table was used to extract the number of traders in the various streets and professions

ID	Surname	First Name	House No	Street/Address	Trade	Directory	Year
1	Ballintine	J & D		Clonsellagh	Bleachers & Linen Dealers	Directory	1824
2	Kelly	Andrew		Collooney	Bleachers & Linen Dealers	Directory	1824
3	McDonnell	William		Ballisodare	Bleachers & Linen Dealers	Directory	1824
4	McTucker	John		Springfield	Bleachers & Linen Dealers	Directory	1824
5	Feeney	John		Quay Street	Boat Builder	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
6	Welsh	Patrick		Quay Street	Boat Builder	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
7	Bolton	Alexander		Castle Street	Bookseller & Stationer	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
8	Feeney	John		Knox's Street	Bookseller & Stationer	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
9	Burke	John		Radcliffe Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
10	Conolan	John		Radcliffe Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
11	Derrig	Andrew		Market Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
12	Ford	William		Old Market Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
13	Harrison	John		Radcliffe Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
14	Henry	James		Church Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
15	Hopwell	Andrew		Radcliffe Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
16	Judge	James		Market Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
17	McCready	George		Radcliffe Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
18	McLoughlin	John		Radcliffe Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
19	May	John		Gaol Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
20	Merrick	John		Wine Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
21	O'Hara	Michael		Quay Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
22	Ralph	John		Thomas Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
23	Shaw	William		Castle Street	Boot & Shoe Maker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
24	Gamble	James		Knox's Street	Brazier & Tinmen (& Coppersmith)	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
25	Johnston	Robert		High street	Brazier & Tinmen	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
26	Roberson	Samuel		Castle street	Brazier & Tinmen	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
27	White	James		Radcliffe Street	Brazier & Tinmen	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
28	Whyte	Edward		High Street	Brazier & Tinmen	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
29	Anderson & Co.	J.		Radcliffe Street	Brewer	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
30	Holmes & Co,	William		Farmhill	Brewer	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
31	Madden & co.	Martin		Radcliffe Street	Brewer	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
32	Smyth	John		Market Street	Brewer	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
33	Arbuckle	Adam		Castle Street	Cabinet Maker and Upholster	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
34	Henry	James		Knox's Street	Cabinet Maker and Upholster	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
35	Ormsby	Hudson		Thomas Street	Cabinet Maker and Upholster	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
36	Cowlan	Patrick		Thomas Street	Clothes Broker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
37	Goolrick	John		Thomas Street	Clothes Broker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
38	Keanghron	John		Thomas Street	Clothes Broker (& Pawn Broker)	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
39	McGlone	Patrick		High Street	Clothes Broker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824
40	Morrisson	Martin		Thomas Street	Clothes Broker	Piggot & Co. Pr	1824

## Appendix V

### Example of the forcible occupation of new houses in Sligo, in November

In November 1936, there were extraordinary scenes at Gallows Hill South, where houses were forcibly occupied, and fifteen families moved into possession of a number of unfinished dwellings.<sup>1236</sup> They came over in a body of about 100 people, saying that 'as they were promised houses and did not get them, they were now going to take them. None of the houses occupied, he added, were finished. The Gardaí were called to the site the next day, but the unauthorised tenants did not give up possession. They claimed that, although repeatedly promised tenancies under previous schemes, they were turned down in each instance. In several cases they spent the night, without any bedding or furniture, in rooms, which had not been provided with windows and doors. One woman, Mrs. Rennick, who had been with her daughter some days previously, had come from a condemned house in the Mill Road; she had been promised a new house in the Gallows Hill scheme, but had been 'diddled' out of it. This time she was not taking any chances; She had a bed and table with her, and the rest of her belongings were in her former residence. She could only see the house I had my daughter laid out in', she stated to the *Irish Press* reporter, 'The priests and nuns agreed with me, and said it was an awful place. There had been eight persons living in the old house the woman had vacated. Her former house in Mail Coach Road was in a terrible state of repair, and she could not get the landlord to do anything with it as it was over 90 years old, and there were eight people living in it.'<sup>1237</sup> However, the minutes of the corporation show that John McSharry, the rent collector had already obtained the keys of the house on Gallows Hill in order to immediately re-house the Rennick family on the 7<sup>th</sup> November. A young girl died before the keys were handed over.<sup>1238</sup> He arrived at the house the following day, only to find that it had already been forcibly entered by John McMorrow, and legal redress was needed to evict him. It is easy to understand then, why the Rennick's took possession of another house, in the face of the law, if not one at all.

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<sup>1236</sup> *Irish Press*, 14 Nov. 1936, p. 9.

<sup>1237</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>1238</sup> Sligo Corporation, Minutes, 2 Dec. 1936, p. 130.

**Appendix VI—Extract from the 1914 Dublin Housing Report, showing the returns from some other provincial towns, including Sligo. HC 1914 [Cd. 7317], Appendix to the report of the Committee ...to enquire into the housing conditions of the working classes in the city of Dublin, ..appendices. 1914.**

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**APPENDIX XXXVII.**

**EXTRACTS FROM STATEMENTS SUBMITTED BY CERTAIN URBAN AUTHORITIES IN IRELAND**

Of the County Boroughs in Ireland, apart from Dublin, Belfast and Londonderry, which have provided no separate residential dwellings for the Working Classes.

**CORK COUNTY BOROUGH.**

It is estimated by the Corporation that:—

- (1). 1,500 houses is the approximate number of working class dwellings urgently required, this number being based on the number of families living in tenements of one room in the city.
- (2). The City Engineer estimates the average cost of these houses (three-roomed) at £150 each.
- (3). It would be impossible to make any estimate of the probable cost of the site, but as a guide it may be mentioned that in the year 1877 the Corporation of Cork acting under the provisions of the Artizans and Labourers Dwellings Improvement Act, 1875, obtained a provisional order from the Local Government Board and cleared an unhealthy area 12A. 3R. 19P. at a cost of £19,859.

The conditions existing in the city indicate that approximately 25,000 persons occupy 1,800 tenement houses, and it is stated that whereas the minimum cubic space prescribed by the bye-laws for each adult occupier of a sleeping apartment is 300 cubic feet, in only 206 cases of 861 rooms in tenement houses did the cubic space for each adult comply with the bye-laws, and in some cases the cubic space for each adult in the sleeping apartment fell as low as 36 cubic feet.

The Corporation state that instances have come under the notice of their Inspectors of two families—husband, wife, and two children each occupying in common one small room of about 702 cubic feet, and of a male and three females not being members of the same family living in one room; also a man and wife, three sons, one male lodger, one daughter (26), one niece (30) and two children under 10 years, occupying one small kitchen and bedroom. The most recent report of the Medical Superintendent Officer of Health gives no fewer than seven instances of nine persons living in one room, nine instances of eight persons similarly situated, and so on.

**LIMERICK COUNTY BOROUGH.**

The Corporation are most anxious to be facilitated in the matter of getting cheap money to enable them to build and let (without loss to the Rates) houses for the Working Classes at from 2s. to 3s. a week. The need for such houses is stated to be a crying one in this city, and the following extract from the annual report, in respect of the health and sanitary condition of the city for 1912, discloses the conditions with reference to housing.

**TENEMENTS.**

As regards congestion in Limerick, the following table will be of interest:—

**TENEMENTS OF ONE ROOM—OCCUPIED BY**

	1 person.	2 persons.	3 persons.	4 persons.	5 persons.	6 persons.	7 persons.	8 persons.	9 persons.	10 persons.	11 persons & upwards
Total Number in the City.	217	243	178	121	98	60	28	10	8	1	1

The following is a brief history of the work done by the Corporation in providing houses for the working classes.

In the year 1889 twenty-four cottages were completed, fifteen of them were let at 3s., and nine at 3s. 6d. each a week.

In 1894 seven more houses were erected, and let at 3s. 6d. and 3s. each a week.

The site and buildings of an old brewery were acquired from the Harbour Commissioners in 1895 at the nominal rent of 1s. a year, and the old stores were converted into thirteen two-storey dwellings. The rent of each house is 4s. a week, and the upper floor is allowed to be sublet at 2s. 9d. a week.

An Improvement Scheme was made by the Council in 1896 in respect of two unhealthy areas. These districts were cleared, roadways and footpaths formed, and sewers laid down at a cost of £8,096. One of the cleared areas was sold to a building company for £1,000, and on it they have built fifty-eight cottages.

In the year 1911 the Council built seventeen more houses, and of these the weekly rents are 3s., 3s. 6d., and 4s. a week, respectively, for three, four, and five-roomed cottages.

Under the Housing Scheme of 1912 the Council have in progress sixty-six houses. The weekly rents proposed to be charged will be 4s. for four-roomed, and 4s. 6d. for five-roomed cottages.

It may be said that in many cases the above rents cannot be paid by the very poor, and while this is true, it is to be remembered that the houses vacated by those who move into the new dwellings will be at the disposal of some of the dwellers in the tenements above referred to, thus decreasing the congestion.

Progress in this direction will be accelerated when the last-mentioned scheme has been completed, but so long as the wretched tenements to be found in Limerick continue to exist, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate tuberculosis from the city, as the bringing back of a tuberculous family from a sanatorium to their old room will give free play to the tubercle bacilli.

**WATERFORD COUNTY BOROUGH.**

Four schemes have been undertaken, the particulars of which are given elsewhere. At the last Inquiry held in 1910 into an application for a Provisional Order to confirm a building scheme the following evidence was given:—

The number of dwellings occupied by the working classes is about 2,500, of which about 80 per cent. are one-storied cottages.

There are also thirty-seven tenement houses—two, three, and four-storied. The most of these are houses which were built in the beginning of the 18th Century by the well-to-do classes, and after the passing of the Union, became detenanted. Like similar houses in Dublin and other cities in Ireland, in course of time, they became the property of middlemen and the house jobber. Many of them are very old and in an unsanitary condition, and owing to the want of space, structural and other defects are incapable of being put into a proper sanitary state, or made fit for human habitation, and consequently should be closed up.

Owing to the want above referred to, of suitable houses for the working classes, the Public Health Committee refrained, from time to time, from taking the necessary steps to have such insanitary tenement and other houses closed as the occupiers would have to choose between going to the Union or remaining on the streets without shelter.

Waterford was almost the first city in the United Kingdom to take advantage of the Act of 1860, as they built in 1870, seventeen two-storeyed houses. These houses were let originally at 4s. 6d. a week, but were reduced to 3s. 6d. a week, and even then were found to be too dear for the working classes generally.

In the year 1887, twenty-five one-storeyed cottages were also erected, and were let at 2s. 9d. and 2s. 6d. a week.

In the years 1887-8-9 and 1900 the Corporation again erected 216 two-storeyed and one-storeyed cottages, which were let at 3s. 6d., 3s. 2d., 2s. 9d., and 2s. 6d. a week.

The total amount expended by the Corporation up to the present time on houses for the working classes is, therefore, £38,350, and the number of houses erected 258.

A number of old, dilapidated tenement houses were closed up and knocked down, with the result that the former occupiers—about 100 families—are now distributed over the other existing tenements.

This, also, as is well known, is the cause of the great prevalence of tuberculosis in the city.

Waterford is a very ancient city, one of the most ancient, perhaps, in Ireland, and consequently many of the houses are very old, altogether too small, badly ventilated, with small windows, and built in narrow streets and lanes and alleys. They are altogether unsuitable for the bringing up of a healthy people, and until proper houses are provided, the working classes, as long as they are left in their present filthy, insanitary, and congested abodes, cannot be expected to be sober, self-respecting, or good members of the community.

An outbreak of Typhus Fever occurred in March, 1910, which affected nearly the whole of the forty families residing in the tenements in a single street.

Dr. Browne, Local Government Board Inspector, made a special report on the matter, in which he stated that the street in question in its then condition was a "danger to the community at large." He has also frequently reported on the absolute necessity of better housing accommodation being provided for the working classes.

Finally, there is an urgent and genuine want for the erection of healthy, suitable, and respectable houses for the working classes.

#### ARKLOW URBAN DISTRICT.

At an Inquiry held in 1912 in respect of a housing application evidence was given by the Town Clerk and Medical Officer:—

That the housing conditions showed that in the town there were 153 heads of families occupying one room, 404 heads of families occupying two rooms, 196 three rooms, and 118 occupying four rooms; thirty-five rooms were occupied by one person each, thirty-nine rooms by two persons, thirty-eight rooms by three persons, eleven rooms by four persons, thirteen rooms by five persons, eight rooms by six persons each, and six rooms by seven persons each, and there were two tenements of one room occupied by ten persons.

As regards the health of the town, there had been a very severe outbreak of typhus fever in 1910. There were about twenty-four persons affected with the disease, and eight of the number died. The disease occurred in a locality where there was insufficient housing accommodation, and it was with a view to taking persons from the insanitary slums that the Council were desirous of building houses.

The medical officer who had held office for over twelve years thought every one-roomed house in the town unfit for human habitation, and that tuberculosis was so prevalent that one in every five persons in the town died from it—an exceedingly high rate. In fact the accommodation for the working classes was as bad as was to be found anywhere. He could prove justification for the levelling of 100 houses, and instanced the case of one locality where there were about forty houses, with about 200 people living in a space twice the size of the Courthouse.

As regards the typhus outbreak there was not such a virulent outbreak in Ireland since the famine days. It broke out in a slated dwellinghouse, which was in insanitary surroundings. The general death-rate of the district was low, as Arklow is one of the healthiest situated towns in the United Kingdom, but consumption is more commonly conveyed in the town from the thatch of houses than from infected persons.

#### BALLINASLOE URBAN DISTRICT.

If loans could be issued on the same terms to the Urban Councils as they are to Rural Councils under Labourers Acts, viz., at 3½ per cent. and time of repayment extended, it would encourage Urban Councils to provide more houses. They have already undertaken one scheme with thirty-two houses.

#### BANBRIDGE URBAN DISTRICT.

The Urban Council have not yet built under the Housing of the Working Classes Acts, but they have resolved to build fifty houses at a cost of £180 each, provided loans can be obtained at, say, £2 1s. 8d. per cent. (to include principal and interest) to carry out the scheme. There are a good many of such houses required in the town, and the medical officer in his recent reports confirmed this. There are some houses in the Urban district that may be unfit for human habitation, and the Council are anxious to lessen any complaint regarding this. They strongly feel that loans should be granted on such terms as would enable Councils to carry out the Housing of the Working Classes Acts so as to make the Working Classes more happy and contented in their surroundings, and they trust the present Inquiry will be productive of much good in this respect.

#### BRAY URBAN DISTRICT.

The Council by two Provisional Orders in 1900 made an improvement Scheme, but much still remains to be done. Some areas require to be cleared, and it is the intention of the Council to proceed with a scheme for providing for probably another hundred families in the district.

The work already carried out (not taking into account Township Rates) means a loss annually of roughly two pence in the pound on the Valuation of the district, and the Council hope as the result of the Inquiry now being held in Dublin that statutory measures will be taken to enable Local Authorities to borrow money for housing schemes from the Commissioners of Public Works at say, 2 per cent. for interest, and that repayment would be made in the easiest possible manner, and so that instead of being any loss to the ratepayers housing schemes might be made at least to pay for themselves.

The Council also think that the method of acquiring possession of sites, clearing of title, &c., might be made more simple and expeditious.

#### CARLOW URBAN DISTRICT.

Houses cannot be built under the existing conditions without a loss to the rates. This difficulty can only be met by some concession from the Treasury, similar to that which has been given to assist in the building of cottages in rural districts, and the time has come to press this claim of Urban Districts on the Government.

Some amendment of the law is required to facilitate the purchasing of suitable sites when required for building schemes, and more especially some amendment which will enable local authorities to compulsorily acquire derelict sites on which no rates are being paid, and they would suggest that the Arbitrator's Award be governed by the period the owner has allowed them to remain in that state.

They have already provided forty-three houses.

#### CARRICK ON-SUIR URBAN DISTRICT.

No housing scheme has been adopted by the Urban Council owing to the unfavourable terms under which money is procurable for the purpose.

#### CLONMEL URBAN DISTRICT.

The Council consider that the conditions relating to their Borough are covered in the following reports of the Borough Surveyor and Medical Officer of Health furnished respectively in October and November 1912.

Some of the houses referred to in the Borough Surveyor's report have been closed up as unfit for human habitation, and some have been improved: otherwise the conditions continue to be as stated in his report.

The Committee hope that any facilities for housing which may be given by the Government will be made to apply retrospectively, so as to include schemes introduced in the present financial year, at the least.

BOROUGH SURVEYOR'S OFFICE,  
TOWN HALL,  
CLONMEL, 1st October, 1912.

To the Chairman, and Gentlemen of the  
Artisans Dwellings Committee.

GENTLEMEN,

The prevailing state of affairs is that the houses are overcrowded, old, badly constructed, badly lighted, and not ventilated.

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There are districts at Old Bridge, notably Raheen Road, St. Nicholas Lane, Storey's Lane, and Glenegad, &c., &c., where the houses are so bad that the absence of any other accommodation alone justifies allowing them to remain open. In other parts of the town also there are localities very nearly as bad as the district before mentioned, such as Irishtown Upper, Price's Lane, St. Stephen's Place, Gravel Walk, Phelan's Lane off O'Connell Street, Cahill's Lane off Wellington Street, Daniels' Lane off Heywood Road, and it is needless to mention George's Court. The small houses in Thomas Street and King Street require big alterations to make them suitable habitations, and there are other parts of the town in a like condition. I have just enumerated a few.

Such a state of affairs is a fruitful source of disease, and militates severely against your efforts in other directions to improve the health of the town. In the interests of the Public Health therefore, if for no other reason, immediate and drastic action is necessary on your part.

Accommodation is needed for about 150 families, and, in my opinion, would best be provided by erecting three classes of dwellings suitable to the Rural, immediate Rural, and central parts of the town, and containing three, four, and five or six rooms to suit the various occupiers.

We now come to a difficulty which if not overcome would render any attempts to solve the housing problem abortive. The difficulty is to provide houses that will be lettable at rents low enough to be within the means of those whom you propose to benefit.

In previous schemes efforts have been made to achieve this object, but it has been found impossible to build dwellings that while suitable and in accordance with the Local Government Board's regulations, could still be let at a rent sufficiently low to be within the means of those who most require them.

In Rural Districts I understand that this is possible, owing to the facilities afforded by the Government by way of Grants, low rates of interest on loans, &c., but Clonmel being an Urban District is not entitled to this aid.

In conclusion, therefore, and to put the matter shortly—The Housing of the Working Classes in Clonmel is bad, so bad as to menace the health of the town, and to call for instant remedy.

To provide a satisfactory remedy you must build about 150 houses at an average cost of £160 per house. Some of these houses must be let at a rent not exceeding 1s. 6d. per week.

There will be as a result a loss of about £490 annually to be met from an outside source, and provisions of this deficit is perhaps the main point to be considered.

I have the honour to be,  
Gentlemen,  
Yours obediently,  
S. A. BRUNICARDI,  
*Borough Surveyor.*

GENTLEMEN,

In the following report I have endeavoured to give you a clear idea of the number and character of the dwellings at present existing in the town for the accommodation of the working and artisan classes. I take it that your object in asking me to furnish this information is to treat the housing question in a comprehensive way by outlining and adopting a scheme which though taking years to develop and complete will finally solve this pressing problem in a satisfactory manner.

For the purpose of this report I shall define an artisan as a skilled workman earning from 25s. a week upwards, and a labourer as an unskilled man whose wages average 13s. With these facts before our minds, and considering the present economical industrial outlook, it is evident that the most we can expect to provide is a sanitary dwelling, without any of that ornamentation, and even luxury, which marks the houses at present being built in the garden cities of England and elsewhere.

The problem of catering for the labouring classes is much more pressing than in the case of the artisan. As a result of a complete survey of the

town I have made the following classification which may be of assistance:—

1. (a) Dwellings recently erected in various parts of the town by the Corporation to the number of forty-nine.

This type of house is perhaps the best we can hope to provide in the present state of affairs.

2. (b) A similar type of house built by private enterprise to the number of thirty-three.

Houses which are unsatisfactory for various reasons, but which must continue to be inhabited until better accommodation is provided. This class includes by far the greater number of dwellings in the town.

Houses unfit for human habitation to the number of about forty. This classification refers to workmen's dwellings only. The artisan population is comparatively speaking small, and some excellent houses are available, e.g., the Corporation houses in Dillon street.

I find that the rents paid by the labouring classes range from 1s. 3d. for rooms in tenements to 3s. for entire house, but in most cases the rent is not more than 2s. to 2s. 6d.

Houses originally intended for the better paid class of labourers and artisans are in some cases being used as tenements. This of course is objectionable, and cannot be remedied till suitable houses are provided.

I will conclude my report with the following suggestions:—

(1). Owners of houses which have been condemned as unfit for human habitation should not be entitled to compensation. Condemned houses should be pulled down immediately, and the ground, if not to be built over should be laid out as play ground for children. This applies also to such plots of waste ground at present existing in the town.

(2). A system of municipal scavenging is a practical necessity, and need not be very costly.

(3). I would again call your attention to the necessity of closing up George's Court. This place was condemned not only for the defective structure of the houses, but also because of the site, which is quite unsuitable.

P. J. O'BRIEN,  
*M.O.H.*

#### DONAGHADDEE URBAN DISTRICT.

No schemes undertaken up to the present, but the housing conditions of the poorer classes in the Urban District call for and merit the earliest possible attention, as the Medical Officer of Health has reported on improvements and requirements necessary in some 170 houses. Under existing conditions it is not possible to have the requirements properly and effectually complied with unless assistance is rendered by the Government in the nature of Grants or improved terms and conditions as to Loans under the Housing of the Working Classes Acts.

#### DROGHEDA URBAN DISTRICT.

116 houses have already been built and the rents are probably the lowest charged by any Urban Council in Ireland, owing to the fact that the Corporation possessed the sites, and that the other contingent expenses, were small. Low as they are such rents are considered higher than the working classes can afford to pay.

Although 116 dwellings have been erected it is estimated that there are still about 800 dwellings which require to be replaced.

The average annual loss represents a poundage rate of 1½d., and the Corporation cannot of course add to it much further, notwithstanding the very pressing need for additional improved dwellings. The trifling annual loss through vacancies and default is explained by the fact that the Corporation have been able to command the best tenants in their respective class.

Contributions from the "Housing Fund" must be disregarded in a general survey, it being recognised and admitted that within a short period such contributions will not be appreciable.



The Corporation would like to avoid overcrowding of particular areas, and to avoid a reproduction of the unloveliness of past years; they would like to provide open spaces for playgrounds, &c., but no advance in this direction can be made so long as houses built under the cheapest possible conditions result in a substantial loss, nor indeed can they do more than touch the fringe of the housing question until additional financial facilities have been provided.

#### DUNGARVAN URBAN DISTRICT.

Have already provided forty-five houses, but at least 300 more are required. Estimated cost of building and sites—£150 each, at least. The condition of existing labourers' houses as regards room, light, and air and sanitary arrangements is most defective as the accompanying report furnished by the Chairman and Sanitary Sub-Officer shews:—

*Strand Street.*—In Strand Street there are fifteen houses occupied.

In some of the aforesaid houses, there are ten, eight, nine, and seven persons residing, while the general conditions of the houses with few exceptions, are so insanitary, that, they are not fit for one person to live in. They are composed of kitchens, a portion of each being partitioned off, and converted into a bedroom. The floors are full of holes, and are made of clay, while the doors and windows are, only, in a few cases, weather-tight. The insides also require rendering. The rear of these houses is only an open space, having no drainage or sanitary convenience. The M.O.H. has often reported on the insanitary state of these houses, and recommended that more suitable ones be provided.

*Cross Strand Street and Lower Strand Street.*—In the above streets there are twenty-eight houses in size similar to these in Strand Street, but they are in a most dilapidated state, though there are 146 persons living in them.

*Bullery Street.*—In this street there are seventeen houses occupied, which are not in general, as insanitary as the houses in the streets above-mentioned, but the sleeping accommodation where both sexes must be provided for is insufficient, while there are none of the yards enclosed by walls; no sanitary conveniences or drains.

*New Chapel Street.*—In this street there are eighteen houses, portions of each house being partitioned off, and converted into a bedroom. The houses, I consider, are too small for families, where both sexes require sleeping accommodation. The yards are exposed, and there are no drains or sanitary conveniences.

*Wolfe Tone Street.*—Thirty persons, I found, were living in five small houses in this street, which were reported several times as unfit for human habitation. The other houses (about twelve in number) in this street, were thrown down recently, as they had become a danger and a nuisance.

*Upper Mitchell Street.*—In this street there are four insanitary thatched small dwelling houses, which were recently covered with corrugated iron, the rotten thatch being allowed to remain underneath. There are thirty-one persons living in these houses, which, I consider, are certainly unfit for habitation. The insides of them are very dilapidated also.

*Lower Mitchell Street.*—Seventeen houses in this street are, I am of opinion, not suitable for sleeping accommodation. The majority of the yards are exposed, having no sanitary conveniences or drains.

*Barrack Street.*—In Barrack street there are ten small houses occupied by forty-two persons, four of said houses having only one person living in each. These houses are in a dilapidated state inside, and have no drains in some cases. The roofs are bad in most of them, and the yards are too small. All of them are insufficiently lighted, and ventilated, and are, in my opinion, unfit for people to live in.

*Quay Street.*—In this street there are eight small houses, having only a kitchen and loft in each house, with the exception of one, which has no loft. There are thirty-four persons residing in said houses. There are no sanitary conveniences, and they are insufficiently lighted and ventilated, and have only earthen floors and small yards.

*Thompson's Lane.*—There are thirteen houses in this lane which are occupied. This is a narrow lane only about eight feet wide, on the west side of which is a large corn store, which runs almost from

the beginning to the end of the lane. Owing to dilapidation, and the want of sufficient air and light, as well as sanitary conveniences and proper yards, these houses are unfit for human habitation.

*New Lane.*—There are five houses in this lane, each consisting of a kitchen room and loft, which are not sufficiently lighted or ventilated. There were quite a number of houses of the same class in this lane; but through dilapidation, &c., they were thrown down.

*Emmett Street.*—In this street there are two small houses, each consisting of a kitchen, room, and loft, in which there are fifteen persons dwelling. I consider there is not sufficient accommodation in any of these houses for families. They are badly lighted and ventilated, and have only small insanitary yards.

*Old Chapel Street.*—In this street there are five most insanitary thatched dwelling houses, which are in a dilapidated state, having mud walls, earthen floors, and without drainage or sanitary arrangements. They have been several times reported by the M.O.H. as being unfit to live in, as they are gone beyond repair.

*Tom Moore Street.*—There are eleven houses in this street, ten of which are occupied, and in which there are fifty-seven persons living. These houses consist of kitchens, having portions partitioned off, and made bedrooms of. The general condition of these houses, is, I consider, insanitary, as they have only earthen floors, and no proper drainage, while the yards are in such a state that they cannot be kept clean for want of proper construction.

*Lord Edward Street.*—The same state of affairs applies to this street as to the previous street. Seventeen houses out of nineteen being occupied by fifty-six persons.

*Davis Street.*—There are fifteen houses in this street (thirteen of which are occupied). The general condition of these houses is very bad. Ten of them having roofs in a wretched state. They have all earthen floors with small exposed yards. No drains or W.C.'s, although there are fifty-eight persons living in them. The street is only eight feet wide, and the ventilation of the houses is very poor.

*Patrick Street.*—In this street there are twenty-four small houses, in which eighty-three people reside. Each house contains one room and kitchen and all the yards are exposed. The majority of them are in a rather dilapidated condition. The yards, without exception, are all insanitary for want of drainage and sanitary conveniences.

*Nicholas Street.*—The situation in this street is similar to that in Davis Street. Thirteen (out of fifteen houses) being occupied by fifty persons.

*Fair Lane.*—There are thirteen small houses in this lane which are not fit to live in, owing to their being insanitary, having no drains or W.C.'s.

*Shandon Street.*—In this street there are forty-eight small houses each consisting of one kitchen and room. With a few exceptions, the floors are all earthen, and the occupants complain of their great dampness in wet weather. The roofs of a good many of them are bad through want of general repairs and rendering. The yards are all exposed. There are no sanitary conveniences, and no drains in a number of the houses. There are as many as eight, nine, and ten persons living in some of these houses.

*Rice's Street.*—The same state of things exists in this street. There are twenty-two small houses, with small exposed yards, and no sanitary arrangements. They are only drained by means of a small pipe running through each kitchen, which discharges on to the water table opposite each house in the public street, not more than three feet from the doors of the houses.

*Thomas Street.*—There are eighteen small houses occupied in this street, which are of the same size as the houses in Shandon Street. The floors are composed mostly of clay. There are no sanitary arrangements, and in most cases, no drains.

*Saint David Street.*—There are thirty-one houses occupied by 147 persons in this street. Each house consists of a small bedroom and kitchen. The majority of the houses have only earthen floors. The yards are all exposed, and there are no sanitary conveniences or drains in most cases.

*King Street.*—There are ten houses in this street, which are too small for families to live in. Each house contains only one room and a kitchen. The floors are of earthen clay, and the rears of the houses are exposed to Sexton Street. It is only an open space, and there are no sanitary conveniences or drains in any of them.

*Sarsfield Street.*—One hundred and nine persons reside in nineteen houses in this street. The general conditions of dwellinghouses in this locality are so bad, that, I am of opinion, the houses are unfit for habitation. The yards are small, and most insanitary for want of drainage, and sanitary conveniences.

*Slate Lane.*—In this lane there are fourteen houses, seven of them having only kitchens with small additions to the back (6' x 8') which are used as bed-rooms. The floors are only damp clay, and there are no drains, or sanitary conveniences.

*Coolagh Road.*—There are seventeen houses in this road, which through dilapidation, and general insanitary condition, are not fit for human habitation.

*New Lane.*—Residing in six houses in this street are thirty-five persons, five of said houses having only one small room and kitchen with damp earthen floors, and no drains or sanitary conveniences.

*Hermitage.*—In Hermitage there are four houses, which are certainly unfit for people to reside in as there are no yards. The roofs of houses are bad also.

#### ENNIS URBAN DISTRICT.

Have built ninety-six houses, yet there is still a great want of labourers' dwellings in the Urban District, dwellings that could be let for say, 1s. or 1s. 6d. per week. Under existing legislation it would be impossible to build houses at this figure.

#### ENNISCORTHY URBAN DISTRICT.

Have built forty-six houses, but as regards the housing conditions of the poorer classes in the district the Council consider that there are about ninety-six houses in which the structural arrangements are not suitable, and which as regards sanitation, are not up to modern requirements. The probable number of houses required (viz., ninety-six) at an estimated cost of £135 each would be £12,960, to which is to be added probable cost of sites—£3,050, making a total of £16,010.

#### FERMOY URBAN DISTRICT.

The Council have undertaken three schemes, and erected up to the present on the first two—eighty-nine houses. There are still some thirty-two houses unfit for human habitation, and in addition eighty-five houses in an overcrowded state. They intend to go on, as soon as they are able with the completion of No. 3 Scheme, as they have acquired, and paid for the sites.

Another hardship under which the working classes rest is the very heavy rents they have to pay their landlords. In Fermoy as much as 5s. and 6s. per week are paid for rooms. If Councils are not able to get money at a more reasonable rate of interest as well as a Grant-in-Aid from the Government it is feared that the housing of the workers will be stopped altogether, when it is understood that each year the Housing Fund grows considerably less.

#### KILKENNY URBAN DISTRICT.

Have provided 140 houses, but a great number of the houses presently existing in the city are of a very inferior description, and a number of them unfit for human habitation. The Corporation have endeavoured from time to time to remedy this state of affairs but owing to the high rate of interest which they have to pay for any money borrowed for the better housing of the workers their efforts have been frustrated, as it is an utter impossibility to erect houses under existing circumstances with justice to either the ratepayer or the worker.

If the Corporation borrow money and erect houses they will either have to charge the tenant a rent which is out of all proportion to the rate of wages paid him, or they will have to charge a fair and reasonable rent which will entail a heavy loss to the ratepayers, as it is they who will have to make up the deficiency that may exist as between the rent paid and amount sufficient to pay back principal and interest to the Board of Works.

Since 1898 all taxes are paid by the tenant, a fact which may much harass the tenant, and it is the opinion of my Council that immediate steps should be taken to as heretofore have the taxes of the poorer classes paid by the landlord.

This would, in the opinion of my Council, be a great relief to the ratepayers as well as to the tenants, as it is utterly impossible to extract rates from most of the property occupied by the poorer classes, and all deficiencies have to be made up by the ratepayers.

#### KILLINEY AND BALLYBRACK URBAN DISTRICT.

The Council have provided forty-three houses, and in addition ten more are in hands. The points which the Council would urge in connection with Housing Schemes are:—

(1). It being frequently necessary to compensate several ground interests, the price of land is often much in excess of its market value.

(2). The exorbitant sums allowed as compensation to owners of old dilapidated buildings standing in areas condemned as insanitary, the full rental value being invariably given for almost worthless property.

#### KILRUSH URBAN DISTRICT.

Have built no houses. The rates are 7s. 3d. in the pound, on a valuation of £4,168, and a population, in 1911, of 3,666. The Council have undertaken no scheme of housing as yet, as the Local Government Board has refused their sanction to a loan for this purpose. The Council had been threatened with a default order with respect to the defective water supply to the Urban District which they had refused to remedy.

There is a great and urgent necessity for the proper housing of the poorer classes in the district.

The housing compares favourably with the lowest slums of Dublin for insanitation, and remedial measures are greatly needed.

One hundred houses are required. The major portion of the old ruins at present existing should be demolished, as they are unfit for human habitation. Several of these tenements are occupied by families of from ten to twelve persons, and under existing circumstances it is impossible to have proper sanitary arrangements made.

#### MALLOW URBAN DISTRICT.

Have provided twenty-eight houses under two schemes.

The more expensive scheme of larger houses was so estimated that the Council could not afford to let them at a great loss; and as artisans and mechanics are few, the ordinary workers could not pay the rent of these—a few tenants not of this class occupy them. If a grant-in-aid were given, to erect other houses for poor labourers, and an allowance were made to reduce the loan already advanced or the payments thereon, the Council would be enabled to proceed further in their housing operations, which the expense now prohibits them from doing.

Notwithstanding their efforts, lanes, houses, and conditions condemned as insanitary, still prevail.

#### NAVAN URBAN DISTRICT.

Have provided eighty-four houses. If slums and overcrowding are to be done away with in the district 100 more houses will be needed.

## NENAGH URBAN DISTRICT.

Have provided eighteen houses, and have another scheme in operation to provide thirty more. The Council believe that the housing accommodation in Nenagh is altogether inadequate and unsuitable for the unskilled labourers who constitute about 90 per cent. of the working population. The wages of these labourers scarcely average 12s. weekly, and the cost of living has so considerably increased that they can only procure the barest necessities of life out of their earnings, and the margin, that could be spared to pay rent must consequently be of the very slenderest character. To solve the housing problem therefore, houses must be built and let to the unskilled workers at a very low rent.

Efforts by associations of men or women to improve the health conditions of the poorer class however well disposed the members of these health associations may be, must be barren of any permanent results while the families of the poor continue to live in unsanitary, overcrowded hovels in the lanes and slums of our towns, and the monies spent by these associations in attempting to combat disease will be to a large extent wasted until the root remedy is applied by providing decent, clean cottages for the poor on healthy sites where there will be plenty of wholesome air and sunlight.

Legislation should be passed vesting local administrative bodies with power to assess all derelict building sites, and to acquire them on failure of owners to meet the assessments. Such powers, if conferred, would enable local authorities to easily acquire suitable sites for building purposes, and would help to remove the many ruined and decayed buildings which so often constitute a danger to life and public health, and which are invariably a source of nuisance and an eyesore in our towns.

The procedure for the compulsory acquisition of lands for building purposes should be simplified. A judicial tribunal should be constituted to fix the value of building sites acquired by local authorities.

The period for repayment of loans should be extended, and loans granted at a lower rate of interest than at present obtains under existing Acts of Parliament, and having regard to the low rate of wages and the high cost of living, a substantial grant in aid of labourers' dwellings in Urban Districts should be made by the Treasury, so that it may be possible to let the houses to the poor at such rents as they can manage to pay.

The Nenagh Urban District is in urgent need of at least 300 additional houses to supply the wants of its working class population. Eighteen artisan dwellings have been built under a previous scheme. Thirty are now in course of erection, and when completed the fringe of the problem will have been merely touched. Big comprehensive schemes will be required, and must be carried out to suitably house the working classes.

For the past ten years the Medical Officer has condemned houses in which the working classes reside, and the Local Government Board, have again and again requested the Council to give the matter their early attention. The Council, however, feel, that under existing statutory powers and cost of enforcing such powers, they cannot do much to remove the great and long standing evil, which they believe can be properly dealt with only in the way they have suggested.

## NEW ROSS URBAN DISTRICT.

Have provided forty-six houses. There is at present a pressing need for houses to be let at 2s. per week, including rates, but this is impossible whilst the present rate for repayment of principal and interest is 5½ per cent. Until the Council get over this difficulty they will not be in a position to demolish a very large number of houses, at present occupied, but which are unfit for human habitation. This great evil of the want of proper housing accommodation could be entirely removed if it were possible to obtain a loan for housing purposes at a rate of say, 2½ to 3 per cent. to repay principal and interest.

## NEWRY URBAN DISTRICT.

Have provided eighty houses. With reference to the housing conditions of the poorer classes in the district it is impossible under existing legislation without incurring a very serious charge on the rates, to provide housing accommodation for a very large number of persons chiefly engaged in the local spinning factories and mills, whose weekly earnings range from 8s. to 12s. per week, and who cannot afford to pay a rent of more than 1s. to 1s. 6d. The Council consider that the housing of the very poor in towns must remain in a very unsatisfactory condition until Urban Councils are granted financial facilities not less favourable than have been provided in Rural Districts under the Labourers Acts, but pending the obtaining of these facilities it is earnestly contended that Urban Authorities are not obtaining the full benefits of the existing Housing Laws; for instance the 1908 Act extends the period for repayment of loans for eighty years, but it seems impossible to have a loan sanctioned for a longer period than 60 years in respect of buildings, and 80 years for land whilst no risk whatever is incurred in granting for the longest period, as the loans can only be negotiated on the security of the rates, as well as of the buildings. The repayment of loans should be fixed on the "annuity" system, and not on the "instalment" system, which involves a heavy and unfair charge on the present day ratepayer.

## OMAGH URBAN DISTRICT.

Have provided thirty-nine houses. As to the housing conditions, the necessity for a number of houses which could be let at about 1s. 3d. to 1s. 6d. per week to the poorer classes has been reported upon frequently by the Medical Officer of Health for the district. The Council admit the necessity for about forty or fifty three-roomed houses at the rate quoted, and would be prepared to undertake a scheme to meet the requirements of the class referred to, if it were possible to obtain in a loan on terms of repayment which would enable them to do so without serious loss to the rates.

## SLIGO URBAN DISTRICT.

Thirty houses have been provided, and the Council make the following report on their District:—

The poorer classes in the Borough of Sligo are housed under very bad conditions.

The centre of the town may be said to be free from slum-dwellings of a bad type—the latter are to be found on the outskirts of the town. Photographs of some of the slum-quarters accompany this statement, and will show the class of dwelling-houses inhabited by the poorer classes of Sligo. They illustrate strikingly how pressing is the housing problem in Sligo.

The typical slum-dwelling contains two apartments—a kitchen and a room. There is a window in each room generally, so fixed that they can neither be opened or closed. The kitchen would measure about 12' x 9', and the height where the houses is ceiled would be seven feet. (In a great number of cases the houses are unceiled, the rough timber supporting the thatch being exposed; there are cases in which the ceiling—if it may be so called—consists of a number of sacks sewn together and whitewashed). The house is thatched, the floor earthen. Number of occupants—man and wife, and say, three children. Rent 1s. 6d. per week. The average weekly wage of the breadwinner would be 12s.

The room in many of the houses may be described as part of the kitchen partitioned off to preserve the decencies of life.

There are also houses with only one apartment, and these are altogether unfit for habitation. Indeed none of the dwellings of the poorer classes may be said to be fit for habitation. They would appear to have been built purposely to exclude the elements essential to health—light and air. They are neither healthy, cheap, nor comfortable; the earthen floor, the sodden thatch, the fixed windows, the lack of proper sanitary accommodation, all conspire against the health and well-being of the unfortunate occupant.

There are no suitable dwellinghouses in Sligo to let at a rent which the occupants of slum-dwellings could afford to pay. To condemn any of the slum dwellings would be to give the occupant the alternative of the workhouse.

The following are extracts from Half-yearly returns of Medical Officer:—

The Housing of the working classes is very bad in many streets (half-year ended 30th September, 1911).

The housing of the working classes is bad in most streets (half-year ended 31st March, 1911). The housing of the working classes in the district is bad (half year ended 30th September, 1912).

The ventilation, lighting, and cleanliness is very bad in poorer quarters of the town (half-year ended 31st March, 1912).

The details, statements, and photographs that follow are given merely as examples of conditions under which the poorer classes in Sligo are housed. They are not to be regarded as a comprehensive review of the existing conditions, the extent of the housing problem locally being much greater than would appear from same.

NOTE.—The dimensions are approximate. Where apartments are unceiled only two dimensions are given, the third dimension may be approximated by reference to photograph.



This is a view of houses of the poorer classes at Cranmore, Sligo.

Weekly tenants. The second and third houses are slated, the remainder thatched. Earthen floors. Reading from left to right on the photograph:—  
 The second house.—Two apartments, 6' x 9' and 8' x 9', unceiled; two occupants. Rent 1s. 6d.  
 The third house.—Three apartments; one occupant. Rent 1s. 6d.  
 The fourth house.—One apartment, 12' x 12', unceiled. Rent 1s. 6d.  
 The fifth house.—Two apartments, 15' x 10' and 15' x 6'; three windows, about 18" square; four occupants. Rent 2s.  
 The sixth house.—One apartment, 12' x 10'; one window, about 18" square; two occupants. Rent 1s. 6d.  
 The seventh house.—Two apartments, 12' x 12' and 12' x 8'; three windows, one front two back; one occupant. Rent 1s. 9d.  
 The eighth house.—One apartment, 12' x 12'; one window; one occupant. Rent 1s. 4d.  
 The ninth house.—One occupant. Rent 1s. 4d.  
 The tenth house.—Two apartments, 15' x 10' and 15' x 9'; three occupants. Rent 2s.  
 The eleventh house.—Four apartments; three about 12' x 9' x 7', the other .  
 The twelfth house.—Three apartments, 12' x 12' x 7'; ceiled; two occupants. Rent 2s. per week.  
 The thirteenth house.—Two apartments, 15' x 10' x 7' and 15' x 7' x 7'; three windows; six occupants. Rent 2s. (See statement of this tenant to Alderman D. O'Donnell, Mayor, below).  
 The fourteenth house.—Two apartments, 15' x 10' x 7' and 15' x 7' x 7'; front and back windows, about 18" square; four occupants. Rent 2s.  
 The fifteenth house.—Two apartments, 15' x 10' and 15' x 8'; unceiled; six occupants; Rent 2s.  
 The sixteenth house.—Two apartments, 15' x 10' and 15' x 8'; window in front and rear; four occupants. Rent 1s. 9d.

The seventeenth house.—Two apartments; vacant; wooden roof, felted and tarred.  
 The eighteenth house.—Two apartments, 15' x 12' and 6' x 15'. Rent 2s.  
 The nineteenth house.—Do. do.  
 The twentieth house.—Two apartments, 15' x 12' and 6' x 15'; three occupants. Rent 2s.  
 The twenty-first house.—Do. do.  
 The twenty-second house.—Two apartments, 8' x 10' and 6' x 7'; unceiled; two occupants. Rent 1s. 6d.  
 The twenty-third house.—Two apartments, 15' x 12' and 15' x 8'; window front and rear; three occupants. Rent 1s. 6d.  
 The twenty-fourth house.—Two apartments, 12' x 10' and 9' x 6', window front and rear; five occupants. Rent 1s. 6d. Unceiled.  
 The twenty-fifth house.—Two apartments, 12' x 10' and 9' x 6'; one window. Rent 1s. 8d.

The following are extracts from statements made to Alderman Daniel O'Donnell, J.P., Mayor of Sligo, by persons of the poorer classes regarding housing conditions, in 1912:—

*Cranmore.*—Thomas Forey says he is a tenant of house in Cranmore. He is married, with wife and five children. The house he occupies consists of kitchen and bedroom. Some of his children sleep with himself and his wife, the remainder in the kitchen. There are three windows in the house, one of them only can be opened. The public roads run at front and back of house. His rent is 2s. per week.

*Cranmore.*—Michael McGrath. Deponent said he lives in Cranmore. The house he occupies has a kitchen and one small bedroom. There is no space for anything more in the latter but a bed and small table; only two out of the twenty-seven have more accommodation. Two however, have an extra bedroom. The roofs are in such a wretched condition that bags have to be used to keep the rain out. His rent is 1s. 6d. a week. The windows do not open.



This is a view of houses of the poorer classes at Duck Street, Sligo. Weekly tenants.

Reading from right to left on the photograph—

- The first house (man standing at door).—Three apartments, partial ceiled, about 9' x 7', height where ceiled 7'; thatched, earthen floor; three occupants. Rent 1s.
- The second house.—Single apartment, 12' x 9'; unceiled; wooden roof, felted and tarred; one occupant. Rent 3d.
- The third house.—Single apartment, 12' x 9'; thatched, earthen floor; one occupant. Rent 8d.
- The fourth house.—Single apartment, 15' x 9' x 7', ceiled; window in front and back about 18" square; wooden roof, felted and tarred; earthen floor; three occupants. Rent 6d.
- The fifth house.—Two apartments, 9' x 10' x 7', ceiled; earthen floor; wooden roof, felted and tarred; earthen floor; three occupants; one window. Rent 9d. (This house with the sixth, eighth, ninth, and eleventh were reported by the Medical Officer of the District, December, 1913, extract from his report below).
- The sixth house.—Two apartments, 6' x 9', unceiled; window in front 2' x 1½', window in rear about 1' square; thatched; five occupants; earthen floor. Rent 1s.
- The seventh house.—Vacant.
- The eighth house.—Two apartments, 9' x 9' and 15' x 9'; unceiled; thatched; earthen floor; two windows; three occupants. Rent 1s.
- The ninth house.—Two apartments 12' x 12' x 7' and 6' x 9' x 7'; ceiled; earthen floor; roof wooden, felted and tarred; four occupants. Rent 1s.
- The tenth house.—Two apartments, 12' x 9' x 7' and 6' x 9' x 7'; ceiled; wooden roof, felted and tarred; earthen floor; two windows; four occupants. Rent 1s.
- The eleventh house.—Two apartments, 12' x 9' x 7' and 6' x 9' x 7'; earthen floor; roof same as tenth; two windows. Rent 1s.

Extract from Medical Officer's Report on inspection of sixth, eighth, ninth, and eleventh houses:—"The houses in Duck Street occupied by James Flynn, John Callaghan, Jas. McLoughlin, Mark Peeney, and Andrew Flynn are in an unsanitary condition, being damp, badly lighted, and space insufficient in most cases."



This is a view of houses of the poorer classes at South Gallows Hill, Sligo. Weekly tenants.  
Reading from left to right on the photograph—

3 D 2

The first house.—Two apartments, 12' x 10', unceiled; thatched; earthen floor; window back and rear, about 2' square; seven occupants. Rent 1s. 4d.

The second house.—Two apartments, 9' x 12' and 6' x 9', unceiled; small window front and rear; thatched; earthen floor; four occupants. Rent 1s. 4d.

The third house.—Two apartments; one occupant. Rent 1s. 4d.

The fourth house.—Two apartments; two occupants. Rent 1s. 4d.

The fifth house.—Used as a store by occupant of

The sixth house.—Two apartments, 12' x 12' and 9' x 9', unceiled; wooden roof, felted and tarred; earthen floor; small window in front and rear; one occupant. Rent 1s. 4d.

The seventh house.—Two apartments, 12' x 12' and 6' x 9', unceiled; earthen floor; wooden roof, felted and tarred; three windows, one in kitchen and two in room, size about 1 1/2' square; seven occupants. Rent 1s.

The eighth house.—Two apartments, 15' x 9', unceiled roof wooden, felted and tarred; three window; four occupants. Rent 1s.

Extract from Medical Officer's report on inspection of the first, second, third, and fourth houses in Gallows Hill South:—"These are miserable hovels." In a report on inspection of houses in this street not shown in photograph, the Medical Officer states:—"I visited the houses named, and find them wretched hovels."



View of house at Gallows Hill, North, occupied by James Callaghan, with his wife and three children.

The house contains two apartments, 8' x 10', unceiled; window at front and rear about 2' square; thatched; earthen floor. Rent 8d. per week.



A view of other houses of the poorer classes at Gallows Hill, North, Sligo.

- The following particulars of housing conditions of some other of the workers of the poorer classes in the Gallows Hill, North, district may be given:—
- House occupied by P. McMorow, two apartments, 9' x 10' x 7'; four small windows; seven occupants. Rent 1s. per week.
- House occupied by Michael Swiftie; two apartments, 12' x 7' x 8'; slated roof; two windows about 2' square; six occupants. Rent 1s. per week.
- House occupied by George Harvey; two apartments; 12' x 7'; slated roof; window front and rear; five occupants. Rent 1s. per week.
- House occupied by Owen Rooney; two apartments; 12' x 12' and 9' x 12'; unceiled; window front and back, about 2' square; four occupants; floor cemented at tenant's expense. Rent 1s.
- House occupied by Pat Fallon; two apartments; 12' x 12' x 7' and 9' x 6' x 7'; window front and back, about 2' square; no back-door; six occupants. Rent 1s.
- House occupied by Pat Kilgallin; two apartments; 12' x 9' x 7'; window front and rear, about 2' square; four occupants. Rent 6d. per week.
- House occupied by Francis Foley. do. do. one occupant. Rent 8d. per week.
- House occupied by Pat Reilly. do. do. wooden roof, felted and tarred; three occupants; Rent 6d.
- House occupied by Bernard Kelly; two apartments; thatched; 12' x 12'; unceiled; 9' x 6' x 7'; thatched; window front and rear, 18" square, and 2' square; four occupants. Rent 1s. per week.
- House occupied by James Scanlan, two apartments; 9' x 12' and 9' x 6'; unceiled; wooden roof, felted and tarred; window front and rear; five occupants. Rent 8d. per week.
- House occupied by Ellen Gillen, two apartments; 9' x 12' x 7' and 6' x 9' x 7'; ceiled; thatched; window front and rear, about 2' square and 1½' square; one occupant. Rent 8d. per week.
- House occupied by Mary Malone; three apartments—kitchen, 9' x 9' x 7', and rooms 6' x 9' x 7'; windows in rooms and kitchen—three; thatched; two occupants. Rent 1s. 1d. per week.
- House occupied by Pat McCullagh; two apartments; 12' x 9'; unceiled; thatched; window front and rear, about 2' square; eight occupants. Rent 1s.
- Barrack Street.*—House occupied by James Williams; two apartments; 15' x 8' x 7'; ceiled; thatched; three windows, about 2' square; four occupants. Rent 1s. 6d. per week.
- Francis Gordon; two apartments, 9' x 6'; unceiled; window front and rear; thatched; three occupants; Rent 2s. per week.
- Francis Gordon (junior), three apartments, 15' x 6' x 7'; 9' x 7' and 6' x 9' x 7'; ceiled; three small windows; wooden roof, felted and tarred; ten occupants. Rent 1s. 2d.
- House of Catherine Doogan; two apartments, 9' x 9' x 7' and 7' x 7' x 7'; two windows, about 18" square; two occupants. Rent 1s. per week.
- House of Pat Devine; three apartments, 12' x 12' x 7'; 9' x 8' x 7'; and 6' x 6' x 7'; ceiled; three small windows; five occupants. Rent 2s. per week.
- House of James McGarry; four apartments; 12' x 9' x 7', 9' x 9' x 7', and 6' x 6' x 7'; ceiled; thatched; four occupants. Rent 2s. 1d. per week.
- House occupied by Peter Murray, four apartments, 15' x 7' x 7' (kitchen); other apartments 9' x 9' x 7'; thatched; window about 2' square in each apartment; four occupants. Rent 2s. per week.
- Hugh Harte, house of two apartments, 9' x 9' x 7'; ceiled; thatched; window front and rear, about 2' square; three occupants. Rent 1s. 2d.
- House of Michael McNiffe; three apartments, 9' x 9' x 7'; thatched; window about 2' square in each room; four occupants. Rent 8d. per week.
- House occupied by Pat McMorow; three apartments, 6' x 9'; unceiled; two windows, about 1½' square (one in front and one in rear); six occupants. Rent 1s. 7½d.
- The above houses may be described as ill-lighted, ill-ventilated hovels.



View of Houses of the poorer classes in James Street, Sligo (N.S.)

Running parallel with James Street are the Rope-walks which contain houses similar to those above.

Statement made to Alderman Daniel O'Donnell, J.P., Mayor of Sligo, in 1912:—"I Martin Kerr, certify that I live in James Street. There are twenty-four houses in the street; there are thirteen houses in the street with only one room (one room and kitchen?). No. 8 one room, and is occupied by seven inmates; No. 9, one room with one inmate; No. 10, one room with seven inmates; No. 14, one room with three inmates; No. 15 one room with five inmates; No. 16, one room with two inmates; No. 17, one room with two inmates; No. 18, one room with six inmates; No. 19, one room with three inmates; No. 20, one room with five inmates; No. 21, one room with four inmates; No. 22, one room with six inmates; No. 23, one room with six inmates; No. 24, two rooms with eleven inmates. Nos. 1 and 2 have two rooms each (two rooms and kitchen?) and two inmates each. Nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13 have three rooms each, with three, five, seven, four, three, two, four and eight inmates, respectively—111 persons living in forty-two rooms. There are no water closets to any of the houses; eighteen of the houses are not provided with windows that can be opened, neither are they properly kept in repair. The doors are very bad, and, if necessary, I can swear to this statement."

#### TRALEE URBAN DISTRICT.

Eighty-eight houses have been provided. Seven hundred more required, at an estimated cost of £140,000.

#### WARRENPOINT URBAN DISTRICT.

No houses yet built, but the Council are considering the question of erecting a number of dwellings suitable for workmen and labourers, and at present are making inquiries as to the cost of sites.

It would contribute to the Council's immediately embarking on the Scheme if the Treasury were to grant the same terms to Urban Councils as already granted to Rural Councils for the erection of labourers cottages, so far as the repayment of principal and interest is concerned.

Year after year this important matter is becoming more urgent.

#### WEXFORD URBAN DISTRICT.

One hundred and seventeen houses have been provided which accommodate 142 families.

With regard to the housing conditions in the Urban District, there are about 250 dwellings at present which the Council deem to be unfit for human habitation. This is due to various causes among which may be included dilapidation and overcrowding, but the principal cause is that many of these dwellings are situated in congested portions of the town.

#### YOUGHAL URBAN DISTRICT.

Eighteen houses (nine completed—nine building) provided. The Council are of opinion from the Report of the M.O.H. that it would be necessary to build about 150 houses to accommodate the labouring classes, &c., and the capital cost would be approximately for sites and buildings £30,000.

#### BALBRIGGAN MUNICIPAL TOWN.

No scheme completed as yet. The matter has for some time past been receiving the most careful and anxious consideration of the Town Commissioners.

There has been for years a continual migration of agricultural labourers who from many causes have been unable to work or to obtain constant employment in rural districts, also an influx of widows with or without families, and old servants who may be past their labour, and these classes have been obliged to seek such cheap houses or rooms as their scanty means could afford, while the various labourers Acts, and the Housing of the Working Classes Acts 1890 to 1908 may have been intended to meet the requirements of labourers and artisans, yet the large and numerous class of poor above mentioned have their wants still unprovided for.

The requirements of modern sanitation, and the gradual decay of the class of house usually occupied by these poor people, and which owners are unable to repair or renew have made the matter of their proper housing a most urgent question in most urban districts, so that the Commissioners here have been considering how best they could deal with this most pressing condition of affairs which has been thrust upon them through this great want of housing accommodation, and the reluctance of private owners to meet it.

It has been estimated that the erection in this town of seventy houses to let at a rent not exceeding 1s. 6d. per week, including taxes, is an imperative and immediate need, and this does not estimate for any future increase in this particular class of house, nor does it include any houses whose occupiers may be provided for under the Labourers or Artizans Housing Acts.

The Commissioners have also considered the necessity of providing for artisans a class of house more commodious than that built by the District Council for agricultural labourers, and at least thirty such houses are immediately required in this area.

The great difficulty which confronts the Commissioners is the almost impossible task of building these different classes of house, and obtaining sites at a cost which would enable them to let them at a rent which would not impose very great extra taxation on the ratepayers, and unless the Government either by a free grant or loan at a very moderate rate of interest can render assistance the Commissioners fear that these most necessary schemes cannot be undertaken.

#### BANDON MUNICIPAL TOWN.

Twenty-seven houses (fifteen built) to be provided on a scheme not yet completed.

The Town Commissioners made a statement as to the housing conditions of the poorer classes in their area, from which the following is an extract:—

"*The Necessity.*—There are at least 172 houses in the town of Bandon which are insanitary, and unfit for human habitation, and those houses are situate in the following districts:—

	Houses.
Chapel Street .. .. .	30
Church Street .. .. .	12
Convent Hill .. .. .	30
Cork Road and High Street ..	20
Shannon Street .. .. .	—
Foxe's Street, Boyle Street ..	20
Killrogan Street .. .. .	20
Watergate Street and Higgins' Lane	20
Castle Road .. .. .	10
Warner's Lane .. .. .	10
Total .. .. .	172

The majority of these houses contain only a kitchen, and one small bedroom about 10 feet square, in which the whole family—father, mother, boys, and girls all sleep together. In many cases eight or ten boys and girls all grown up, are sleeping with their parents in a small bedroom of this class, with no ventilation of any kind. Plenty of rain comes from overhead where the roof should be. In bad weather all the utensils of these poor families are called into requisition to contain the dripping from the roof or to bale out the flooded rooms. In many cases they have to work during the night dealing with the downpour.

A few of these houses have three or four rooms actually occupied by four families, each family occupying a room of less than 10 feet square.

*Class for whom Housing Reform is needed.*—All these houses are generally occupied by labourers whose average weekly wage does not exceed ten shillings. An average rent of 1s. 6d. weekly is paid for the class of accommodation detailed, and under the existing circumstances they have no chance of getting better houses. The rates are heavily overburdened to support those whose health and morals have been undermined and ruined in consequence of the great bulk of our working people in towns having to live under such conditions. Hospitals, workhouses, asylums, sanatoria, and jails are filled by the victims of a disgraceful housing system, and the ratepayers suffer, and suffer, apparently without hope of redress.



*The Stumbling Blocks.*—One of the great drawbacks is the heavy price which we have at present to pay for money borrowed. This means 5½ per cent. principal and interest. Secondly the disinclination of owners even of derelict property to sell at anything less than the highest possible figure. We speak from experience as in our present scheme of artisans' dwellings we have had to pay for derelict property at the rate of close on £1,000 an acre.

*There is ground for Hope.*—Our present scheme is a financial success notwithstanding the exorbitant prices paid for land, as out of the £4,320 lent us for the artisans scheme, nearly £1,000 was expended before a single stone was laid.

*Suggested Remedies.* First.—If the rate of interest were only 2½ per cent. on the money advanced, and the Housing Fund Grant very considerably increased, local authorities would be enabled to provide decent houses for all concerned at the reasonable rent of 1s. 6d. per week. This would not mean any burden on the rates.

Second.—Shum-owners and owners of derelict property should be discountenanced and where they will not provide decent houses the local authority should be empowered to compulsorily acquire those sites.

#### BANTRY MUNICIPAL TOWN.

Ten houses have been recently built, but this number is wholly insufficient to meet the urgent necessity for further house accommodation. Owing to the excessive rate of interest payable for loans under the existing law the Commissioners are unable to provide the additional houses without unduly burthening the local rates, and it will be impossible for them to remedy the evil unless a grant be given in relief of the loan or a loan obtained on terms similar to the Labourers (Ireland) Acts.

#### FETHARD MUNICIPAL TOWN.

Eight houses are in course of construction. There is still, however, a want of housing accommodation in the town, but the rural labourers with their present wages would not be able to pay a rent of 3s. per week. The Town Commissioners would wish to build more houses, but at the present rate of interest on loans and instalments they could not do so as they charge no town rate, but light the town and pave channels out of their income. The outskirts of the town are in a deplorable state, and accommodation for housing the labouring class is sadly needed.

APPENDIX VII - SAMPLE OF CENSUS FORM B1 IN 1911, GALLOW'S HILL NORTH, SLIGO URBAN

**CENSUS OF IRELAND, 1911.**  
**FORM B. 1.—HOUSE AND BUILDING RETURN.**

County, Sligo Parliamentary Division, North Sligo Poor Law Union, Sligo District Electoral Division, Sligo north Urban Townland, -  
 Parliamentary Borough, - City, - Urban District, Sligo Town or Village, Sligo Street, Gallop Hill North Barony, Barlowry Parish, Sligo

Note A.—When a Townland or Street is situated in two Parliamentary Divisions, or in more than one District Electoral Division or Parish, or is partly within and partly without a Parliamentary Borough, City, Urban District, Town, or Village, a separate Return should be made for each portion.

No. of House or Building	Whether Built or Building	State whether Private Dwelling, Public Building, Manufactory, Hotel, Tavern, Shop, or other use	Number of Tenements and Parts separately appropriated on Form B. 2	Is House inhabited?	PARTICULARS OF INHABITED HOUSES.						CLASS OF HOUSE.	No. of stories in each House.	Name of the Head of each Family residing in the House.	FAMILIES, &c.				No. on Form B. 1 of House or Building in which the Householder is enumerated
					WALLS	ROOF.	ROOMS.	Windows in Front.	Windows in Side.	Windows in Back.				Total Families in each Family.	Date on which was collected.	Number of Families in which was collected.	Name of the Landholder (if any) on whose Holding the House is situated, or other name appears in return B. 2 or B. 3.	
					If Walls are of Stone, Brick, or other material, state the nature of the material.	If Roof is of Slate, Stone, or other material, state the nature of the material.	Enter in this column the number of Rooms in the House, but do not include the Kitchen, Bath, or other small rooms, or the Porch, or any other part of the House, which is not a Room.	State in this column the number of Windows in the House, but do not include the Windows in the Porch, or any other part of the House, which is not a Room.	State in this column the number of Windows in the House, but do not include the Windows in the Porch, or any other part of the House, which is not a Room.	State in this column the number of Windows in the House, but do not include the Windows in the Porch, or any other part of the House, which is not a Room.								
(Col. 1)	(Col. 2)	(Col. 3)	(Col. 4)	(Col. 5)	(Col. 6)	(Col. 7)	(Col. 8)	(Col. 9)	(Col. 10)	(Col. 11)	(Col. 12)	(Col. 13)	(Col. 14)	(Col. 15)	(Col. 16)	(Col. 17)		
1	built	Public House	1	yes	1	1	3	6	11	2nd	1	Stephen Carroll	6	3	4th	-	-	
2	do	Private Dwelling		yes	1	1	2	2	6	2nd	1	Anne J. Shannon	2	2	4th	-	-	
3	do	do		no														
4	do	do		yes	1	1	2	2	6	2nd	1	Hannah Burrows	3	3	4th	-	-	
5	do	do		yes	1	1	2	2	6	2nd	1	Anne Farney	4	2	4th	-	-	
6	do	do		no	1	0	2	1	4	3rd	1	Ellen Kelly	2	1	4th	-	-	
7	do	do		yes	1	0	2	1	4	3rd	1	Francis Ryan	4	4	4th	-	-	
8	do			no														
9	do	Private Dwelling		yes	1	1	2	2	6	2nd	1	Thomas Doyle	4	3	4th	-	-	
10	do	do		yes	1	1	3	4	9	2nd	1	James Fallon	5	6	4th	-	-	
11	do	do		yes	1	1	2	2	6	2nd	1	James McLaughlin	4	7	4th	-	-	
12	do	do		yes	1	1	2	2	6	2nd	1	Mary Murray	4	6	4th	-	-	
13	do	do		yes	1	1	2	2	6	2nd	1	Michael Quinn	4	11	4th	-	-	
14	do	do		yes	1	1	2	2	6	2nd	1	John Kelly	4	8	4th	-	-	
15	do	do		yes	1	1	2	2	6	2nd	1	John Casey	4	3	4th	-	-	
16	do	do		yes	1	1	2	2	6	2nd	1	Owen Rooney	4	7	4th	-	-	

Note B.—If one Room is occupied by more than one Family, the Names of the Heads of Families so occupying it should be bracketed together in Col. 12, thus—  
 John Jones, Peter Murray, and the figure 1 entered in Col. 14, opposite the middle of the bracket. See pattern Table in Instructions, page 9. [OVER]

Appendix VIII – Details from the Database of the a Survey of overcrowding in Sligo from the 1911 Census

The Lungy										
No. of House on Form	Private Dwelling or other	Class of house	No of distinct families in house	No of Rooms occupied by each family	Total Number of Persons in each family	No of Persons per room (PPR)				
1	p	2nd	1	2	8	4.00				
2.1	p	2nd	1	2	2	1.00				
2.2	p		1	1	2	2.00				
2.3	p		1	3	11	3.67				
2.4	p		1	1	1	1.00				
2.5	p		1	1	1	1.00				
2.6	p		1	1	1	1.00				
3	p	2nd	1	4	3	0.75				
4	p	-	-	0	0	0.00	Total Rooms	Total Persons	PPR per street	
5	p	-	-	0	0	0.00	19	36	1.89	
6	p	2nd	1	4	7	1.75				
Smiths Row										
1	p	3rd	1	1	2	2.00				
2	p	3rd	1	1	6	6.00				
3	p	3rd	1	1	8	8.00				
4	p	3rd	1	1	1	1.00				
5	p	3rd	1	1	3	3.00				
6	p	3rd	1	1	3	3.00				
7	p	3rd	1	1	8	8.00				

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Roll 394	Gallows Hill.
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Roll 435	Holborn Hill.
Roll 526	Barrack Street.
Roll 563	Clearance orders 1934, and misc.
Roll 1301	Vernon Street.

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