

Emigrants and the Estate Office in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: a Compassionate Relationship?★

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Introduction

COMPASSION IN THE ESTATE OFFICE might not seem to be a very appropriate consideration at a time of commemoration of the Great Famine. The disasters which struck Ireland at that time have frequently been attributed to maladministration, from local to national level, or an administration which had been notably characterised by lack of compassion, even callousness – from the doctrinaire central bureaucracy down to the mechanistic application of the new poor law legislation.

Before the territorial geometry of poor law unions was introduced, and indeed even after its establishment, the estate undoubtedly formed the most important spatial and social reality for good or ill in the daily lives of most of the country population. In many cases, of course, the ‘estate’ was a vague enough entity in the eyes of the country people. It may have lacked local clarity or been represented in local perceptions by a middleman, and it was often characterised by incoherence, like the ‘throughotherness’ of crown estates like Ballykilcline.¹ But in one way or another the estate and especially the estate office represented the place where rents were paid and help might be sought in various crises. It did not matter much to the tenants whether the office or officers represented the legal landlord or simply the tenant of a distant owner. Presumably the more distant the owner – and the more intermediaries between him and the tenants – the less likelihood that help would be sought with any confidence. Rents would have to be paid sure enough however.

Therefore, when talking of ‘compassion’ in this context we are talking of situations where the office represented a direct landowner, and probably an estate where the owner was resident for much of the time. And probably also we are referring to estates which were large enough to warrant and maintain the semblance of an office administration which has in turn left us with some kind of collection of records. Thus we are probably talking of a fairly restricted sample and perhaps even an unrepresentative sample of the total range of estates in the country.

The object of the following essay is to see what light a well-maintained estate record can shed on the nature and management of a subsidised emigration policy in the frantic decade before the Famine. The intention also is to interrogate the wide-ranging popular attitude to emigration, especially assisted emigration, which

crystallised soon after the Famine. This condemned the emigration as a conspiracy of extermination, when much evidence seems to show that, while it was a desperate measure, in a lot of cases it was welcomed by a great many potential emigrants. The assessment of 'forced-exile-by-cruel-landlords' appears mainly to have been made by those left behind in Ireland (by those who were refused assistance?) in a climate when the rapacious landlord syndrome was growing not just at grass roots level in Ireland, but also in Westminster. Kerby Miller's argument is that the rural community in Ireland created the exile motif to anaesthetise it from the pain of so much loss and to ensure continuing links with the homeland.² The fact that the assisted emigration in the 1840s was accompanied by house tumbling, to ensure emigrants did not return, helped to fuel the sense of outrage and conspiracy among those left. It is interesting to focus on this widespread condemnation of the estate office and landlords, for their alleged cruelty and tyranny. The landlord Shirley and his agent William Steuart Trench in south Monaghan have largely negative memories in folklore to this day. But the evidence from the 1840s suggests that they were hardly as bad as folk memory would suggest. Around Westport in County Mayo, a great many locals will still not set foot inside Lord Altamont's house and demesne – which is daily advertised as the biggest tourist attraction in the west of Ireland – though his mid-nineteenth century predecessor almost bankrupted his estate in looking after the tenants. So, popular memories perpetuate the belief that the estate bureaucracy was callous and cruel, that it was interested only in maximising rents and that it had little regard for the ordinary person.

There is also an implication that government-assisted emigration schemes, such as Peter Robinson's scheme to assist emigrants from Munster to Upper Canada in the 1820s, were well organised and caring and that the private schemes of landlords were not, though David Fitzpatrick has alluded to many well-organised landlord schemes.³ Bob Scally suggests that the Crown tenants from Ballykilcline and other places were very fortunate in having the state look to their welfare, until they had boarded ship in Liverpool at least.⁴ This poor opinion of landlord emigration has been founded on a number of well-publicised shipping disasters, such as Lord Palmerston's, which have been frequently used to illustrate the callous disregard of the landlord and his alliance with reckless coffin-shipowners. The folk memory continues in the recent publication of *Famine Diary*, purporting to document one particularly ill-fated and badly-managed migration.⁵ At the height of the Famine when thousands were on the move, horror stories abounded, much like Bosnia-Herzegovina in the past couple of years.

Steuart Trench, Land Agent

William Steuart Trench in many ways epitomises the perspective of the landowner and may with care be seen as a witness to the part played by the estate office. From Queen's County (Laois), a scion of the landed class and a professional land agent for much of his life, his attitudes and philosophy may be seen to represent the priorities and interests of the landlord class. He wrote his memoirs, *Realities of Irish Life*, to perpetuate his ideas and record his contribution to solving the mid-nineteenth century crisis.⁶ He was an enthusiastic proponent of assisted emigration wherever he worked as agent throughout the middle

decades of the nineteenth century. For a short time he was an agent on the extensive 26,000 acre Shirley Estate in Monaghan, where he initiated a scheme of what he termed 'voluntary' emigration. He was then engaged as agent to Lord Lansdowne's estates in Kenmare where, at the end of the forties, he established an extensive scheme to assist in the emigration of the impoverished population on the Kenmare estates. In 1851, he returned to the Bath estate, neighbouring Shirley's property in south Monaghan, where he 'emigrated' another couple of thousand tenants. Trench was well in touch with contemporary trends in estate agency. Apart from its self-adulatory tone, most of his *Realities* was written in prescriptive mode for a gentry and land agency readership and his keenness on emigration in the 1840s especially must represent him as being in the *avant garde* of the profession in Ireland.

Trench's policy on emigration was fairly simple, and in face of the facts, rather logical: namely that, in the early forties, impoverished tenants on tiny holdings, in rent arrears and with little possibility of paying any rent, should be encouraged to give up their farms and be given their passage to America. This would in one move reduce future charges on the rates, consolidate farms and improve the life chances of the people themselves, though this latter point was probably not a primary consideration. Later during the Famine, he cleared Kenmare workhouse by offering all Lord Lansdowne's people there free passage. In Monaghan in the decade after Famine, he followed an eviction-driven policy based on the proposition that nobody would be evicted without being offered passage to America. Patrick Kavanagh for one, native of the Bath estate, thought this an 'excellent idea', but perhaps Kavanagh was not a typical south Monaghan countryman.⁷ Folklore, however, does not regard Trench so kindly.

As Trench himself said about Kenmare, 'a cry was raised that I was exterminating the people . . .', abuse and vituperation were heaped on him.⁸ In Monaghan, folklore says that his remains were attacked by rats and could not be buried until immersed in the sea at Blackrock seven miles away! In Kenmare, folklore is equally negative, but unspecific about his role. Because of the policies and practices he represented, it is interesting to look at his record for a moment. Was he so bad? Was he a despot, lacking in compassion? His memoirs failed to realise their objective and probably did not favour him for posterity. They too were execrated locally, burnt in public bonfires. The *Freeman's Journal* noted in 1869 when *Realities* was published, that 'in a New York hospital there is a ward called the Lansdowne Ward because in it died so many of those immigrants from the Lansdowne Estate in Kenmare, arriving as they did half starved, disease-ridden and penniless.'⁹ His book got bad reviews led by two imperious clerics, the President of Maynooth College and the parish priest of Carrickmacross, who wrote about his agency on the Bath Estate: 'the several large farms are so many finger posts announcing that the Destroying Angel passed that way'.¹⁰

In his book he certainly comes across as conceited, with a condescending attitude to the peasantry that was not exceptional for one of his class in Victorian Ireland. When he wrote the book in the 1860s, he was witnessing the beginning of the end of the world and class he represented and he felt particularly besieged and embittered in his barracked-up house in Monaghan.¹¹ But throughout the book there is a noticeable undercurrent of compassion for the impoverished and underprivileged, tinged with a paternalism that would have been considered at

the time as being characteristic of a responsible landed gentry. This is especially significant when the book is read in conjunction with an important formative report which Trench compiled on the Shirley Estate twenty years earlier in 1843.¹²

Trench's long report on the state of the Shirley property is hard hitting on the maladministration of the estate and on the treatment of the tenantry. It was clearly not intended for publication, so would reflect some deep seated personal sentiments held by Trench. He comes across as a responsible, concerned, even caring land agent. He pulled no punches, for example, in blaming the estate for a great many burdensome levies imposed on the tenants. One in particular was the system of local espionage, called 'keepers' locally, to watch all the tenants' dealings, which was apparently paid for by the tenants themselves. This system, said Trench, 'deeply wounded the feelings of the tenantry'. He also condemned the system of bog rent which he said he had never witnessed anywhere else in Ireland. He passed on to Mr Shirley a communication he had from Mr Griffith on the valuation of the Shirley Estate, pointing out that Shirley's tenants were paying 21 per cent over the general valuation. And he complained about the practice of obtaining decrees against tenants for rent and sending them to Monaghan gaol: the tenant was charged with the cost of the decree, together with his own and the Bailiff's fare to, and subsistence in Monaghan. As Trench says 'there is no man of common sense, not to speak of humanity . . . who could sanction such a system'.

Trench comes across in his report, oddly, as a sort of champion of the tenants' rights, although, in view of the later reception for his *Realities*, this might be an unfortunate choice of words. 'Even in Ireland', he claimed, 'it has never fallen my lot to witness destitution to the same degree and over such a large extent as I have seen it on this property . . . there are many tenants' houses where there are neither windows, bedsteads, tables nor chairs'. As a step towards improving conditions for those tenants who were 'better circumstanced', Trench proposed grants for improvements to house and premises, such as draining, planting, installing chimneys and proper windows. 'What I conceive they want most is kindness, encouragement, some substantial proof that the landlord is anxious for their amelioration and that they will be left to enjoy the fruits of their exertions and that everything will not be raised upon them the moment they increase its value by their industry'. He included a rather pointed calculation which showed that in the previous year, the estate had granted £16-14s-11d for tenant improvements out of a rental income of £22,954. This was Trench's proposal for the solvent tenants who could be relied on to carry on farming and paying their rent. For those who were impoverished and 'completely broken down' he proposed emigration, which he costed at £3 a head to America.

Trench's report to Shirley vindicates some of the humanitarian attitudes underlying his behaviour in *Realities*. It also provides a fitting background introduction to pre-Famine conditions on this large 26,000 acre estate in south Monaghan. Unfortunately for Trench's memory, perhaps, his proposals for improvements on the estate were not taken up, leading he claimed to his resignation of the agency. Only his emigration scheme was implemented.

The Role of the Estate Office

Under Trench, the Shirley Estate maintained an efficient office and a collection of documents relating mainly to his emigration policy throws light on the nature and implementation of the policy and how it fared with the tenants.¹³

News of the allowances for emigration spread quickly through the estate. Trench himself personally invited people in the country to participate. A great many petitions for assistance came into the office. With other petitions seeking wide ranging assistance for blankets, clothes, or money for a horse, or postponement of rent demands, these demonstrate the central place of the office as a social welfare agency in the lives of approximately 20,000 people. By any terms, the office and its officials held a most important role which they appear to have discharged with some responsibility, which appears to have contrasted with the inefficiency and croneyism characterising its operation under the previous long agency of Samuel Mitchell. In the late forties, admittedly, some of the decisions relating to old widows especially, who were craving permission to hold onto their 2 acres ("refused: she has no business with land") were very harsh and inevitably added up to a negative folk memory. But on balance in the trying times of mid-century, the records of the office show some attempts at tempering justice with mercy.

A classic example of a petition for help in the late forties epitomises the nature of the crisis faced by the estate office: Widow Hanratty, who was sheltering in one of the emergency outbuildings of Carrickmacross workhouse (which still had 1,700 inmates in the 1851 census) petitioned the landlord Evelyn Philip Shirley:

You will recollect that you came to the poor shed that shelters Widow Hanratty at Corduff Chapel and left her refreshments and comfort for which you will have her poor blessings . . . in this life which will be short for she is famished with cold and hunger. She is confined to her bed these six years . . . has not had the comfort of a blanket and would represent this to your honour the day you visited her only she did not wish to be troublesome . . . now implores and prays that your honour will allow or cause her to get a blanket and such other necessaries as you may think will support her sinking frame for the neighbours who were kind to her heretofore are now distressed and cannot give more assistance . . .

In three months in 1843, approximately forty people were listed as having received clothes from the estate. By 1849, there were increasing references to aprons, petticoats and other items being collected from the schools on the estate. Further substantiating its social role in the district, the office was also frequently asked to arbitrate in disputes between neighbours, often over land, and indeed in domestic disputes within families. Fathers, mothers, and brothers were ordered, as the case might be, to take in an ejected family member, or to remove a troublesome sibling. Seventy years and more later, when Shirley and the office had departed the scene, such disputes usually ended up in the district courts.

Trench's policy on farm subdivision among family members was the direct opposite of his predecessor's (who seems to have generally facilitated the practice) and no doubt his refusal to allow anyone else onto a farm without his express permission¹⁴ and his policy of paying the emigration costs of second households, including cottier households, was not too popular with some.

In February 1844, the McEnaney orphans wrote to Trench that their 'Father possessed 5 acres . . . [died and willed] that his widow should enjoy his place so long as she honestly took care of his children and remained with them unmarried

but she is now doing all in her power to transgress the covenant by getting married to Peter McQuillan who has no property . . . implores your Honour in the name of Heaven to protect them by a speedy interference . . .’ A peremptory note from Trench stated: ‘settled, the marriage not allowed’.

There were quite a number of these petitions to intervene in marriages, to prevent or to allow them as the case might be, and it is interesting that, though invited in these cases, part of the folklore about Trench is that he stopped people getting married. A ballad called ‘The marriage veto’ in the 1860s contains a caustic comment on this role:

Oh girls of Farney is it true
That each true-hearted wench
Before she weds must get consent
From pious Father Trench.¹⁵

Emigration Petitions

Throughout the forties, appeals for assistance with emigration predominated in the record – demonstrating a keenness to get continuing help in distress, but in many cases also to avail of opportunities presenting themselves. The office very frequently refused appeals for other assistance, but instead offered help to emigrate as an alternative. Two petitions illustrate the application of this pressure on tenants. Hugh Ward in January 1844 was destitute, with only one acre of land left. He had been forced to ‘leave his dwelling house, himself and his large family exposed to the inclemency of the weather without shelter either day or night . . . take his want, poverty and distress into consideration . . .’ A note from Trench simply stated that he ‘can do nothing but give him the means of going to America if he will give up his place’. In December 1844, Francis McCabe’s story demonstrates the desperate struggle for survival for the poorest class in the countryside in the crisis years before the Famine. He lived on his aunt’s farm. She died of ‘complication of distemper’ and he was ‘put to the expense of burying her’. He had to mortgage half the farm and was unable to redeem it. During the last three years the ‘death of pigs’ destroyed him though ‘by going to the last English harvest he got the means to clear arrears of rent but cannot pay the past half year’s rent. Between himself, his wife and two children they have not one pound of day or night woollen covering and are nearly perished with the cold and know not what may happen if kind providence does not inspire your Honour to relieve them and particularly with some warm covering . . .’ Again all Trench would do was offer him help to go to America.

Trench also adopted a proactive approach to encouraging people to go. In 1843, while he was riding through the estate familiarising himself with its problems before submitting his report to Shirley, he came on James McCannon who ‘was living as a Cottier with Francis Murray of Derrylavan at the new mills of Mr Shirley. You were riding by the way in the month of December and you called me to the Road and asked me would I go to America and that you would pay my wife’s passage and mine to America. I am prepared now according to your Honour’s decision to go any time that is pleasing to you . . .’

Some of the office correspondence, as well as Trench’s book, show clearly that, while it was obviously in the long term interests of the estate to ‘shovel out’ the paupers, the officials considered that it was also ultimately in the interests of

the people themselves. In his original proposal on emigration, Trench suggested that for those with no visible means of support emigration must be considered as the only thing 'for their benefit'. It 'would put the people themselves', he said in *Realities*, 'in a far better way of earning their bread hereafter . . . it would be cheaper to him [Lord Lansdowne] and better for *them* [Trench's] to pay for their emigration at once, than to continue to support them at home'.¹⁶ And the poor emigrants in most cases appear to have been glad of the opportunity to go: according to Trench a rush was made to get out. Davis, the London passenger agent in 1849, remarked on the safe departure for Australia of a party of Shirley's emigrants that 'I am quite sure they have been, 95 poor creatures as they are, put in a fair way of doing well for themselves'.

If the petitions among the records of the office are anything to go by, a great many of the tenants were anxious to get help to emigrate, including cottiers, schoolmasters, tradesmen, and the sons and daughters of tenantry. Peter Ward, for example, was a schoolmaster who in March 1844 sought help to go 'if your honour considers his family too numerous for your present scheme, he humbly supplicates your Honour to include the bearer [his son] in the number of your emigrants'. The family of nine sailed later that year with £15-15s assistance. Charles Mee was trained as a tailor and 'has formed a most sanguine wish for Emigration to Canada . . . humbly beseeches you to assist his passage to that Country' and Harry Mee (from another family) had a five acre farm, eleven in the family, 'unable to provide for his two eldest daughters at home or even to pay their passage to America . . . prays assistance to provide for their passage'. Passages were paid in both cases.

Many other tenants took time to make up their minds to accept offers of assistance, an understandable reaction especially if they were older with a family. This was a particular problem with the Australian emigration in 1849, when people kept changing their minds much to the annoyance of the office. The office did try to speed up the decision-making process, if one could call it that. By the late forties, when the estate undertook evictions – and was attacked for 'extermination' by *The Nation* newspaper – there was a considerable increase in the numbers seeking assistance to go. Indeed it appears that many actually knocked down their houses, so anxious were they to abide by the rules of the estate and avail of the assistance offered, and suggesting that assistance for emigration was not as readily available at the height of the crisis. Francis Magee, like a great many petitioners in the late forties was desperate to get some of his family out. He possessed a small plot of land on which he supported a wife and five children. He said that his house had been pulled down a few days ago 'and his poor wife and family have taken refuge under a few sticks and ragweeds placed against a ditch. That he is now penniless without a cabin to shelter him and humbly implores to send the two adults of his family to America . . .'. Such a modest request would ensure that the costs of the other family members might be remitted home later.

Miles Martin, in March 1847, pleaded: 'your honour sir I expect you will give me further assistance as I have done according to your wishes has my house thrown down which cost me seven pounds in building it and living since then in a tent wherein I had nearly starved with cold so I expected that both myself and family could go together but now I cannot unless your honour does consider my

case . . .'. His family of five were entered on the emigration list in April having apparently paid off their arrears. Miles' indefatigable wife Margaret wrote from Liverpool on 12th April to complain about the assistance they received:

Dear Sir, I rte you thaes few line hoping to Find your Honour in good health as God leaves us at present thank God dear Sir i am to inForm you that I thought to go to Emeraica but it is out of my power unless you relieve me with more Money or Else i must devied my poor Family and send some of them of and go to the poor house me self which is a poor ?place and I wont be Alive unless you Relieve me if you or Mr Smith does not pleus send me an answer as soon as possible or else I mus send two of them Home some are ?leanams [leanbhs?].

The passenger agent in Liverpool referred to the Martin family who could not pay enough towards their passage who were there in a 'miserable growling humour'. He eventually was able to report that he had got them on board and ready to depart by the 25th April. Liverpool was daily witnessing such misery as thousands of impoverished emigrants like the Martins spent their days wandering the town waiting for their ship.

Desperate straits called for desperate measures and there was an element of disingenuousness in some of the pleas for help. Scally has talked about the manner in which the tenantry often exploited the 'throughother' nature of the estate, how they tried to play on the office's ignorance of the real state of the farms and tenant relationships.¹⁷ Cases made for help with emigration or other problems were sometimes elaborately overstated. Was Mary McCabe exhibiting *naïveté* or clever advocacy in her petition in February 1844? She had 'survived a heavy loss a few months ago by the death of a son and seven young pigs and that she had her rent made up in order to pay it and being admonished to buy a horse to plough her land and then sell the horse and pay the rent in full, she accordingly bought the Horse in the last fair in Ballybay which horse died in five days after in consequence of some medicine administered by the seller to make him up for sale, which losses have entirely frustrated her design . . .'.

Managing the emigration scheme

What sort of care did the office take with the organisation and management of the emigration scheme? The record shows that a considerable amount of care was taken. Since the landlord's money was involved, a strict account was kept of every penny spent, but the correspondence between the office and the various passenger agents involved in the emigration, whether in Dublin, Liverpool or London, shows a well-organised and humanitarian system in place. Much of the work involved a form of crowd control, especially after the first rush when the offers were made initially, and later as distress increased during the Famine years. A large estate such as Shirley's had to have a minimum level of administrative resources. It is clear that it would have been impossible for an estate without some sort of office administration to have undertaken such schemes.

In his *Realities of Irish Life*, Trench refers to the amount of time he spent on the Lansdowne emigration in a manner which captures the frantic pressures on the organisers of the emigration in another large estate.

I have gone through much laborious work during my life, but I never went through any which pressed so hard upon my powers of endurance as the arrangements for the emigration at Kenmare. The tide of emigrants was so enormous, each pressing his claim and terrified lest all the money should be exhausted before his or her name could be entered . . . I frequently passed eight hours a day at this most disagreeable and laborious work.¹⁸

Depending on individual circumstances, emigrants in Monaghan or Kerry were given a varied amount of assistance, either the bare passage money or passage plus provisions plus landing money. The office endeavoured to determine how much was required, based on the ability of the emigrants to pay something towards their costs, on numbers in the party and so on. In contrast to Scally's Ballykilcline emigrants, where the Crown office depended on poorly-informed local officials, the Carrickmacross office appears to have had fairly comprehensive knowledge of the estate, particularly on the extent of the cottier population.¹⁹ Perhaps 'compassion' is the wrong word for the management or care of the emigrants in their journey. During 'the heat of emigration', – the Liverpool agent's description of conditions over there in 1847 – it would have been foolhardy in the extreme to let the emigrants head off on their own. As Trench said of his pauper emigrants from Kenmare ('wild batches of two hundred each'):

There was great difficulty in keeping them from breaking loose from the ship, not only in Cork but in Liverpool . . . their chief device was to escape out of the ships almost naked, to hide all their good clothes which had been furnished them as an outfit, and to appear only in their worst rags . . . rushing through the streets of Cork and Liverpool in large bodies to the terror of the inhabitants.²⁰

This behaviour was no doubt an embarrassment to the estate. In 1849, the Liverpool agent reprimanded the Carrickmacross clerk for the condition of an earlier group of Monaghan emigrants and hoped 'most sincerely such another ragged pack may never appear here again'.

Trench also claimed that all the Kenmare emigrants were in 'uproarious spirits; there was no crying or lamentation, as is usual on such occasions; all was delight at having escaped the deadly workhouse'.²¹ Whatever about the subsequent need for a 'Lansdowne Ward' in the New York hospital, undoubtedly these workhouse emigrants were glad to get out. This assessment of the attitudes of emigrants, admittedly by a self-interested Trench, contrasts with Scally's reliance on Walter Macken's image of the awesome silence of lonesome emigrants at the quayside.²² Other writers in the twentieth century have confirmed the silence of emigrants at moment of departure.²³ Perhaps the pauper emigrants who were assisted were exceptional in being delighted with the chance to escape?

In general, emigrants from the mid-nineteenth century countryside, as also the mid-twentieth century, who had probably never been outside their parish, would have needed careful handling to get them safely away. A 1942 recollection of emigration in the 1870s recalled the trauma and stress for a young sixteen year old girl on her way to America.

At last we got into Derry and everyone made a mad rush for the boat thinking it would go without them [a common experience for first time travellers]. . . . we wouldn't be let on the boat until we had bought our beds and a lot of other things. This caused a terrible weeping and wailing among the people who did not seem to know these regulations. But the agents said they should know that already . . . I bought a bed, a tin mug, a tin ponny . . . we all left our names and the things were to be sent down to the boat . . . when I went to the boat there was a place fixed for me I heard and where I was to sleep. But to tell the truth I never found it from that day to this. The crowds and the pushing and shouting were awful and I still remember the confusion of my mind, a young green girl . . . there were thousands on board – could that be possible?²⁴

The assisted emigrants often had an advantage over individuals going out under their own steam, who had to overcome the problems of the journey alone, though undoubtedly so vast was the network of migration by the 1850s that most voluntary individual emigrants had lots of advice from former emigrants. One such, from Clones in 1870 sent home a blow-by-blow account of the trip with a detailed description of what to do at each turn on disembarkation at New York – get registered, get railroad ticket, change money, go to customs, all extremely valuable information for gauche newcomers from the country.²⁵

Elliott, Shirley's Liverpool passenger agent, was meticulous in his attention to the emigrants at the Liverpool end of the journey as they awaited passage to America. When they arrived, if they had to wait some days for their ship they were given a daily allowance. Many of the emigrants expressed their appreciation. In April 1844, he reported that 'the last paid of your people got off yesterday all in excellent humour and I must say most grateful they all appeared for the trifling friendship and attention I tried to show them. They one and all desired I should write to let you know how they prayed for your success as they termed it. The ready cash they all got daily does much for them . . .' Peter Byrne, who had received £10 worth of assistance, wrote to Trench in the same month from Liverpool:

I take the liberty of returning you my most sincere thanks for the goodness you have done to me and my brother and sister in assisting us to emigrate to America. I wrote to Mr Smyth to let your honours know my state here for which I received in return of it this morning thirty shillings from Mr Elliott and never was more awanting. We have found Mr Elliott very kind he has got for all his passengers on Monday a pound of bread each on Tuesday the same and on this day one shilling each now we are to get a shilling every day while we are detained here . . .

Brigid Corrigan, who with her husband and five children was given £16, took ill in Liverpool and was sufficiently well cared for that Elliott managed to get her on the boat with her family and under the care of a surgeon who happened to be a cabin passenger: 'I have risked charging £1 on a/c of what has been done in this case . . .'

In general, Shirley's emigrants came well outfitted, though towards the end of the forties, it is evident that the system was creaking with the strain of numbers,

many following ejections at home. Following Elliott's reprimand on the condition of some emigrants in 1849, the office was careful to prevent badly outfitted passengers being sent over again. The Fox and Conlon families, who appear to have been unable to pay anything, were given extensive help and the following account details the nature of this assistance:

Pat Fox and family of Lissirill, 11 in number: Passage on the packet 19s

Dinner in Dundalk 7/8d; sea store 3/-; tin can 1/-.

Pat Conlon's family of Lissirill, 6 in number: Passage 10/6d

Dinner 4/-; sea store 1/8.

Clothes given to Pat Fox and Children:

Michael Fox	1 pair trousers
Margaret	1 shift, 1 gown, 1 flannel petticoat, 1 apron
Betty	1 shift, 1 gown, 1 flannel petticoat, 1 apron
Mary	1 gown, 1 slip
Pat jr	1 shirt, 1 coat, 1 vest
Betty and Anne,	1 apron each
Bridget	1 flannel petticoat, 1 apron
Pat sr	1 shirt, 1 trousers, 1 coat, 1 vest

Sundries supplied to Pat Fox's family:

Tinware:	2 x 3 gal water bottles 2/-		
	1 Boiler 8d and coffee pot 8d		
	4 panicans 8d, 1 chamber pot 7d		
	1 frypan 9d, 1 dish 8d, 8 plates 6d		
		£.	s. d.
	8 stone Biscuit @3/10	1	10 8
	8 stone Oatmeal@3/4	1	6 8
	2 Barrels with locks and keys		3 6
	10lb bacon 7/6, 3lb coffee 1/8	12	6
	7lb sugar 3/6, 1/4lb tea 1/3, salt 3d	5	0
	14lb treacle & Mug 5/2,		
	1 bottle vinegar 8d	5	10
	2 small pr shoes	7	0
	1 small pr trousers	2	6
	2 small frocks	3	6
	One nights lodging and food while in Liverpool	8	6
	Cash on departure	2	0 0

Sundries supplied to Mary Conlon's family

3 gal tin water bottle, 1 chamber pot, 1 dish, 2 plates,

1 coffee pot, 1/4 lb. tea, 2 lb. coffee, 6 lb. sugar,

7 lb. treacle and mug, 5 lb. bacon, 1 bottle vinegar,

1 night's lodging and food in Liverpool.

Cash on departure

Total cost £3 2 8

Because south Monaghan was so close to Dundalk and the Liverpool ferries, meant that many emigrants were able to move back and forth quite readily, in

contrast to regions further west. In May 1847 Elliott wrote to the office 'respecting the two young Persons who returned Home in such bad Humour when the passages ran up so high. If they come along by next Saturday's Boat I will give them their passage to New York on as fine a ship as is now in Port . . . at the terms they paid and as I offered before will pay their Steamboat fare'.

Some of the passengers tried Elliott's patience however. He was endeavouring to get as good a deal as possible for the estate, which in most cases throughout the forties meant booking ships to Canada. Many of the emigrants, however, wanted to go to the United States Henry Grimes (with his wife and four children) was one such in 1849 who refused to go to Quebec:

nothing will do Grimes but to go to Boston where children are charged almost the same as adults . . . he handed me £2 in addition to your order but this would not be accepted for the family to Boston. I got him an offer of getting away to New Orleans this day and his friend would not permit him to go even there . . . I would not by any means stretch so far in good nature as to enable him to choose his destination – especially after losing part of his funding, Beds and Bedding etc. having gone off in the Quebec Ship intended and put on board for his family . . .

The Australian Emigration

In 1849, the estate determined to assist upwards of 200 emigrants to Australia, responding to incentives from the Colonial Emigration Office in London. The demands of this new bureaucracy in London taxed the resources of the Carrickmacross office to its limits and the correspondence illustrates the amount of effort and care which went into the emigration in response to the colonial regulations. A passenger agent had to be engaged in London whose somewhat hectoring correspondence with the little office in the 'provinces' in Monaghan is illuminating. George Morant, Trench's successor as land agent, discussed with the clerk the style of jackets to be purchased for the emigrants and the price of shoes which would be ordered from Pims in Dublin. He thought an ordinary jacket 'instead of the always absurd and unmeaning tail coat is an excellent proposition.' In terms of shoes all that was required, he said, 'is a shoe that will last the voyage and if those at 1/10 will do this then there will be no need to go to the higher price'; two pairs of strong shoes would be enough to last a woman or girl for four months. He noted that monies would have to be forwarded to London in advance and with this in mind he was looking to income on the estate which in mid-1849 was a cause of some concern. Accordingly, 'the ejections had better be executed at once that is to say to commence on next Tuesday week if the Sheriff can attend . . . Let those . . . under the auspices of those rascals Swanzy and McMahon be the first dealt with and afterwards the rest in due course – levelling one dwelling house in each subdivision where there are but two upon the farm, and in no case leaving a house upon farms valued at under £4 – the same rule must apply for non-payment of rent'. By this time the rates in the union had risen in excess of 4 shillings in the pound and the policy of evictions brought about an increase in those going to America. At least 170 were assisted to America in 1849.

By August Morant was worrying about where to get soap and how much; it emerged that 2lbs. was required per person. He also concerned himself with the

finer details of the trip and instructed the office to double-check the regulations to make sure nothing was omitted. 'Do you think it will do to fit the people with their clothes in Dublin or would it not be worthwhile to get them down to Carrick to be tried on? Chests will I believe be wanting. These I imagine all possess of some kind or another. We must make sure that each has two pair of shoes though it is not necessary that they should be new – if in tolerantly good repair ...'.

The bales of new clothes were brought to Carrick and fitted, as far as can be determined in the local school. Boxes of cardboard which Morant considered to be 'quite as good as the ordinary trunks of the country' were eventually bought in Liffey Street in Dublin on the morning of departure. Presumably these were then filled with the supplies of the government agent and whatever spare clothing the emigrants had with them. There was a complicated correspondence with the new bureaucracy of the railway, ranging from the new Inniskeen station, to Dundalk, Drogheda and Dublin, to obtain third class carriages to Dublin. But as the only train with third class would arrive in Dublin at 10.00 p.m., this was deemed too late to bring such a large group across the city with their baggage and so they were sent by car to Drogheda and from thence by an earlier train. Board and lodging was booked in the North Wall on the night before departure where, said the ever-vigilant Morant, 'I have arranged for their safekeeping ... I shall be in attendance on Saturday morning at the inspection and shall probably remain until they are actually on board.'

For the journey to Australia, most of the males were allocated 5 shirts, 5 pair stockings, 2 pair of shoes, 1 jacket, vest and trousers and had 1 'suit reserved'. Each of the females was allocated 5 shifts, 5 stockings, 2 pair of shoes, and one each of gowns and petticoats. The following account illustrates the range of provisions acquired to supply the first group of emigrants in August 1849.

	£.	s.	d.
from W G Smith Grocer, Tea/Coffee Dealer for Loaves, salt, pepper & tobacco	1	8	11
To Anne Woods for Dinner for 8 men @ 10d each		6	8
John Dawson, Woollen & Linen Draper Cmx [Carrickmacross] for 100 pairs of cotton sheets	8	15	0
Francis Reilly Carrickmacross carhire to Dundalk		3	3
Patk O'Connor, Wax, Sparmaceti & Tallow Candle manufacturer D'Olier St Dublin, 2 cwt Soap and 2 Boxes	2	13	0
Todd Burns & Co. Dublin, Linen & Woollen Drapers 6 doz. towels	1	4	0
John Richardson (Capel St Dublin ?) 48 trunks (various)	3	12	8
Mathew Jones 47 Nth Wall Boarding & Lodging for 94 emigrants	10	10	0
Bernard McKenna for conveyance of 68 adults and 26 children from Drogheda to Dublin /14 Aug [rail]	16	2	0
Millers, Basket & Travelling Trunk Manufactory, Fishamble St Dublin for 11 trunks		15	0
Dundalk & Enniskillen Railway for carriage of 2 Bales, hamper and bag	4		9
Hugh Gormley carriage of 2 Bales from Enniskillen to Carrickmacross, and a large box		3	6
Dublin and Belfast Junction Railway 94 3rd class Passengers (fares paid)			

from Dundalk to Junction per the day mail @ 12.40 p.m	7	3	0
Carolan Ward (Carrickmacross) 1 assorted caps	1	9	4

In addition there were bills for shoes, sheets, clothes and towels.

The sometimes inconsistent manner of describing the occupations of the emigrants on the forms supplied from London upset the metropolitan sense of order of Davis, the London agent: they were first listed as labourers, later on as tailors, coopers, weavers, etc. But Smith in the office retorted with some impatience that this was easy to explain in terms of the rural economy in Ireland at the time: 'these people being according to circumstances employed at these occupations in turn.' However, as there was a smaller contribution required from the estate for labourers, Davis, the wily bureaucrat, sensibly pointed out that while a 'poor man is naturally anxious to make as much of himself as he can – if he has ever struck a blow on the anvil for the village smith he dubs himself "blacksmith", which in the eyes of H.M. Commissioners is a reason for paying an extra £5'!

Following the successful embarkation of the first group, Morant determined to streamline the emigration of the second group in December. He drew up a memorandum for the office outlining his instructions for a more efficient, and more economical, operation. Emigrants were

To be ready and assembled in Carrick the evening previous to the day of departure for Dublin. All to be dressed in suits of the new clothing. Boxes to be made for each adult except in cases of 2 brothers or 2 sisters when one somewhat larger than the single boxes will suffice. These to be corded. Bonnets strong and cheap for the women. Scotch caps for the men and boys. Shoes, 2 pairs each, except where they may have one reasonably good pair of their own when one will suffice. Two lbs. of soap each. Third class to Dublin from Drogheda. Mr Lane to accompany the emigrants as before and to be provided with the necessary funds. If the emigrants are to pass a night in Dublin, Mr Lane will endeavour to provide for their maintenance at a cheaper rate than the last time. The journey to Drogheda via Ardee by vans or some such conveyance.

Conclusion

The popular image of landlord and estate which emerged in the post-Famine period is one of oppression and injustice and this image has come down in folklore to the present. Much of this was founded on eviction policies which gathered pace from the 1840s, as the population-land crisis manifested itself at the level of the estate. Emigration also became an emotive issue from this period. Miller has examined the emergence of the 'exile motif' as a societal response to the loss of millions of people from the country. Encouraging people to emigrate by means of assisted passage, therefore, was a risky undertaking for the estate in these circumstances of a rising tide of negative public opinion.

In many cases, assisted emigration was interpreted as another attempt by the landlord class to exterminate the Irish population. The association of emigration with eviction has been seen as an extension of a landlordly disregard for the

wishes and welfare of his tenantry. And this belief was based on documented cases of some landlord-inspired group emigrations which ended in disaster. However, to what extent assisted emigrants – who were admittedly among the poorest class to leave in the mid-nineteenth century – were worse off than the tens of thousands of individual voluntary emigrants who were leaving at the same time is a moot point.

The evidence of the estate office in Carrickmacross suggests that in the circumstances, the estate discharged its responsibilities in a humane and considerate manner. On the large Shirley property, Steuart Trench in 1843 was reaping the harvest of decades of mismanagement. He inherited a situation where the population and farm structure was seriously imbalanced. Almost anything he could have done to solve the problems of the estate, including assisted emigration, would have been interpreted as oppressive subsequently. Indeed it might be suggested that to do nothing, as was done by many smaller or poorly-run estates with no effective administration, would probably have earned a better folk memory. But in the circumstances of the Shirley Estate in the 1840s, with a population in excess of 20,000, failure to do anything would probably have resulted in greater social and economic hardship for the people and the property.

The construction of the popular memory of Shirley's emigrants was largely the product of those left behind, who witnessed the compulsory dispossession of farms and tumbling of cabins by the estate and the emigration of their neighbours to far-away shores in the late forties. What evidence there is for the emigrants themselves indicates that they were keen to leave. As this essay has shown the officials of the estate attempted to apply management policies humanely. Generally speaking the office was as caring in its dealings with the tenants as any bureaucracy whether it was the poor law guardians, the later county councils, or indeed the social welfare agencies of the twentieth century. In the final analysis, given the circumstances of thousands of impoverished tenants on farms which had no viable economic future, and looking through the papers documenting their sorrow, misery and destitution, one must ask the question, what alternatives to emigration did the management of the estate have? One must conclude that in this decade of the 1840s, which was the worst at any time before or since, the estate officials in Carrickmacross probably did as much as could be expected of them.

References

- * Extracts from the Shirley papers are published with the kind permission of Major J.E. Shirley and the Deputy Keeper of Records, P.R.O.N.I.
- 1 Robert Scally, *The End of Hidden Ireland. Rebellion. Famine and Emigration* (Oxford, 1995), chapters 1 and 2. (E.E. Evans, who used the term 'throughother' to describe rundale agriculture, is quoted p. 13).
- 2 Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exile: Ireland and the Irish exodus to North-America* (Oxford, 1985).
- 3 David Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration 1801-1921* (Dundalk, 1985).
- 4 Scally, *The End of Hidden Ireland* p. 169.
- 5 Gerald Keegan, *Famine Diary, Journey to a New World* (edited and presented by J.J. Mangan, Dublin, 1991).

- 6 William Steuart Trench, *Realities of Irish Life* (London, 1868).
- 7 *Realities of Irish Life* (London edition 1966), with preface by Patrick Kavanagh. (this edition referred to hereafter).
- 8 Trench, *Realities of Irish Life*, p. 69.
- 9 Quoted in L.O. Mearain, 'Estate agents in Farney – Trench and Mitchell', *Clogher Record* (1981), p. 405.
- 10 Quoted in *ibid.* p. 412.
- 11 See 'Document on Farney', *Clogher Record* (1975), p. 297.
- 12 'Causes of complaints stated, and certain alternatives suggested in reference to the Management of the Shirley Estate', P.R.O.N.I., D3531/S/55
- 13 Shirley Papers, P.R.O.N.I., D3531/P/1-3. Much of this collection has been published in P. Duffy, 'Assisted emigration from the Shirley Estate 1843-54', *Clogher Record* (1992), pp. 7-62. Unless otherwise indicated quotations in the following paragraphs are from the Shirley Papers.
- 14 *Shirley Papers*, D/3531/P.
- 15 quoted from *Dundalk Democrat*, June 1869 in *Clogher Record* (1981), p. 413. Another verse of the song says: 'O search green Erin through and through/ And tell us would you find/ Match-maker and land-agent too/ In one small farm combined.'
- 16 Trench, *Realities of Irish Life*, p. 65.
- 17 Scally, *The End of Hidden Ireland*. especially p. 71ff.
- 18 Trench, *Realities of Irish Life*, p. 75.
- 19 A comprehensive list of cottiers was compiled for 1840 to 1847, D3531/M/5/2.
- 20 Trench, *Realities of Irish Life*, p. 66.
- 21 *Ibid.* p. 67.
- 22 Scally, *The End of Hidden Ireland*, p. 166.
- 23 For example, Donal Foley, *Three Villages* (Dublin, 1977), pp. 52-5.
- 24 'I went to America', taken down by Anna Kelly, *The Bell* (1942), pp. 353-4.
- 25 P.O. Gallachair, 'Two letters from a Clones emigrant', *Clogher Record* (1962).