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**THE POOR LAW UNION AND THE FAMINE IN CARLOW.  
1845 - 1847.**

**BY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is about the Carlow area during the early Famine years of 1845 - 1847.

The first chapter is about Ireland before the Famine, the phenomenal increase in population, the great amount of poverty among the people and all the problems which accompanied both.

The second chapter looks at the background to the introduction of a Poor Law System to Ireland and the various commissions and reports prior to its introduction. It also looks briefly at the setting up of the system in Ireland.

The third chapter looks briefly at the setting up of the Poor Law Union of Carlow, its Board of Guardians and the building of the Workhouse.

The fourth chapter deals with the Workhouse and the Famine in Carlow up to December 1847.

The fifth chapter deals with the number of paupers in the Workhouse between April 1845 and December 1847 and also studies the number of deaths there during that period.

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## INTRODUCTION

*"These statistics taken together present in what is considered one of our best circumstanced counties a frightful picture of the condition of the poor. What must the amount of misery be elsewhere".....Symod of priests of Kildare and Leighlin Diocese, Carlow 1st December 1847*

This thesis is intended to give some information on the Carlow Union area during the early Famine years of 1845 to 1847. Included are chapters on social conditions of the time, the introduction of the Poor Law to Ireland and the subsequent formation of the Carlow Union to provide a background to the thesis.

The primary sources of information on this subject are the Minute Books of the Carlow Board of Guardians. They provide much valuable information on the Workhouse, the numbers using it, the general diet of inmates and other administrative details such as appointments of staff and details of contracts with suppliers etc.

At the end of each weekly meeting of the Board of Guardians the minutes were signed by the Chairman of the Board so all information in the minutes can be regarded as accurate. This information is mainly of an administrative nature and no personal information is given on any of the paupers who used the Workhouse apart from exceptional circumstances such as cases of indiscipline among the paupers when they were then brought before the Board.

Together with the Carlow Union Minute Books other sources both primary and secondary were examined to describe and determine the extent of poverty in Ireland and the Carlow area before the introduction of the Poor Law System, and how the area coped during the years 1845 to 1847.

# THE POOR LAW AND THE FAMINE IN CARLOW - 1845 - 1847.

## CHAPTER ONE.

### IRELAND BEFORE THE FAMINE.

While the Great Famine in Ireland of 1845 - 1847 was due to the large scale failure of the potato crop it is important to have a look at the preceding century to note the conditions which made such a high proportion of the population of the country so dependent on that one crop. The potato was first introduced to Ireland sometime in the last fifteen years of the 16th century.

It was a crop which was free from disease, easy to grow, easy to conserve, highly productive, pleasing to the palate and required the minimum of cultivation and capital inputs while at the same time producing its own seed for the following crop.(1)

Bourke also attributed the suitable meteorological conditions - wet and overcast - to the general acceptability of the potato in Ireland. The first official record of the potato in Ireland is to be found in the Montgomery Manuscripts which refer to potatoes being grown in County Down in 1606. In 1663 Robert Boyle's gardener sent him a box of potatoes from his estate in Lismore, County Waterford with accompanying information as to the proper husbandry of the crop was well advanced by the middle of the 17th century. (2)

The Irish also developed the "lazy bed" system of growing potatoes during this period. This system had distinct advantages in wet and poorly drained soils and was also used for overwintering the produce. (3)

In time the potato became an accepted and welcome addition to the diet of the Irish people. It was not and did not become the staple diet among the Irish people for many years and eventually became the chief diet only among the lower social classes - the cottiers, unemployed and landless people. The potato was nutritious, with milk added, it formed a balanced diet, containing adequate amounts of protein, carbohydrates and minerals. Its high energy value and low fat content made it a healthy food source. It also remained palatable even as part of an extremely monotonous diet. (4) An interesting factor to watch over the one hundred years preceding "The Great Famine" was the rising population in Ireland from

1740 onwards. The year 1740-41 was a year of famine, fever adding to its horror. Deaths may have been in the region of 200,000 to 400,000. (5) This famine of 1740-41 may have killed a higher share of the people at the time compared with the famine of the 1840's.(6)

The population of the country in 1740 was estimated at around three million people. By the 1780's this figure was estimated to have risen to around four million - an increase of thirty three and one third percent. This increase in population has been attributed to people surviving because there was not large famine in the intervening years. From the 1780's to the 1840's the population of Ireland increased to over eight million in 1841 - an increase of one hundred and five percent. (7) Arthur Young, when undertaking a tour of Ireland 1776-79, estimated that the population of Ireland was around three million persons. He based his figures on the hearth-tax returns but admitted that they were not entirely accurate. He found the circumstances in Ireland were "extremely" favourable to population and mentioned five factors influencing the rapid growth - the lack of Poor Laws, the habitations, high marriage rates, large families and fifth - the potato. (8)

The potato was increasingly becoming the main food of the poorest sections of the Irish people, particularly those living in the poorer regions of the country. Previous to this time grain was an important feature in the diet of the people generally and was also important in cultivation too, among small farmers and in the eastern half of the country. Carlow was a tillage county as also were bordering counties Kildare and Kilkenny. Milling was carried out extensively in the Carlow, Kilkenny area. (9) Grain was not only extensively cultivated; it was also immensely important in the diet of the countryman and townsman. The potato was widely cultivated and figured prominently in the diet - but it did not dominate the diet. Oaten bread was widely consumed. As the population grew the potato became the chief food of the poor. At the time the definition of the poor meant cottiers and labourers in the countryside and unskilled labourers in the towns. Poverty lay in economic insecurity. The cottiers and labourers were unable to pay the hearth-tax and very many of them were exempted from the tax. It was this rural social class which relied more and more on the potato as time passed. (10)

The spread of the potato was also a factor to the evolution of the cottier system. Population expanded rapidly in areas of the west of Ireland where potato cultivation could be added to access to hills for grazing, to bogs for turf and to the seaside for seaweed, sand and shore food. With these amenities, families had access to cheap food, fuel and housing - which could easily be constructed from local materials - stones for walls, clay for floors, "wreck

timber" for rafters and oats or bent grass for thatch. Because this social class of people had little material expectations and had positive inducements to marriage i.e. cheap food, fuel and housing, there was a very high early marriage rate with resultant increase in families and population. (11) The spread of the potato as the main diet of the labourers benefitted the farming class; as the cottier system expanded it delivered an extremely cheap and disciplined work force to the farmer who paid a "potato wage" to the labourer. (12)

This scene can be contrasted to the population picture in the environmentally favoured farms areas of South Leinster i.e. Carlow etc. where social and economic constraints depressed the demography. (13) Unchecked subdivision operated on inferior or upland soil where commercialised agriculture did not exist or on land freshly colonised from the waste. Farmers subdivided land extensively only where agricultural output for the market was limited. The composition of the countryside was varied and complex. According to the 1831 census 100,000 farm occupiers employed hired labour. These occupiers would be in general the more comfortable section of the farming community. These would approximate to those holding over fifteen acres counted one hundred years later. In addition, the 1831 census returned 564,000 occupiers who employed no labour and 567,000 agricultural labourers. A few years later the Poor Law Commission regarded both those categories alike and lumped them together. (14) There was a difference - whereas the half a million labourers were destitute and had nothing, many of the small holders had the security of the farm, so they were not totally destitute. The gap between the social classes in Ireland was very noticeable to visitors to this country who while commenting on the beauty of the countryside noticed the abysmal living conditions of the very poor. These visitors also gave good accounts of life in Ireland. Young tells us that ploughing in Carlow was better with four horses than with four oxen which would plough less than half an acre a day. He also mentions an important fact that around Carlow the hiring tenant was the occupier. (15)

In 1835 a French nobleman, Alexis de Tocqueville toured Ireland extensively and commenting on the appearance of the country from Dublin to Carlow stated that the country was pretty, land very fertile with some beautiful parks from time to time. Most of the dwellings very poor looking - a large number of them wretched - of those occupying these dwellings he said, "many wore clothes with holes or were much patched and went bare headed and bare foot". (16) While in Carlow he met and dined with the local Bishop (R.C.) Edward Nolan and discussed the state of Ireland. In the Bishops opinion poverty was increasing ..... "the population was increasing rapidly and the means of employing it were decreasing". He believed the adoption of "Poor Laws" indispensable. (17) Another traveller



in Ireland was the retired M.P J.C. Curwen Esq., who wrote a very descriptive account on the poor in Ireland. He travelling the Carlow area in September 1813 and while commenting on the rich land around Carlow he described living conditions in a cottiers cabin in neighbouring County Kildare as miserable. The food was potatoes. (18)

Earlier, Edward Wakefield travelled Ireland and his description of Carlow was of a very neat town abounding with houses of entertainment for every shop almost has attached to it a house which is used as an inn. (19) He does not mention any poverty in the town but of the country part of Carlow he says "in this county there is very little of that minute division so injurious to other parts of Ireland. It has neither a temporal or spiritual peer resident in it.....

it is tenanted by more wealthy people than any other county in Ireland. Of late leases granted for twenty one years and one life - formerly they ran for thirty one years and three lives - this was considered a bad method by landowners - land let to a tenant is subdivided among his children and by them among their children so that at the end of a lease there are twenty tenants instead of one. (20) The growing of potatoes was widespread around the area as he also noted that the potatoes grown on the Carlow side of the river Barrow were of a superior quality and that the planting system was the lazy bed system on old worn out ploughed land which was the best for the growth of the crop. (21) Between Wakefield's visit 1809 and the 1830's some changes must have taken place as the number of small holding tenants increased. Indeed pre famine figures suggest that in Carlow more than one quarter of all persons holding land held less than one statute acre. This was true of neighbouring Counties Kildare and Laois also. (22) After 1829 and the Catholic Emancipation Act; it didn't suit landlords either financially or politically to have too many tenants so some large scale clearances took place in the 1830's. Somerville mentions that awful havoc was made among the small tenantry some years earlier in getting them cleared away to make large farms and to substitute a Protestant tenantry for a Catholic one. (23) This division on religious grounds was a result of the foundation of the Orange Order in 1795 and the 1798 Rebellion and this sectarian division was sometimes perpetuated and popularised by bitter electoral conflicts in the early 19th century between "Liberal and Ascendancy" landlords. While many of the Ascendancy gentry had been strongly opposed to the Union with Britain, the Emancipation Act 1829 caused landlords to become more conservative and by the time of the Repeal Movement of the 1840's the division had become political as well as religious. The social prestige of the gentry remained in high standing however. (24)

County Carlow in the 1830's suffered considerably from evictions by landlords and Fr. James Maher P.P. Carlow wrote public letters condemning these actions. In one of his letters he mentions one townland - Slyguff and points to the fact that five families whom he names, were evicted which meant that twenty two people were left homeless with nowhere to go, "What will become of these poor creatures", he asks, "when thrown upon a county where

there is no provision made even for the poorest of poverty's children?". Having been evicted some of those lived in the ditches where they lived for months in misery which was impossible to describe. Others took to begging to eke out a wretched existence. (25) The phenomenal growth in population from the 1780's up to the 1840's was reflected in the western parts of the country more than the eastern part - the average density per square mile for the counties Wicklow, Wexford, Carlow, Kilkenny and Queens i.e. Laois was two hundred and twenty one in 1841 - this figure was much lower than that general in the country, but the proportion of population in towns and villages in these counties was relatively high for rural Ireland. (26) Town growth was very rapid in the period 1793 - 1815, the major expansion of Irish towns and urban building was crowded into the years between 1793 - 1815. (27)

Carlow town in 1806 was estimated at having a population of 6,575 with types of houses numbered thus, slated houses 608, thatched houses 769. The thatched houses were of small type and were inhabited by people relieved during the hardship in 1800 which was also a year of scarcity. (28) The population of Carlow Town was given as 9,597 in 1831, an increase of 3,022 i.e. an increase of forty six percent over the estimated 1806 figure. (29) Towns, because of the pace of urbanisation were becoming increasingly more important. They were also developing along specifically urban lines. The relationship between town and country was also changing. (30) Before the mid 1840's the relationship had often been personal and direct, many towns having almost a third of their population engaged in agriculture. (31) Because of the seasonal nature of agricultural work it meant large numbers were unemployed at slack times of the year. As a result there was the depressing feature of large numbers of paupers who were underemployed walking the streets of the towns. Most of the large towns had "squatted suburbs" full of mud huts of cottiers gambling on conacre potato plots. (32) Industrialisation in England was having its effect also on towns. The increasing penetration of mass-produced goods significantly altered employment opportunities in skilled artisan occupations. This resulted in prosperity for shopkeepers. Before the famine many shops were doing little trade and seemed too big for trade carried on there - and Thackeray commented on the poor state of shops in Carlow. (33)

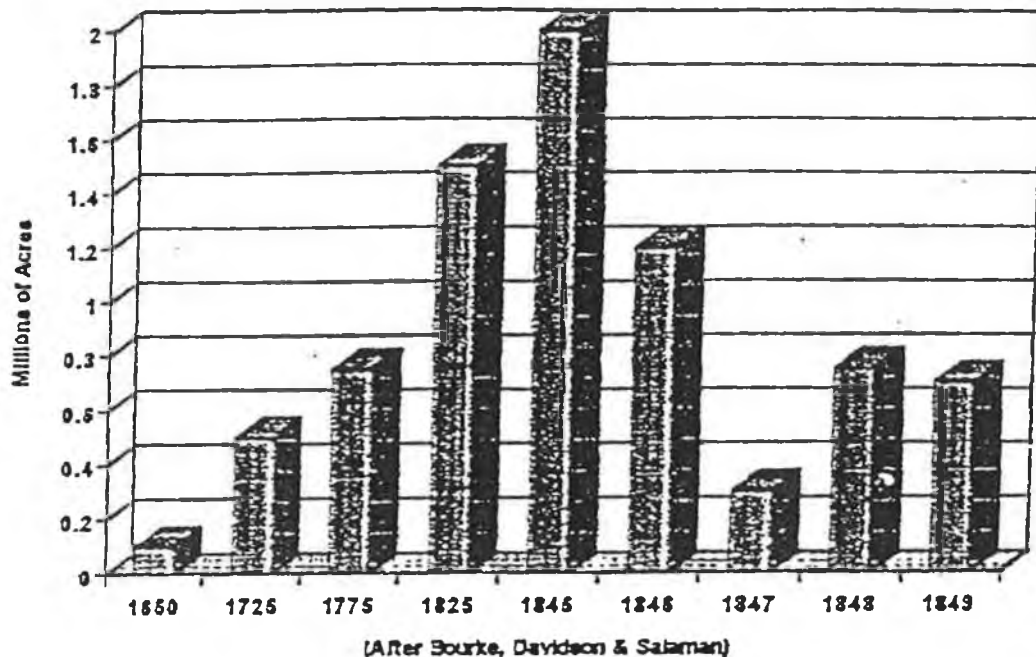
The increasing population, particularly among the poorest sections of the community did not go unnoticed among many influential people. James Doyle, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin who lived in Carlow wrote many letters on the state of the nation and particularly about the increasing numbers of destitute poor in the country. These letters were published in 1825 and in them he mentioned the large number of cabins and houses which had been built around the countryside and commented also on the increase congregations attending Catholic churches. He stated that those two facts pointed to an increasing population which he estimated at the time to be about seven millions. Doctor Doyle was not favourably disposed to the potato as being the main diet of the poor as he saw that as a result a man felt he could set up home by having a potato plot. (34)

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- (13) IBID page 22
- (14) Cullen, L.M. *"An Economic History of Ireland Since the Famine"* Dublin 1962 page 110
- (15) Young, Arthur *"A Tour in Ireland - Volume *ii* 1776 - 1779"* Dublin 1970 page 29
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- (17) IBID page 40
- (18) Curwen, J.C. *"Observations on the State of Ireland 1818"* page 97
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- (21) IBID page 324
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- (27) Cullen, L.M. *"An Economic History of Ireland Since the Famine"*. London 1962 page 101
- (28) Wakefield, Edward *"An Account of Ireland Statistical and Political 1812"* Volume *ii* page 598
- (29) Census of Ireland 1831
- (30) Hoppen, K. Theodore, *"National Politics and Local Realities in Mid 19th Century Ireland"*
- (31) Cullen, L.M. *"An Economic History of Ireland Since the Famine"*. London 1962 page 141
- (32) Nicholls, George, *"A History of the Irish Poor Law"* London 1866. pages 133/134
- (33) Thackeray, W.M. *"The Irish Sketch Book"* page 37
- (34) J.K.L. *"Letters on State of Ireland, addressed by J.K.L. to a friend in England"*. Dublin 1825. page 107

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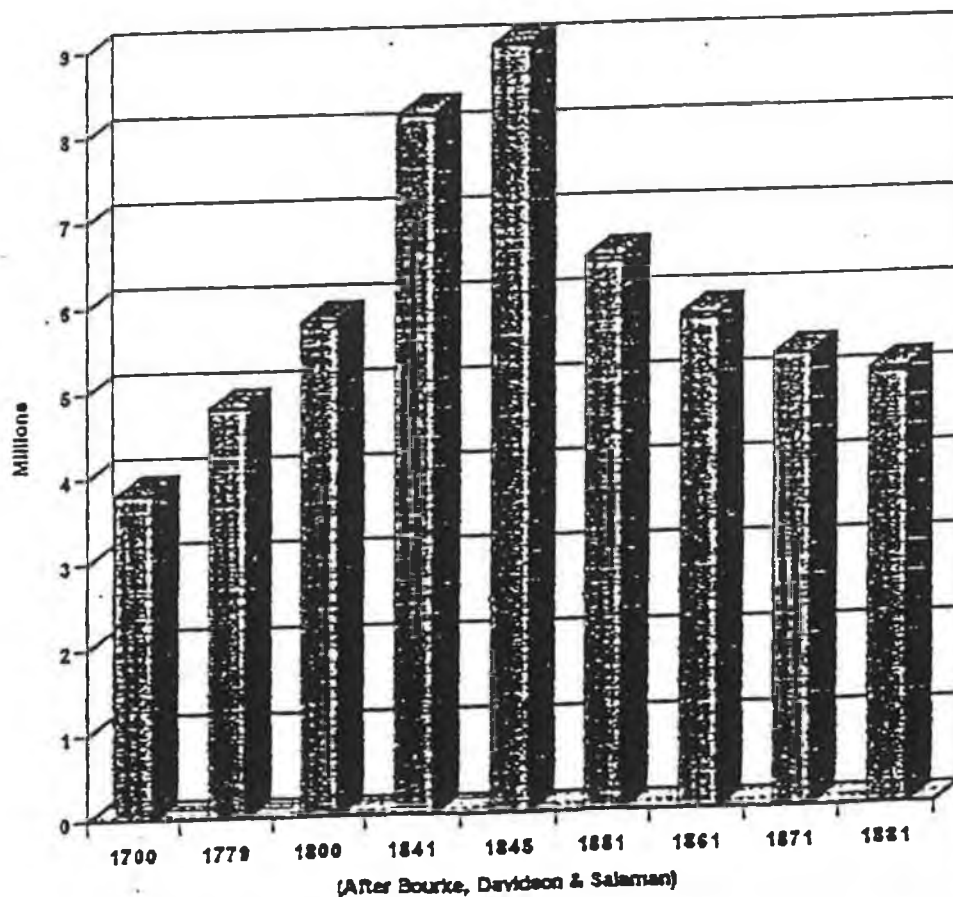
THE FOLLOWING GRAPH SHOWS THE GROWTH AND DECLINE OF THE POTATO ACREAGE IN IRELAND. NOTE: 1845 - 1847.

POTATO ACREAGE IN IRELAND 1650-1849



2ND GRAPH SHOW THE PHEOMENAL GROWTH OF POPULATION 1700 - 1845 WITH CONSEQUENT DECLINE THEREAFTER DUE TO FAMINE AND EMIGRATION.

IRISH POPULATION CHANGES 1700-1881



## CHAPTER TWO.

### THE INTRODUCTION OF THE POOR LAW TO IRELAND.

While poor laws had existed in England since Elizabethan times, there were no national Poor Laws in Ireland to help the poor in this country until the 19th century. The "Acte for the Reliefe of the Poore", of 1598 and the subsequent act of 1601 were consolidating acts which streamlined the earlier Elizabethan poor laws. (35) Under these laws each parish was charged with the responsibility to provide for its poor. This was usually done through organising a system of outdoor relief which was administered by the justices of the peace in each parish. It had the effect of cutting down on the wandering beggars. The fact that these laws were never extended to Ireland meant that there were no constraints on the movements of the poor and destitute and so while numbers of these classes remained locally in their own areas, quite a number moved from place to place begging.

Ireland, since 1801 had been part of the United Kingdom. Economically it should have represented a great advantage to Ireland but while the total income of Ireland did rise in the period from the Union to the Famine the benefits from this were unevenly spread and the poorest third of the population probably grew more impoverished. (36) The general perception of Ireland was that of a poor backward country and now that Ireland was a new partner in the Union much greater interest was being taken in her affairs. Various investigations were taken in the early decades into the state of Ireland as it was not in the interests of the British Government to allow the condition of this country to deteriorate. The investigations made included the various census taken every ten years from 1821 onwards and quite an amount of information was gleaned from them. Most of the information confirmed that there was a lot wrong in many aspects with the country. Most of the enquiries and investigations into the condition of Ireland in the early 19th century concerned poverty, the system of land-holding, the size of population and the backwardness of its agricultural sector, especially the continuing dependence on potatoes. (37)

The British Government was concerned with poverty and how to alleviate it not alone in Ireland but within the United Kingdom. Unfortunately how it reacted to poverty was determined by the thinking and theories of the leading economists of the day. These were generally followers of Adam Smith. Adam Smith was regarded as the leading expert in this

area. His philosophy - first published in 1776 - was a belief in a free market i.e. keep government intervention to a minimum and the wealth of a nation will increase if the market is kept free. He also believed that this principle should be adopted between government and individuals in society, thus encouraging self-help and individualism. (38) The fast growing population of Ireland in the early 1800's drew much attention which concentrated on the increasing poverty in the country. This caused opinion in Britain to conclude that as Ireland was becoming more impoverished, so did it become a potential liability to the Union. Thomas Malthus was a follower of Adam Smith's theories. He believed that state intervention in the realm of poor relief was dangerous and to give poor relief would encourage the poor to breed copiously. State intervention in the relief of poverty was in his opinion both futile and counter productive. (39) Government members in Britain appeared to be very much influenced by the Malthusian ideas. However, various events caused the government to re-assess the question of poverty and thus it became generally accepted that the whole system of poor relief needed to be reformed. (40) As a result a commission was set up to examine poverty and to examine which were the methods to be employed in alleviating it without costing the rate-payers any extra expense. Their attitudes were more tuned into how to contain poverty than how to alleviate it. (41)

The Irish Parliament had passed several acts to deal with poverty throughout the 18th century. These included enabling the erection of a workhouse and foundling hospital in Dublin in 1703 and later in 1771 making provision for the establishment of a house of industry in each county in Ireland. However, as was reported in 1804, as these were to be funded from private contributions and grand jury monies only a few counties had undertaken their setting up. As a result the Dublin House of Industry was catering for the poor from all over the country. (42) The foundling Hospital in Dublin also catered for children from all over the country. Children from the Carlow area were brought there - there is reference to monies being raised by the vestry of St. Mary's Church of Ireland parish in Carlow for that account. On the 16th April 1811 a note in the Vestry Book says "That the sum of five pounds be raised for bringing children to the Foundling hospital to be accounted for". The same sum is again mentioned for the same purpose at the Annual meeting's of the Vestry for 30th March 1812, and 20th April 1813. More money was made available to look after the poor of Carlow on 4th April 1821. In April 1827 thirty pounds was set aside for "coffins for the indigent poor" and twenty pounds for bringing children to the Foundling hospital. The Protestant Parish of St. Mary's in Carlow was involved in trying to look after the poor of the area and on 4th April 1836, "we appoint the present church wardens - John R. Griffin - overseers to take up and provide for deserted children of the parish.... resolved forty six

pounds, three shillings and one penny to be raised for the support and maintenance of deserted children". (43) Circumstances were much different in the Catholic Parish - the majority of its members were among the poorer classes; Emancipation was passed in 1829 and the penal laws although not enforced for some time past were lifted. Some wealthy Catholic merchants personally gave alms to the poor but there was no church fund for those seeking help. Before 1838, the poor in Ireland were helped almost totally by private charity except in times of extraordinary shortages when there was a combination of both local and central involvement. In 1800 a year of extreme hardship the poor of Carlow were helped to public subscription. (44) Many instances of private contributions to charity are recorded among them Benjamin D'Israeli, uncle of his famous namesake, who as property owner of Beechy Park, Rathvilly, Co. Carlow left in his will of 1814 £1,000 for the building of a school, a £2,000 trust fund to pay a teacher "for the education of the poor children of Rathvilly". He also left £500 to be invested in Government Securities and the interest to be used every Christmas Eve for the purchase of provisions for the poor of the parish. (45)

After the Act of Union, the Westminster Government became more involved in the issue of Poor Relief in Ireland. In the years 1819, 1823 and 1829 where there were crop failures select committees were appointed to examine the question as to how poverty should be relieved in Ireland. By the 1830's it was agreed in official quarters that state intervention was necessary in the area of poor relief in Ireland. The general opinion was that Irish landlords had failed in their duty to the Irish poor. (46) Prior to 1838 the state had given some form of relief to the unemployed through Public Works Schemes in times of severe hardship. The Irish Parliament in the 18th century instituted development in transport with the opening of the canals and the building of roads. The Carlow area was well served by improvements carried out on the Barrow Navigation in the 1750's from which coal was transported from Leighlinbridge down the Barrow to St. Mullins. (47) In 1829 a new turnpike road from Dublin through Blessington and Baitinglass to Carlow was built together with the other road to Dublin i.e., Kilcullen - Naas. (48) - (Appendix - Maps 1 & 2)

On the 25th September 1833, the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the conditions of the poorer classes in Ireland was set up. Its chairman was Richard Whately, the Church of

Ireland Archbishop of Dublin. The commission, which became known as the Whately Commission, had ten other members who included the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Archbishop D. Murray; three English Poor-Law experts; Bicheno; Wrightson and Corrie; three Irish country gentlemen, More O'Farrell, Naper and Hort; Charles Vignoles a Scottish churchman and educationalist, a young Catholic Whig, Lord Killeen and Anthony Blake. (49) A man of national standing who had written many letters to the Government over the years about poverty and who was held in high esteem in political circles but not nominated to the commission was Bishop James W. Doyle of Kildare and Leighlin. At the time of the setting up of the commission he was suffering from a very serious illness from which he died in June 1834. The "Whately Commission's" brief was "to enquire into the condition of the poorer classes of our subjects in Ireland and into the various institutions at present established by law for their relief, and also, whether any and what further remedial measures appear to be requisite to ameliorate the conditions of the Irish Poor". (50) The Commissioners took three years to complete their work in the course of which 1,590 persons were interviewed. It was the most extensive survey on poverty ever undertaken in either Britain or Ireland. Their findings were presented in three reports. These reports presented a picture of Irish poverty much more bleak than the British Government had anticipated. They estimated that the number of persons out of work and in need of assistance for thirty weeks of each year to be not less than 2,385,000, approximately thirty percent of the population. (51) Under Whately's leadership the Irish Commission interpreted their brief broadly as "endeavouring to prevent destitution" rather than devising "means for alleviating misery after it had arisen. (52)

As well as trying to analyse the causes of poverty and assessing the levels of destitution amongst the population, they reported on the charitable institutions already in existence in some of the principal towns of Ireland. Their second report set out to examine the charitable institutions currently operating for the relief of the poor including lunatic asylums, fever hospitals and so on and the third was concerned with measures for improving the economy and therefore the employment and living conditions of the poor. The basic theme of the Commission's report was a rejection of the proposal to introduce the English workhouse system to Ireland. From all their research and inquiries over the three years it was apparent to them that what Ireland needed was economic development. This would necessitate Government funding for public works such as road building, bringing waste land into production and improving the agricultural industry. Also, there should be assistance given to



help people to emigrate, i.e. to the colonies, not to Britain. (53) Among the many matters the Commission inquired into were the extent of illegitimacy, the position of orphans and of the unmarried mother and her child. The large amount of material collected provides us with a valuable picture of these aspects of Irish Poverty. The pattern of illegitimate births shows that in Catholic areas, illegitimacy was not prevalent. The Commissioners noted "the infrequency of bastardy..... is truly surprising". This concurs with J.K.L. who stated in 1825 that "illicit intercourse ..... is restrained". (54) Tullow, which was to be part of the Carlow Poor Law Union, was probably the most notable exception to the general pattern in the Southern part of the country. The Commissioners summary of the evidence given in that parish noted, "Mr. Germain knew one woman who had five children by five different fathers; Capt., Carter of four children by four different fathers and the Rev. Mr. Nolan knew ten women having three or four children each by different fathers". The Tullow area was an exception to the general trend around the country except the North-Eastern Ulster counties of Armagh, Down, Derry and Tyrone where it was reported "the number of bastard children is very considerable. (55)

When one considers the depth of inquiry into the conditions of the Poor in Ireland which the Commissioner's went to - examining many aspects of life e.g. (a) able-bodied out of work; (b) deserted and orphaned children; (c) bastardy; (d) widows with children; (e) impotent through age etc. it is amazing that those in authority disregarded the Report and showed so little enthusiasm for taking up any of its recommendations while political economists agreed with the section of the report which stated that the government should not grant a "right" to relief to the poor in Ireland, two main points in the Commissioner's recommendations were instrumental in turning opinion against it. i.e. the proposals for large financial support for both public works and assisted emigration. (56) The Government called upon some leading economists to examine the report and comment upon it. Naturally the large scale financial investment necessary to implement the Report was the major deterrent. It was not the political philosophy of the time for government involvement on such a scale to be agreed to. Accordingly some of these economists like Nassau Senior in condemning it regarded poverty as the fault of the individual and believed it was not the duty of the government to alleviate it. (57)

The reaction of the government was to set up a new investigation. As they themselves were of the opinion that a poor law for Ireland on the lines of the English poor law was suitable, George Nicholls a commissioner of the English poor law was sent to Ireland. He was regarded as a dependable representative to evaluate the situation here. Nicholls was a

former workhouse master and known advocate of the workhouse system which was that support at the public expense in a workhouse should always be less desirable to the destitute than the support to be obtained by employment. He completed his first report in November 1836. Not surprisingly he recommended the workhouse system for Ireland. It was almost a foregone conclusion as even before he set foot in Ireland he stated that he was convinced that the English Law would be as effective with the Irish as it would be with the English poor. (58). While Nicholls was on his tour of Ireland Archbishop Whately, in a letter to Nassau Senior foretold what the conclusion of the visit would be ".....who is gone on a tour through Ireland, to form the conclusion that workhouses on a similar plan to those of England will be a safe and effective remedy for the distresses of Ireland"....."I only foretell that he will come back with that conclusion because he took it out with him". (59) Nicholls, while not gathering information himself on the extent of poverty in Ireland selectively used the evidence collected by the now defunct Commissioner's of inquiry..... he was scathing in his remarks on the living standards of the poor..... "they do not strive to improve their appearance or add to their comforts" and his attitude to beggars was even more severe. (60) Nicholls therefore regarded the function of a Poor Law as being only to relieve persons who were really destitute and he figured that only about one percent of the population fell into this category. In his opinion if the workhouse system was introduced it would bring about the changes which the government desired - not alone would the system solve the immediate problem of destitution, but it would also help Ireland through the "transition" period when Ireland would change from being a country of small holdings, low productivity and absentee landlords to one in which the holdings would be consolidated, the labourers would become wage earners and men of capital and energy would take an interest in their estates. (61) Nicholls revisited Ireland in 1837 and admitted that poverty here was much more extensive than he realised during his first visit. While admitting that the introduction of a Workhouse System would now be much more difficult to introduce he remained convinced that a Poor Law System akin to the English one could and would succeed provided it was strictly administered. To ensure this would be the case each district should be made responsible for the maintenance of its poor. Nicholl's policy and subsequently British Government policy was that ultimately it was the responsibility of the wealthy and landed interests in Ireland to look after the financing and distribution of any relief in their own districts. (62)

Nicholls felt that the workhouse system would work in Ireland as the Irish would seek out any type of employment rather than face the rigorous discipline and restrictions of a workhouse. It was also his opinion that the workhouse would be the last resort for the Irish poor and so therefore he advocated that as in England relief should be restricted to the workhouse and

destitution alone should qualify for relief. That Nicholls during his inquiry always had the cost factor in mind is borne out by his estimates of various costings e.g. he estimated that about one hundred workhouses would be needed, costing around seven thousand pounds each. These calculations were based on the cost of the English workhouses. The money to build these workhouses would come from a government loan "requiring an instalment of five percent of the principal to be paid off annually out of the rates". (63) He also estimated the cost of keeping an inmate for a week in the workhouse and other costings. He recommended that the workhouses should be able to hold about one percent of the population which he estimated at around eight million people I.E. one hundred workhouses, each capable of holding eight hundred inmates. (64)

On 9th April 1838, "An Acte for the more Effective Relief of the Destitute Poor in Ireland" was passed by a large majority in the House of Commons. This act rejected the recommendations of the Whately Commission and vindicated Nicholls. When the Act became law in July 1838 it became known by a shorter name than the official one - the Irish Poor Law 1838 or the Poor Relief (Ireland) act 1838. Nicholls was appointed to implement the Poor Law in Ireland along with four assistants, one in Belfast, one in Cork, one in Limerick and one in Dublin. (65) Since the workhouse was to be the central important factor under the new law it was of great importance that they be built as quickly as possible. Ireland was divided into one hundred and thirty new administrative units known as "Unions". Each union was made up of a number of electoral divisions made up of a number of townlands. These unions varied in size with those in the west covering larger areas. Each union was to have a workhouse centrally situated near to a market town. These were to provide for the destitute poor in the union. A Board of Guardians comprised of elected and "ex officio" local men were to administer the Poor Law and they had to levy a compulsory rate in the Union to finance the administration of the Poor Law. The other duties of the Board of Guardians as set out in the "Regulations for Proceedings of Guardians" were:

- (i) to relieve and set to work within the workhouse all the destitute poor within;
- (ii) to govern and manage the workhouse - to be responsible for the upkeep of the workhouse and for expenditure on the relief of the poor. (66)

The granting of relief was at the discretion of the Guardians and therefore no poor person, however destitute, could be held to have statutory right to relief. Only in the workhouse could relief be given and preference was to be given to the aged, the infirm, the defective, children and people resident in the Union and to which the workhouse belonged. The overall control

in implementing the provisions of the Act was in the hands of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales. This authority was based in London. They were to issue orders for the guidance and control of Guardians and Union officers. They could not, however, interfere in individual cases. (67) The architect appointed to superintend the building of the workhouses in Ireland was George Wilkinson, an Englishman who had designed several of the English workhouses. The style of building adopted for the workhouses whilst durable in quality, was of the cheapest description. They were built in limestone, a material handily available throughout Ireland and kept to the barest and minimum of comforts. Indeed they were never meant to be comfortable..... inside the workhouse no plaster was put on the walls or ceilings; they were whitewashed with limestone burnt specially on the site. The ground floors were more frequently earth than mortar as Wilkinson said that earthen floors were more adapted to the habits of people accustomed to walking barefooted on the common earth of their cabins. (68) The workhouses when built were little used before the Famine, very few were full and some were even empty for long periods. (69) It is also a fact that proportionally fewer paupers used the workhouses here in Ireland than did the paupers in England before 1845. (70)

- (35) Burke, Helen. *"The People and the Poor Law in 19th Century Ireland"* 1987 page 305  
(36) Kinealy, Christine. *"This Great Calamity-The Irish Famine 1845-52"* Dublin 1995 page 6  
(37) IBID page 7  
(38) Smith, A. *"An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations"* London 1976 page 540  
(39) Malthus, *"Essay on the Principle of Population"* Book 1  
(40) Kinealy, Christine, *"The Great Calamity-The Irish Famine 1845-52"* Dublin 1995 page 13  
(41) IBID page 14  
(42) O'Brien, George. *"An Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine"* page 165  
(43) St. Mary's Church of Ireland, Carlow (Vestry Book).....Dublin.  
(44) Wakefield, *"An Account of Ireland Statistical and Political"* Volume (ii) page 598  
(45) O'Toole, James. *"The Carlow Gentry"* Naas 1994  
(46) Kinealy, Christine. *"This Great Calamity-The Irish Famine 1845-52"* Dublin 1995 page 18  
(47) Cullen L.M. *"An Economic History of Ireland Since the Famine"* Dublin 1962 page 88  
(48) Freeman, T.W. *"Pre-Famine Ireland. A Study in Historical Geography"* 1957 page 193  
(49) Burke, Helen. *"The People and the Poor Law in 19th Century Ireland"* England 1987  
(50) *"First Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland with Appendices"* H.C. 1835. (369) xxiii Part 1 page 1  
(51) Burke, Helen. *"The People and the Poor Law in 19th Century Ireland"* England 1987  
Kinealy, Christine. *"This Great Calamity-The Irish Famine 1845-52"* Dublin 1995 page 18  
(52) Burke, Helen. *"The People and the Poor Law in 19th Century Ireland"* England 1987 page 19  
(53) J.K.L. *"Letters on the State of Ireland addressed by J.K.L. to a friend in England"* Dublin 1825 page 108  
(54) *"Poor Law Commission Enquiry Pt. 1. App. A pp 1-186"* H.C. 1835 (369) xxiii  
(55) *"Third Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland"*  
(56) Kinealy, Christine. *"This Great Calamity-The Irish Famine 1845-52"* Dublin 1995 page 19  
(57) IBID page 19  
(58) Russell to Nicholls *"Report by George Nicholls to His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department on Poor Laws"*. Ireland 1837. (69) Li pp 1-2  
(59) Whately, E.J. *"Life and Correspondence of Richard Whately D.D. Late Archbishop of Dublin"*. London 1866 Volume 1 pages 117-118

- (60) *"First Report of George Nicholls Esq., to His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Home Department on Poor Laws, Ireland"* London 1837. page 5
- (61) IBID pages 11-12
- (62) Kinealy, Christine. *"This Great Calamity-The Irish Famine 1845-52"* Dublin 1995 pages 22 & 40
- (63) O'Brien, Gerard. *"A Question of Attitude: Responses to the New Poor Law in Ireland and Scotland"* in *"Economy and Society in Ireland and Scotland 1500 - 1939"....* Edinburgh 1988 page 15
- (64) First Report of George Nicholls, *"op. cit."*, page 37
- (65) Burke, Helen. *"The People and the Poor Law"* page 47
- (66) O'Connell, S. *"The Development of the Home Assistance Service"* Administration Volume 17. No. 3 (Autumn 1969) page 15
- (67) Burke, Helen. *"The People and the Poor Law"* page 47
- (68) *"Sixth Annual Report P.L.C. App. D. No. 1" H.C. 1840 (235) xvii*
- (69) Kinealy, Christine. *"This Great Calamity-The Irish Famine 1845-52"* Dublin 1995 page 24
- (70) O'Grada, Cormac. *"The Great Irish Famine"* Gill & MacMillan 1989. page 31
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## CHAPTER THREE.

### THE SETTING UP OF THE WORKHOUSE IN THE CARLOW POOR LAW UNION.

Various travellers accounts of their journeys throughout Ireland in pre-famine times give vivid descriptions of the immense poverty to be seen around the country. It is worthy of note that there is little mention of this poverty when they visited Carlow. Indeed their accounts of Carlow describe the richness of the area. Curwen in 1813 wrote about the richness of the countryside from Leighlin to Carlow and mentioned the good well kept condition of the white washed cottages, something noted by the Halls also when describing the Milford area of Carlow which incidentally is situated about four miles from the town of Carlow on the way to Leighlin. Of the town Curwen stated that it was "a neat town of considerable extent and charmingly situated". (71) Earlier, Wakefield had passed practically the same comment ..... "a very neat town". (72) - (Appendix - Map 3). The Halls were lavish in their description of Carlow as one of the most fertile and best cultivated of the counties of Ireland and called it "the garden of Erin". According to them it was almost exclusively an agricultural county with soil most suitable for corn. They described the mill at Milford and its area ".....white washed cottages, new roads etc....", "cottages are exceedingly clean and well ordered" which stressed in the Halls' opinion the importance of resident landlords. (73)

Lewis in 1837 gave a description of Carlow town and its environs - "surrounded by a rich agricultural district and sheltered by some ranges of hills well cultivated to their summits..... it has an air of modern neatness". He went on to describe the trade with Dublin and other ports e.g. New Ross and Waterford and mentions corn and butter as the chief agricultural products. The butter was of a superior quality he says and was exported to the London market. (74) Wakefield in 1812 had also commented on the superior quality of the butter which he attributed to the great degree of cleanliness and attention in salting it. (75) However, the dairy system was disappearing in the Carlow area early in the 19th century. The yield of butter was one and a half cwts a cow and in Carlow dairies of twenty to fifty cows were the common size. Carlow butter was shipped by canal to Dublin where it was regarded as the best quality in Ireland. (76)

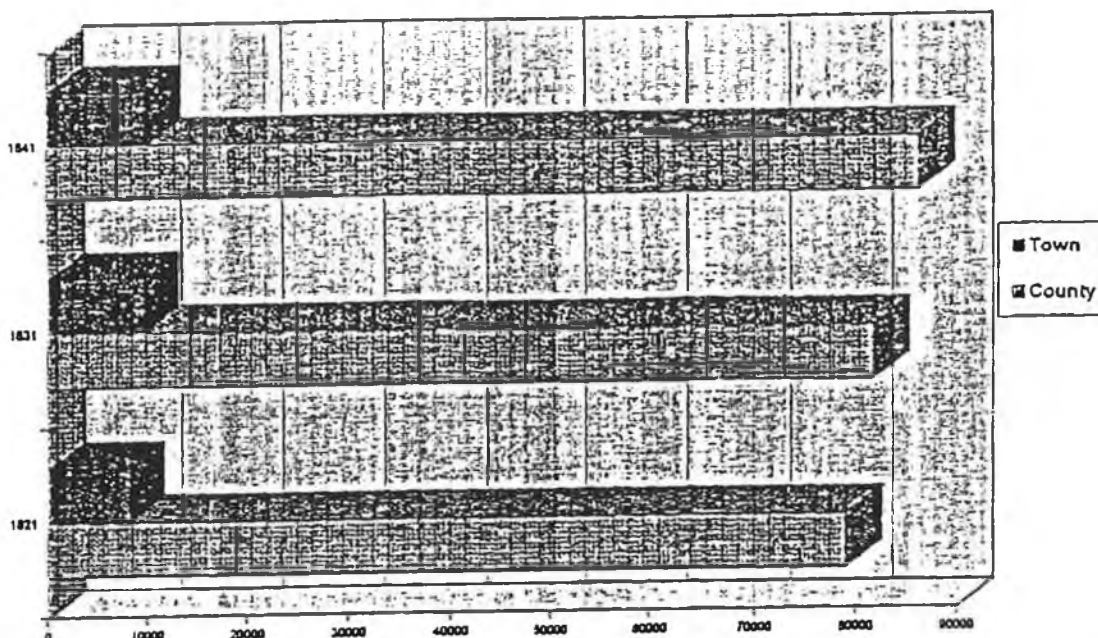
Why then was there a need for a workhouse in Carlow which by all accounts was a neat prosperous town. Perhaps the figures for the population growth of both town and country

may have the answer. In 1795 according to the Halls the population of County Carlow was around 44,000. This grew to 78,952 in 1821 an increase of seventy nine percent over the estimated 1795 figure. The figure of Halls i.e. 44,000 may have been very inaccurate based as they were on hearth tax returns. It is very difficult to arrive at any precise judgement on the degree of error present in the returns of the collectors of the hearth tax. The one certainty is that the errors were ones of deficiency rather than excess. Connell mentions many reasons for this deficiency e.g. laziness of the collectors, their desire to embezzle, the isolated nature of much of the country in which they were working and the opposition of the people with whom they were dealing. All these factors he says co-operated to make the number of hearths they returned less than the real number.(77) Between 1821 and 1831 the population of the county grew yet again to 81,649 but this only reflects slightly over three percent of an increase on the 1821 census figure. The 1841 census figure for the county of 86,226 show an increase of just five and a half percent. These figures show that after 1821 the rate of population growth had come back to modest increases. The same holds true of Carlow Town. Using Wakefields figures for 1806 and the various census returns from 1821, 1831 and 1841 we find the population of Carlow town growing from 6,578 in 1806 to 8,126 in 1821 i.e. an increase of twenty four percent. In 1831 the figures given are 9,597 an increase of eighteen percent. Between 1831 and 1841 however the rate of population growth in the town was a mere three percent the population figure being recorded at 9,901.

POPULATION TRENDS OF CARLOW TOWN AND COUNTY.

Sheet1 Chart 1

Population Trend



Obviously from the figures shown the greatest increases in the populations of town and county took place up to 1821. Connell mentions that town growth was very rapid in the period 1793 - 1815 with the major expansion of Irish towns and urban building taking place between those years. Population increases became more or less normalised after that. (78)

What was quite noticeable in the towns around this time was the amount of poor beggars - vagrants who were dependent on begging for their existence. In some towns paupers thronged the streets "part of that band of chronically underemployed which was so depressing a feature of pre-famine Ireland". (79) Carlow was no different from the other towns so there were large number of paupers around the town. Some of those were homeless due to the large scale clearance by some landlords of their tenants during the 1830's. Somerville mentioned that awful havoc was made among the small tenantry some years earlier in clearing them away to make large farms and to substitute a protestant tenantry for a catholic one. He also stated that Carlow Town was a protestant stronghold of protestants - the political protestants. (80) In February 1840 the "Carlow Sentinel" in an attack on Daniel O'Connell stated in a reference to church gate collections for him that he was taking pence into his pocket from a "starving and shivering population" when this money should be feeding the paupers and homeless who were wandering about in the snow. Because of the homeless and unemployed increasing around the area over the years Carlow was also in need of some form of relief for these people so the Poor Law of 1838 which divided the country into areas called Unions created the Poor Law Union of Carlow with the town as the centre where the workhouse was to be situated. (81)

During 1840 various notices appeared in the Carlow Sentinel from individuals seeking the job of valuator for the Union. Other information given was the area of the Union, 179,700 statute acres and a notice appeared on 20th February 1840 seeking a complete valuation of all rateable property. In October 1840 at a meeting of magistrates for the election of ten ex-officio Guardians the following were elected:

**Sir Thomas Butler Bart.,  
Robert L. Browne.  
Henry Faulkener.  
William Fishbourne.  
Pilaworth Whelan.**

**Henry Bruen.  
James Hardy Eustace.  
James Butler.  
Harman H. Cooper.  
William Duckett Esq.,**



Fr. James Maher Catholic Parish Priest of Graigue on the West bank of the Barrow side of Carlow town argued very strongly against protestants holding office under the Poor Law. He said only Catholics should be in charge as "Protestants can have no sympathy with the poor". ( 82) Fr. Maher was a priest who worked tirelessly on behalf of the poor and had been a severe outspoken critic of the lack of government aid for the poor over the years. The Carlow Union Workhouse was set up in 1840 and it opened on 18th November 1844. Its administrative area comprised of fourteen electoral divisions, there were thirty elected representatives and ten ex-officio guardians, ten J.P.'s were named as board of guardians of the workhouse.

At an earlier meeting of the Poor Law Guardians held on 24th May 1840 the following members attended with Sir. Thomas Butler as Chairman; William Fishbourne, William Butler, Thomas Singleton, Henry Newton, Joseph Fishbourne, Henry Carey, Sam Haughton, A. Fitzmaurice, John Hanlon, P. Kehoe and Robert Farrell. Transactions of the last meeting were read and it was announced that the title to the site for the Workhouse was established and a sum of one thousand pounds was paid for seven acres, two roods, nineteen perches. (Lady Julia Bailey was landlord of Workhouse and lands attached in 1866). The members of the Board were informed that the erection of the Workhouse would cost £9,000 and that a clerk of Works had to be appointed by the Commissioners at two guineas a week. Mr. George Wilkinson was the architect for all the Poor Law Unions in Ireland. At the monthly meeting 8th November 1840 a report was laid before the Board of Guardians that portion of the building in process of erection in front of the Workhouse was built with rubble instead of cut stone as was generally understood to be used at the beginning of the week. As a result of this complaint a committee of five was elected to inspect the building and report to the Commissioners - Messrs. Duckett, Faulkner, Haughton, Fishbourne and Carey. They inspected the building and expressed their deep disappointment that the contractor had not "executed the work in the manner proposed by the Guardians".

The Probationary house was being built with rubble stone and was so placed as to shut out the view of the "cut stone" in the main building from the public road. Mr. Robinson the contractor seemed to act as he thought fit and the Board had no control of the disposal of public money. The construction of the Carlow Union Workhouse seemed to cause trouble all along as the "Carlow Sentinel" wrote in its leading article on 6th July 1844, that there were objections to some of the internal details which had to be remedied before the Guardians could take possession. The "Sentinel" complimented the work done by Mr. Graham

compared with the report on the other work. The result was that on July 22nd a committee was appointed to inspect "Carlow Poor House" and report to the Board of Guardians. Their report was critical of the work of the builders e.g. the flagging of the main hall and other parts of the building was very bad and the tiles on the roof were of inferior quality and not according to specification. Other defects such as flooring of dormitories, the furniture of the aged and female wards, schoolrooms and other parts of the house were badly finished and by no means were they up to the standard of original specifications. The sewage and water system arrangements were described as dreadful. The various repairs carried out were haphazard as the Workhouse had at this stage opened and had over two hundred inmates from April 1845 rising gradually during the rest of that year.

- (71) Curwen, *"Observations on the State of Ireland"* Volume 1 page 73
- (72) Wakefield, Edward. *"An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political"* London 1812 Volume 1 page 39
- (73) Hall, Mr. & Mrs. S.C. *"Ireland, It's Scenery Character etc"* London 1840 page 404
- (74) Lewis, *"Topographical Dictionary of Ireland"* London 1837 page 261
- (75) Wakerfield, Edward. *"An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political"* London 1812 Volume 1 page 324
- (76) *"Report from H.M. Commissioners of Enquiry.... in respect to the occupation of Land in Ireland"* page 484 H.C. 1845 (605) xix 546
- (77) Connell, K.H. *"Population of Ireland 1750 - 1845"* Oxford 1960. page 8
- (78) IBID page 101
- (79) Hoppen, K. Theodore. *"National Politics and Local Realities in Mid 19th Century Ireland"*
- (80) Somerville, Alexander. *"Letters from Ireland during the Famine of 1847"*. Irish Academic Press. page 33
- (81) *"Carlow Sentinel"* 20th February 1840.
- (82) IBID. 17th October 1840.

## CHAPTER FOUR.

### THE FAMINE AND THE WORKHOUSE IN CARLOW.

The first existing Minute Book of the Carlow Poor Law Union covers from March 1845 to 10th January 1846. Early in 1845 there was no idea that the potato crop was to be severely diseased over the next number of years so in pre-famine times it is interesting to note the numbers who were in the workhouse. On 5th April 1845 there were 247 people in the workhouse with 36 of those in the hospital attached to the Union. These 247 people were obviously regarded as the "deserving poor". Comprising that 247 were: 54 adult males; 82 adult females; 48 boys under 15; 47 girls under 15 and 16 children under 2. Watching these figures of April 1845 and keeping an eye on them as they move through the year it is important to remember that the cause of the Famine of the 1840's i.e. the potato blight - did not make its appearance in County Carlow until September of that year and that the constabulary reported the general crop to be good and not as badly affected as in other countries.

Bearing in mind that April 1845 was not really a bad time and that this was the age of *laissez-faire* individualism, when poverty was not seen to have a social cause but was an outward manifestation of the failure of individuals to secure work and support themselves as a result of their own particular vices such as idleness, sloth or laziness. However, when individuals were destitute through illness or misfortune they were perceived in a new light as the "deserving poor". It was for this category of people that the workhouse was intended as it is most interesting to note that 247 were regarded as "deserving poor" in April 1847 in Carlow Union.

Most of the Boards minutes in Volume 1 of the Carlow Union were taken up discussing the rates of the Union. There were a number of problems. The main two seem to have been dishonest collectors and people unable to pay. These matters were discussed at length in a report commissioned to investigate the Rate books of the Carlow Union and to compare the Valuators Return with the Ordnance contents. Indeed the investigating committee discovered that in one instance an entire townland containing 380 acres, two roods and two

perches had been omitted altogether and in fact had not been rated upon the Books of the Carlow Union. As a result of this report of 3rd April 1845 a resolution was passed that "the Valuator do forthwith complete the valuation of the Poor Law Union as directed by the order of the Poor Law Commissioners dated 14th September 1840 by having the townland of Knockmore, Parish of Ballyellin, Barony of Idrone East added to the Borris Electoral Division and that the clerk intimate the same to Mr. Wilson - the valuator".

On page 50 Volume 1 the name of the rate collectors for the various electoral divisions are listed together with the amounts collected and the amounts outstanding for each division. The list is:

NAME OF COLLECTOR	NAME OF ELECTORAL DIVISION	COLLECTED	OUTSTANDING.
Matt Griffith	Carlow	£457.17.0	£16.1.4 1/2
Joseph Malone	Grangeforth	225.11.7	" .18.2
do	Tullow	268.7.7	5.19.6 1/4
John Moulton	Barragh	258.0.3	2.16.0 1/2
do	Myshall	161.11.6	0.18.8 1/2
John Cummins	Kiltennel	158.18.2	4.1.6 1/2
do	Borris	255.10.0	6.15.3 1/4
do	Bagenalstown	189.6.9	15.3.0 1/2
Martin Hughes	Idrone West	402.18.1	1.6.8 1/4
Matt Griffith	Kellystown	313.18.8	2.3.5 1/4
do	Fenagh and Nurney	311.16.11	2.12.0
Matt Farrell	Shrule	246.18.3 1/2	4.19.10 1/4
do	Graigue	198.7.0 1/2	3.8.1 3/4
do	Arles	164.3.5 1/2	5.3.1 3/4
<b>TOTALS:</b>		<b>£3,613.5.3</b>	<b>£72.16.11 1/4</b>

Further on in this Volume we find the striking of rates recorded in the minutes on pages 213 and 214. The workhouse was calculated to cater for a maximum of 800 persons. It never reached that figure until 1847. On 5th April 1845 there were 247 paupers in the Workhouse and the average cost of keeping a pauper per week was 1s 9d. (83) There was no great increase in intake into the Workhouse during 1845 - indeed by the 3rd January 1846 there were only 353 inmates there at an average cost per week of 1.9 1/2d. (84)

## THE LIST OF FOOD ORDERED FOR THE WEEK 5TH APRIL 1845 AT THE WORKHOUSE READ:

400 lbs white bread	@ 2d per lb.
300 lbs brown bread	@ 1 1/2 d per lb.
meat (unspecified amount)	@ 4 1/2 per lb.
buttermilk 1200 qts.,	@ 2 1/2 per gallon.
sweetmilk 800 qts	@ 6 1/2 per gallon.
salt 4 cwts	@ 1s 9d per cwt.
2 cwts soap	@ 25s per cwt.
20 barrells potatoes	@ 7s 4d per barrell.

The potato blight "*Phytophthora Infestans*" which earlier had made its appearance in North America and Europe made its first appearance in the South East counties of Ireland in early September 1845. In Ireland the late arrival of the disease and its irregular spread during 1845 meant that the loss in production was relatively small. The main loss was caused by the subsequent rotting of the tubers before and after harvest. Loss estimates were 40% due to rotting tubers but because of the exceptional yields of that year the shortfall in production was only between 25% and 30% that of normal. (85) The worst areas in the Carlow area were in the south of the county around Borris where up to 80% of the labourers were unemployed. (86)

In a letter to the Under Secretary., C.H. Tuckey R.M., Carlow on the 20th October 1845 wrote of the Baronies of Rathvilly and St. Mullins that the white potato grown in these districts had suffered most. Again on 28th October 1845 he wrote that in the vicinity of Carlow Town one third or one fourth of the crop was diseased, but near Tullow not more than one eighth of the crop was affected. However, the potato crop was more or less affected throughout the county. On 19th November 1845 Michael Donahoe farmer of Tullow Rock, County Carlow wrote to the Lord Lieutenant making suggestions as to how the disease might be counteracted.

Suggestion No 1 - wealthy and poor should unite to plough up their drills "in sheets" (a term known to all experienced farmers particularly those who do not intend to sow wheat). No 2 - Potatoes found to be decaying in pits. No 3 - The progress of the disease might be stopped by ploughing up the potatoes in sheets. No 4 - The ploughing should be done with two horses and a large swing 4 ft. 6 inches - it being the best method.

Michael Donohue again writing to the Lord Lieutenant on 7th November 1845 said that potatoes pitted by him within the last ten days were showing instances of rot. He was steadfast in his opinion as to ploughing drills in sheets for the purpose of saving seed for the next year. He also suggested to the Government that a piggery be established in each town and that cabbage be sown so that bacon and cabbage would be a substitute for potatoes. (87) By April 1846 most of the potatoes which had escaped the disease were eaten and distress became very severe among the unemployed labouring population. Early in June, Richard Pennefather, the under-secretary in Dublin Castle reported to Charles Trevelyan, Secretary to the Treasurer that aggravated distress existed in some parts of the country.(88) This phrase "aggravated distress" is interesting as the only two references to this period of Famine in the Carlow Union Minute Books are 21st May 1846 "The season of unparalleled distress" (89) and 15th July 1847 "during the existence of extreme distress in this country from the late awful visitation of providence". (90) Another interesting point regarding the Famine in Carlow is the complete lack of reference to "this season of unparalleled distress in the Journal of Thomas Edwards, emigration agent in Carlow 1840 - 47. One would expect some comment on the state of distress from a man in his position, particularly someone dealing with increased emigration during Famine times. (91)

Due to increasing shortage of potatoes the price of this crop started to rise drastically. A barrel of potatoes which cost around eight shillings in January 1846 was almost double that price a few months later in May. As most of the crop which had survived was eaten by April 1846 the labouring population was in great distress as they were now unemployed after the Spring work. Furthermore as only the Gentry paid wages and hiring farmers paid in kind the unemployed labourer was in great need. Normally he paid for his plot of land by his labours but now this plot of land was not productive so even his labours were not sustaining him - At his stage he needed a money wage but employers were either unwilling or unable to pay this regular wage. As a result of this state of affairs where the system of labourers payment for work was incapable of sustaining him and his dependants at this time the government decided to organise public works throughout the country. (92) These schemes were sanctioned at a general presentation session for the county on 5th May 1846. As the Government schemes did not come into operation immediately due to bureaucratic delays, local relief committees were trying to cater for the wants and needs of the poor during this period of need. On 29th May 1846 the Rev. J.B. Johnstone, Established Church Rector, Tullow, told the Chief Secretary's Office that there were in the Tullow Electoral area 250 men in need of employment. To give them two months work at 10d a day £500 would be

required. He further explained "The works presented for at the Special Sessions amounted to £230. Balance of Relief Fund on hand £180, in all £410 leaving a deficit of £90 for labour only. There are 400 individuals unable to work - of whom 50 might be admitted to the workhouse. What is to be done with the remaining 350?". (93) In reply the Relief Commission requested a list of local subscribers, promised to recommend a grant in aid, but pointed out that the plan of paying 10d a day in wages was "not so wise as paying for such labour in food, which, bought at a low rate will enable the fund to last much longer and yet satisfy the demands of actual want". The Tullow Committee forwarded a list showing subscriptions to the amount of £271.3s.0d. and stated that it had carefully considered the central body's suggestion on payment but that that "individuals could purchase more for one shilling than the committee could for 1s 3d". (94) By mid August 1846 over £700 in local subscriptions had been raised in county Carlow for the relief of distress and £500 received in aid from the Government. In Leinster only Westmeath, Kildare and Dublin had lower figures while those for the Queens County (Laois) were approximately twice as high with Kilkenny and Wexford many times worse off. (95)

The wants of the poor were catered for as far as possible in the interval before the commencement of the public works schemes by Local Relief Committees. These were organised among the clergy and gentry to collect subscriptions and to aid in every way possible those who needed assistance. Committees set up with the sanction of the lieutenant of the County Lord Duncannon received grants in aid of their subscriptions from the government. These were about two thirds of the amount subscribed. There were ten committees in County Carlow, of which five qualified for government assistance - Tullow, Bagenalstown, Hacketstown, Kiltennel and Borris. (96) Early in June 1846 the public works schemes were opened in almost every barony. These schemes dealt mainly with roadmaking i.e. the lowering of hills and the filling in of hollows. On the road from Leighlinbridge to Tullow £75 was spent on the lowering of three hills and at Ballon the road was built to avoid Ballon Hill at a cost of about £400. (97) Apparently these public works supplemented by the activities of the Relief Committee bridged the gap during the Summer until the harvest when the new crop was expected and although there was distress deaths by starvation appear to have been avoided. Obviously because of the scarcity of seed the previous Spring there was a shortage of food. Horace Rochfort a large land-owner of Clogrennane County Carlow supplied his tenants with seed potatoes the previous Spring but on the whole there were less potatoes sown in the County in 1846 than in normal years. (98)

Because of the scarcity of food there was a shortage of seed potatoes in Spring 1846. T.P. O'Neill has written about the suggestion that over - cultivation of the potato crop was the cause of the failure of 1845 and 1846 and tells of attempts to grow a blight-resistant tuber from the wild potato or potato-apple seed. He says that "the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Heytesbury offered £100 to the Royal Agricultural Improvement Society to be awarded to those who succeeded best"..... Br. Serenus Kelly of the Patrician Monastery in Tullow spent some time in the cultivation of these seeds. (99) In August 1846 it was stated that the potatoes in Carlow were considerably tainted and by the end of the month it was feared that the entire crop would be lost. (100) During 1846 it was most noticeable that something was very amiss as the numbers in the Carlow Workhouse kept increasing from 357 on 10th January 1846 to 840 on 26th December 1846 at an average weekly cost per pauper of 1s 3/4d on 10th January to just over 2s per pauper on 26th December 1846. (101) It is worth noting also the food bought in by the Workhouse Master on 10th January 1846 for 357 inmates:

700 lbs white bread	@	2d per lb.
200 lbs brown bread	@	1 1/2d per lb.
100 lbs meat.	@	4 1/4d per lb.
1200 qts. buttermilk	@	2 1/2d per gallon.
800 qts. sweetmilk	@	6 1/2d per gallon.
2 lbs tea	@	3/6d per lb.
1 stone sugar	@	5/10d per lb.
4 lbs pepper	@	1/= per lb.
16 barrells 3 stone potatoes	@	8/= per barrell.

The Board of Guardians were concerned for the welfare of the inmates of the workhouse as on the 24th January 1846 they complained that the coal supplied was of inferior quality and the contractor was told to improve it. It is noted also that the Board directed that "the usual dinner of meat be supplied to the paupers on Easter Day - one and a half pound to each adult and three quarters of a pound to each child. Also on 16th April 1846 the Master of the Workhouse was slightly reprimanded for the milk being of poor quality and questions were asked as to whether the diet of the inmates should be changed. (102) The rule whereby whole families must enter the workhouse together was not strictly enforced and there are various entries to be found in the Minute books of this relaxation of the rule. A married





woman Jane Gregory and her five children were admitted without her husband. A motion was proposed by Samuel Haughton Esq., and proposed by William Fitzmaurice Esq., "that she shall not be permitted without her husband or without satisfactorily proof being first given that he had deserted her - the woman having admitted that he wished her to have accompanied him to Dublin". An amendment to that resolution was passed "That the foregoing resolution is giving an unjust and uncandid notification to the answers of the applicant Jane Gregory who we consider as being in the position of a deserted married woman". Proposed by William R. Lecky Esq., Seconded by H. Walters Esq., (103) There are other instances where the Guardians threaten the law on individuals in breach of the Poor Law. James Kealy of Bagenalstown whose wife was an inmate of the Workhouse had notice served on him that unless he came in himself he would be prosecuted according to the 58' and 59' section of the Irish Poor Relief Act. (104) There is very little recording of inmates names in the Carlow Minute Books unless in instances as mentioned or where cases of misbehaviour occur. There is an instance of a pauper inmate of the workhouse Margaret Kane being questioned by the Board as she wished to change her religion from Roman Catholic to Protestant. The Guardians were most anxious to be impartial to all religions as they ordered in their minutes "that no person whatsoever shall be permitted to interfere with the religious instruction of the inmates of the house, except regular Ministers of religion as directed in the 49' section of the Act". (105) One pauper, Anne Murphy was brought before the Board on a charge of using insulting language to pauper Margaret Kane and for being generally disordered. She was sentenced to twelve hours confinement five hours one day and seven hours next day. Obviously she didn't improve in her conduct and was accused of disorderly conduct towards the officers of the workhouse at the next meeting of the Board and as a result was dismissed from the house. (106)

It was around this time also - January 1846 that the question of emigration as a relief from the distress was becoming an option and the Guardians of the Workhouse formed a committee to investigate which inmates would be suitable. (107) During the Summer of 1846 a change of government took place - the Whigs replacing the Tories. As no potatoes were available by December of that year it was proposed that the Government should establish food depots to supply food as was the case in the west of Ireland. The executive was not in favour but was being pressed by influential people throughout the county to recommence public works schemes. The parish priest of Clonegal, Fr. John Whelan wrote to the Chief Secretary warning him of riots unless some relief was given. The clergy and prominent gentlemen of Leighlinbridge requested the recommencement of public works. (108)

Gatherings of hungry people looking for work and food were reported from various parts of the county. The Whig government decided that relief should be given only by public works or through relief committees - the sick to get support through the committees, but the able-bodied would be required to work. A new Public Works Act was passed under which the total cost of the schemes was to be defrayed by local taxation. The Government would advance the money but it had to be repaid by each barony in yearly instalments. As a result of the Act presentment sessions were held in various parts of the county during October 1846. The distress papers of that time show that the new works were to be the same as those of the preceding Spring e.g. the building and repairing of roads. (109) Due to the centralisation of the system under the Treasury, there were, however, great delays in getting the schemes under way. These delays were causing severe hardship among the small farmers and labourers. Reports of individual cases of severe distress were common with examples of families calling on the gentry asking for food as they hadn't eaten for two days. In Ballon a family lived for a month on a few boiled turnips. After much bureaucratic delaying the works were started by Mid November. The Guardians of the New Ross, Wexford, Kilkenny and Carlow Unions jointly petitioned the Government to the effect that the relief being provided was insufficient. They also felt that the central administration of the relief policies was ineffective and criticised the fact that no provisions had been made for the old, the infirm or people with large families. (110) The landowners appealed against the exclusion of productive work from the government schemes and the Lord Lieutenant took upon himself the onus of allowing a less limited interpretation of the Act and so draining schemes were authorised. Under the public schemes lands of various large landowners were improved including the lands of the Lord Lieutenant himself near Myshall. Some of these landowners were members of the Board of Guardians. Quite often under the schemes the money provided was not sufficient to complete the work and labourers had to be let go until an additional sum was presented. As a result severe hardship was once again suffered by those in need. By the 6th March 1847, 3,005 persons were employed on the relief schemes in County Carlow and 734,792 were employed throughout the country. The average number of people employed daily on the Public Works in County Carlow from October 1846 - June 1847 was 1,414 - Carlow was among the lowest users of the scheme. (111)

Meanwhile during 1846 the number of paupers in the Workhouse in Carlow was rising steadily - perhaps the delays in organising schemes contributed to this also e.g. there were 517 on 11th April 1846. This figure rose to 645 on 14th November 1846 which shows an increase of almost 25%. Once again emigration is mentioned as an option for reducing

numbers but the first list of names of young women deemed suitable for help to emigrate was not recorded until 13th April 1848. These were orphans. The Board of Guardians directed the Master of the Workhouse to have 32 selected orphans 31 female and male prepared for embarkation according to the instructions supplied by the Under Secretary for the Colonial Department. The Clerk of the Union was instructed to provide the outfit and conveyance of these orphans to the point of embarkation. The names of these 32 are listed together with their ages, religion and townland address. Only one was 20 years old, the remainder were between 15 and 18 years of age. Of those 32, 24 were listed as Catholic and 8 as Protestant. (112) Meanwhile during 1846 the Board of Guardians of the Workhouse were mindful of the need to keep the inmates gainfully employed and occupied. Apart from formal schooling in the workhouse there was a recommendation from the Board for the partitioning of the men's day room into workshops for tailors and shoemakers and instructing a certain number of boys in those trades. The female inmates were busily occupied in sewing, making and repairing garments as can be seen from the following list of requisites of 10th January 1846:

50 yds calico	@	3d per yd.	
20 yds muslin	@	7d per yd.	
400 needles	@	10d per 100.	
half gross knitting pins	@	2s 10d per gross.	
4 doz. thimbles	@	3d per doz.	(113)

During the Autumn of 1846 the relief committees which had existed during the previous year were re-organised and others were formed throughout the county. They began to issue cooked food to the destitute on the plan operated by the Society of Friends. This started in Carlow in early November. (114) This work was encouraged by the Irish relief Association which gave grants in cash - £210 and provisions for distribution. It is worthwhile noticing also that in the workhouse report for 5th December 1846 there were 102 admissions and the number of inmates had risen to 796 at an average weekly cost per inmate of just over two shillings per week. (115) These figures show that in spite of the work of the Relief Committees and charitable groups destitution was increasing around the area covered by the Carlow Union.

The Society of Friends had taken part individually in local efforts to ameliorate the conditions consequent on the partial potato failure of 1845. They were fairly numerous around the area,

Carlow being one of their four main centres in Ireland. It was only after the almost complete destruction of the potato crop in the harvest of 1846 that a central body was formed to organise relief. Relief was supplied by the Quakers to those cases for which sufficient provision had not been made by the government and true to the Quaker charity no preference was made in the distribution of relief on the grounds of religious profession. (116) The Sisters of Mercy distributed food among the needy from monies received from various sources, £20 from the Society of Friends, £50 from Pope Gregory and money sent from the Parish Relief Fund in Rome to Bishop Haly. A letter from Rev. Paul Cullen - later Cardinal Cullen - to Bishop Haly written on 29th January 1847 tells of the concern among the Irish and others in Rome about the poor plight in Ireland and the efforts made there to collect money to send home to help the needy. Further correspondence during 1847 from Rome to Bishop Haly shows Cardinal Fransoni telling of him forwarding bills of exchange for £50 sterling for the relief of distress in the diocese on 3rd July. Again on 31st July 1847 in another letter from Fransoni to Haly a second donation of £50 was sent for the relief of the poor. (117) The various relief committees had extra work in helping the needy during February, March and April of 1847 as the change took place from the public works schemes. In preparation for the new scheme the Relief Committee were re-organised during February and March 1847. The Committees for the borough and parish of Carlow were amalgamated as one soup depot was considered sufficient. It is interesting to note that during the period of re-organisation of the Relief Committees the number of paupers in the workhouse had risen to an unprecedented level. On 18th February 1847 the number there was 1,333 at an average cost per pauper per week of 2s 3d. (118)

The new scheme was successful in alleviating immediate distress and was not subject to the delays from which the overburdened supervisory system of the Board of Works had suffered. It was assisted too, by the operation of private individuals who got donations from various sources. The Annals of the Sisters of Mercy in Carlow mention these dreadful years. This order came to Carlow in 1837; they had two areas of vocation (i) the visitation of the poor and sick; (ii) instruction of the "poor and ignorant". These were the only two external activities allowed. Their visitation consisted of bringing value rather than cash and their usual gifts to the poor on visitation were tea, sugar, a loaf and one penny. (119) At the request of Bishop Haly of Kildare and Leighlin the Sisters on 1st May 1840 opened a school for the education of middle class girls - a visit by the foundress Catherine McAuley in November of that year finds her stressing that the education of the middle classes was of the utmost importance - forming a connecting link between the high and low classes. (120)

Whereas the word "Famine" was not used by other agencies elsewhere in Carlow the Mercy Sisters recorded in 1847 "The failure of the potato crop in 1846 was followed by two years of famine and the intense sufferings of the poor during this trying period have chronicled it in the memory of every Sister of Mercy then living. Such was the scarcity of food that our best efforts could only procure for many barely enough to keep them from dying of hunger and although our friends were appealed to on their behalf and that they gave generously what help they could; yet the calamity being national, people were more disposed to succour the poor of their own respective localities". (121) It was in January 1847 that Somerville visited Carlow and wrote about how the large resident landlords were taking their share of the burden of looking after the poor. He mentions Col. Bruen as being very attentive to the poor - who as he also mentioned were the labouring population, the quarter acre men, the small householders and the small farmers where holdings are under ten acres. He further stated about Carlow and the dreadful conditions of that time "a better soil, a more industrious people, a better managed farm gardens are not to be found anywhere than around Carlow and yet every family holding only a few acres is reduced to Indian meal and the soup kitchen by the failure of their potatoes. (122)

Although as stated the workhouse which was built to cater for 800 inmates only, destitution was so prevalent that in 1847 there were over 1300 paupers in it. The diet in the workhouse at this time was 8oz of oatmeal stirabout for breakfast and 1lb of sheaten bread for dinner together with some milk. "The Master having produced to the Board samples of stirabout made from rice and Indian meal mixed and Indian meal and oatmeal mixed - we are quite satisfied of the advantage to the health of the inmates from continuing to give the three breakfasts in the week of the first named materials and he is directed to purchase one ton of rice from J. Haughton & Sons at £28 per ton". (123) Towards the end of the year oatmeal was substituted for rice at breakfast which also included a pint of mixed milk and the dinner was changed to 1lb brown bread and a pint of buttermilk. Examining the diet of food given to the inmates of the workhouse leaves one asking the question - what became of the extra food bought in? For example adding up the meat bought in each week for the first six months of 1847 one sees the total amount of meat at 7,810 lbs - 2,710 lbs bought in the first quarter, leaving 5,100 lbs of meat bought in during the second quarter, April to June. (124) occasionally one notices extras bought in e.g.

Two dozen bottles of wine @ 30 shillings a doz  
and one dozen bottles of port @ 38 shillings a doz.

(125)

With increasing numbers due to increasing hardship the Board of Guardians had to seek further accomodation around the town area to house those seeking shelter. Some sheds at the rear of the main building were converted into sleeping quarters while various large stores were rented from their owners and converted into quarters to accomodate the extra paupers. A hospital was set up beside the River Barrow and was called the "Barrow Hospital". This was to house paupers who were suffering from fever. There is a record in the Carlow Union Minute Book Vol., 4 where the Guardians spent £1.10 shillings on the purchase of a pony and cart for transporting the sick from the workhouse to the hospital. The Mercy Sisters who, as mentioned previously had the visitation of the sick and poor as a top priority had to get written permission from the Board of Governers of the "Barrow Hospital" before being allowed visit the sick there. It is interesting to note here also that the dreadful times had a depressing effect upon the Sisters - they saw the famine and subsequent sickness take effect on the children in their school - "our school was but thinly attended - no class but felt the pressure of the times while emigration completed the depression of the Green Isle which famine and pestilence had begun". (126) To relieve the Barrow hospital at times of overcrowding sheds were built on the west bank of the River Barrow to house those suffering from various fevers who lived on that side. A sizeable portion of the Carlow Union stretched into the hilly Slieve Margy barony of County Laois on the west side of the River Barrow from Carlow and it was this area suffered most during those years. As the workhouse was built to cater for 800 it was unable to cater fully for the numbers who flocked there during the Famine. As a result auxiliary houses were opened in rented buildings around the town e.g. the Brewery, the starch-yard, the Distillery etc. Two sheds were erected for use as dormitories for 250 inmates on 1st May 1847. - (Appendix Map 4). Early in 1847 the Board of Guardians had a new problem imposed upon them. The local churchyards and graveyards were in danger of overcrowding so the guardians were told that no more paupers from the workhouse could be buried in these places. "Resolved, that it is represented to the Board that the usual place for burying poor persons near the town of Carlow is so overcrowded that there is not room for more interment there. The Board is also informed that in future no more of the paupers from the workhouse will be allowed to be buried there. In consequence of which the Board of Guardians think it advisable that a portion of the ground belonging to the workhouse be apportioned for the purpose of burying those who die in the workhouse and we approve of the plot of ground at the rear of the Infirmary and Idiots yard being fenced in and consecrated for that purpose". (127)

Quite obviously there was some delay in organising this scheme as a minute of meeting of the Guardians of 7th October 1847 states that as there was no room officially in neighbouring churchyards - recent burials had to be done by stealth and in the dead of night. Thereafter burials took place in the workhouse plot set aside for that purpose. When the cholera epidemic struck the area - 1849 being the worst period - victims were buried as quickly as possible in fields set aside for burials. These fields are still called "cholerafields" and most parishes have them. They were especially used in areas where the Poor Law Guardians had established fever hospitals e.g. Leighlinbridge, Borris and Tullow. The Unions in which the cholera disease proved to be most deadly were those of Carlow, Clare, Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick and Waterford. In each the Poor Law Commissioners attributed the high levels of mortality to the insufficiency of funds which were made available for the prevention and treatment of cholera. (128)

A look at Parish Records for the Catholic, Church of Ireland and Presbyterian Parishes in Carlow shows a noticeable drop in Catholic marriages and Baptism over the ten year period 1845 - 1855.

BAPTISMS	CATHOLIC BAPTISM	CHURCH OF IRELAND	PRESBYTERIAN
1845	267	46	5
1846	300	37	5
1847	212	42	11
1848	219	44	6
1849	235	51	2
1850	181	36	2
1851	175	48	21
1852	192	35	-
1853	140	39	-
1854	159	44	-
1855	179	42	-

Considering the fact that the 1851 census showed an increase in the population of Carlow Town the Registry of Baptisms in the Catholic parish shows a decrease from 200 - 300 baptisms per annum in 1845, '46, '47 and '48, thereafter the figures drop under the 200 mark.

Its worth noting also that in 1833 there was a severe outbreak of cholera in Carlow and the Baptisms in the Catholic Parish in 1834 numbered a meagre 91. Members of the Church of Ireland were not affected by the Famine as most of them were belonging to the more affluent and wealthy section of the population - quite a number of the baptisms in this Church of Ireland parish were to military families - as was also the case with a number of the Presbyterian Baptisms.

<b>MARRIAGES</b>	<b>CATHOLIC</b>	<b>CHURCH OF IRELAND</b>
1845	60	8
1846	76	6
1847	38	10
1848	49	20
1849	30	12
1850	49	12
1851	45	6
1852	34	9
1853	24	3
1854	44	12
1855	35	8

In spite of Relief both from official and voluntary organisations poverty and destitution was very prevalent around the country. Fr. James Maher was continuously fighting for the poor and criticising the lack of full government relief in a letter of 4th December 1847 said " The annexed statistics of the Union of Carlow though apparently not important, will exhibit if I mistake not, the state of Ireland, and the causes of its crimes and miseries more fully than the eloquent temperate and elaborate speech of Sir. George Grey in the House of Commons" ..... he then went on to give an account of the diet of food in the workhouse "Carlow Union Workhouse built for the accomodation of 800, numbers now in the workhouse and fever hospital 1243.



**SCALE OF DIET:** Breakfast for adults: 6 oz Indian meal.

2 oz rice made into two pints of thin stirabout.

Milk (sour) 1 pint.

Dinner for adults: Same as breakfast.

Supper for adults: No supper.

**TOTAL AMOUNT OF FOOD PER DAY: 16 OZ.**

**DIET FOR THOSE UNDER 15 YEARS** - Breakfast - 3 oz Indian meal.

1 oz of rice.

Half pint of sweet milk.

Dinner - Same.

Supper - 4 oz bread.

No milk.

This is perfectly monstrous..... the poor are defrauded - starved - their strength is wasted. The indoor relief in Carlow workhouse is very considerably below the starvation point. The outdoor relief is still worse". (129) On Wednesday 1st December 1847 at a Diocesan meeting of the clergy presided over by the Bishop the general condition of the poor throughout the entire Union was described thus - "Resolved - that destitution of the most appalling character prevails in many parts of the Union. The disabled poor and the unemployed labourers are without food, without fuel, without clothing, seeking to preserve a wretched existence by feeding on the field turnip or by the charity of the benevolent".

*"These statistics taken together present in what is considered one of our best circumstanced counties a frightful picture of the condition of the poor. What must be the amount of misery elsewhere.(130)*

- (83) "Carlow Union Minute Books" Volume 1. 5th April 1845.
- (84) IBID 3rd January 1846.
- (85) Dowley, Leslie J. "Late Blight and the Potato in Ireland". Teagasc 1995 page 8
- (86) N.A. Distress Papers 1846 D635 D695
- (87) N.A. Government Correspondence Book 75., page 71.
- (88) "Carlow Union Minute Books" Volume 2 page 522 21st May 1846
- (89) "Carlow Union Minute Books" Volume 3 page 375 15th July 1847
- (90) "Journal of Thomas Edwards Sometime Emigration Agent 1840-1847" N.L.I Ms 16. 136
- (91) O'Neill, T.P. "The Famine in Carlow" Carloviana Volume *ii* No. 1 January 1847
- (92) N.A. Relief Commission Papers. Pps 11/3 2/442/06 Abstracts of Incoming Letters - County Carlow.
- (93) IBID. Pps 11/2 2/441/31 Abstracts of Incoming Letters - County Carlow.
- (94) IBID.
- (95) N.A. Relief Commission Papers. 2/442/14
- (96) N.A. Relief Commission Papers. 1A 50.86
- (97) O'Neill, T.P. "The Famine in Carlow". Carloviana Volume 1 Pt 1 1947
- (98) N.A. Registered Papers County Carlow 1846. Z15574.
- (99) O'Neill, T.P. "The Scientific Investigation of the Failure of the Potato Crop in Ireland 1845-46" Irish Historical Studies Volume 5. No. 18. September 1946. page 131.
- (100) Dublin Evening Post 23rd August 1846.
- (101) "Carlow Union Minute Books" Volume 2. 1846.
- (102) IBID. Volume 2. 16th April 1846. page 471.
- (103) IBID. Volume 1. page 184.
- (104) IBID. Volume 2. page 341.
- (105) IBID. Volume 1. page 150.
- (106) IBID. Volume 2. page 493.
- (107) IBID. Volume 2. 24th January 1846.
- (108) N.A. Distress Papers 1846. Z15736.
- (109) IBID. D6753.
- (110) "Minute Books New Ross Union" 9/12/1846 & 30/12/1846.
- (111) "Analysis of Returns of Poor Employment Under 9 Vic., C.I. & 9 and 10 Vic., C. 107" from week ending 1846 to week ending 26/06/1847, 1852 (169) xviii page 595.
- (112) "Carlow Union Minute Books" Volume 7 page 139. 13th April 1848.
- (113) IBID. Volume 2 page 432. March 1846.
- (114) "Freeman's Journal" 27th November 1846.
- (115) "Carlow Union Minute Books" Volume 3 page 804 5th December 1846.
- (116) O'Neill, T.P. "The Society of Friends and the Great Famine"
- (117) "Carlow Union Minute Books" Volume 3 18th February 1847.
- (118) "Annals of St. Leo's Convent of Mercy, Carlow". 1837.
- (119) IBID. 1840
- (120) IBID. 1847
- (121) Somerville, Alexander. "Letters from Ireland during the Famine of 1847" Irish Academic Press.
- (122) "Carlow Union Minute Books" Volume 4 page 920 18th February 1847.
- (123) IBID. April - June 1847.
- (124) IBID. 27th February 1847.
- (125) "Annals of the Sisters of Mercy, St. Leo's Convent, Carlow" 1847 & 1848.
- (126) "Carlow Union Minute Books" Volume 4 page 920. 18th February 1847.
- (127) "The Regional Variation of Mortality during the Great Irish Famine" in proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy *bii* Section C No. 3 1963. page 143.
- (128) Kildare and Leighlin Diocesan Archives. 1847.
- (129) Moran, P.F. "Memoirs and Letters of Rev. James Maher" Dublin 1877. page *ix*
- (130) IBID.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### NUMBERS IN THE WORKHOUSE

#### PERIOD; APRIL 1845 - DECEMBER 1847.

Page 1/sheet 3 gives a monthly total for the workhouse in Carlow starting in April 1845 up to and including December 1845. The average weekly numbers for April 1845 were 55 men, 81 female, 49 boys under 15 years, 15 children under 2 years. The weekly average total was 246. Males were averaging out at 22% of total in the workhouse as against Females at 33%. The ratio of males was 68% as against the number of females. Many factors could be held responsible for the lower number of males vis a vis females using the workhouse - quite a number may be found in "Women Surviving".

Whatever the reasons - as these charts and statistics show - males either underutilised the workhouse for various reasons and females used them for their survival and other advantages which accrued from being "within" e.g. easier access to emigration etc.

Page 1/sheet 3 shows numbers in the workhouse for April 1845 - as mentioned above rising to an average per week in December 1845 of 337 - an increase of 27%.

Page 2/sheet 3 shows column figures for 1846 showing a steady rise from January to April from a weekly average of 372 in January to a weekly average of 512 in April. This represents an increase of 38% on January's figures. The percentage of adult males and females using the workhouse does not seem to vary with any great degree. e.g. in January 1846 males were 19% of the total and females were 35%. In April adult males were 18% and females were 32% of the total. Children under 2 years were generally around 5% of the total.

Figures remained fairly static for the summer months but a sharp drop of 28% on the April figures is noticeable for September. Figures rose sharply during the rest of 1846 to a record weekly average of 814 for December 1846.

This shows a rise of 122% over the September figures and an increase of 59% over the April figures. The December figures shows that adult males were 15% of the total, adult females 32%, children under 2 years still at 5% with the remaining numbers made up of boys and

girls under 15 years. The 1846 potato crop was a disastrous failure and the winter was a particularly harsh wet period. These combined factors must have had a demoralising effect on the destitute people who as can be seen were increasingly moving towards the workhouse for relief.

Page 3/sheet 3 gives a monthly column of numbers in the workhouse for 1847 with figures rising drastically for February and March. The month of February is recorded as having been a particularly severe month weather-wise with gales, blizzards and harsh weather being the norm. The March figures reached a weekly average of 1286. This shows an increase of 58% on the December 1846 averages. The adult males show as 13% of the total and the adult females at 32% of the total for March 1847. Children under 2 years show at 4% of the total. Figures from March to August 1847 fluctuate within a narrow band of variances but again as in 1846, September 1847 shows a sizeable drop in numbers in the workhouse. This perhaps may be attributed to: (i) harvesting time - employment available; (ii) Improvement in the potato harvest.

Figures show that September 1847 had a drop of 13% over March 1847 numbers. The weekly average for September 1847 was 1119 with 163 adult males making up 15% of the total, 350 adult females over 31% of total and 31 children under 2 years making up 3% of the total. An interesting factor here is the comparison between the figures for September 1846 and the figures for September 1847.

Weekly average September 1846 - 51 adult males/106 adult females - 367 total.

Weekly average September 1847 - 163 adult males/ 350 adult females - 1119 total.

These figures show a 205% increase in the weekly averages staying in the workhouse.

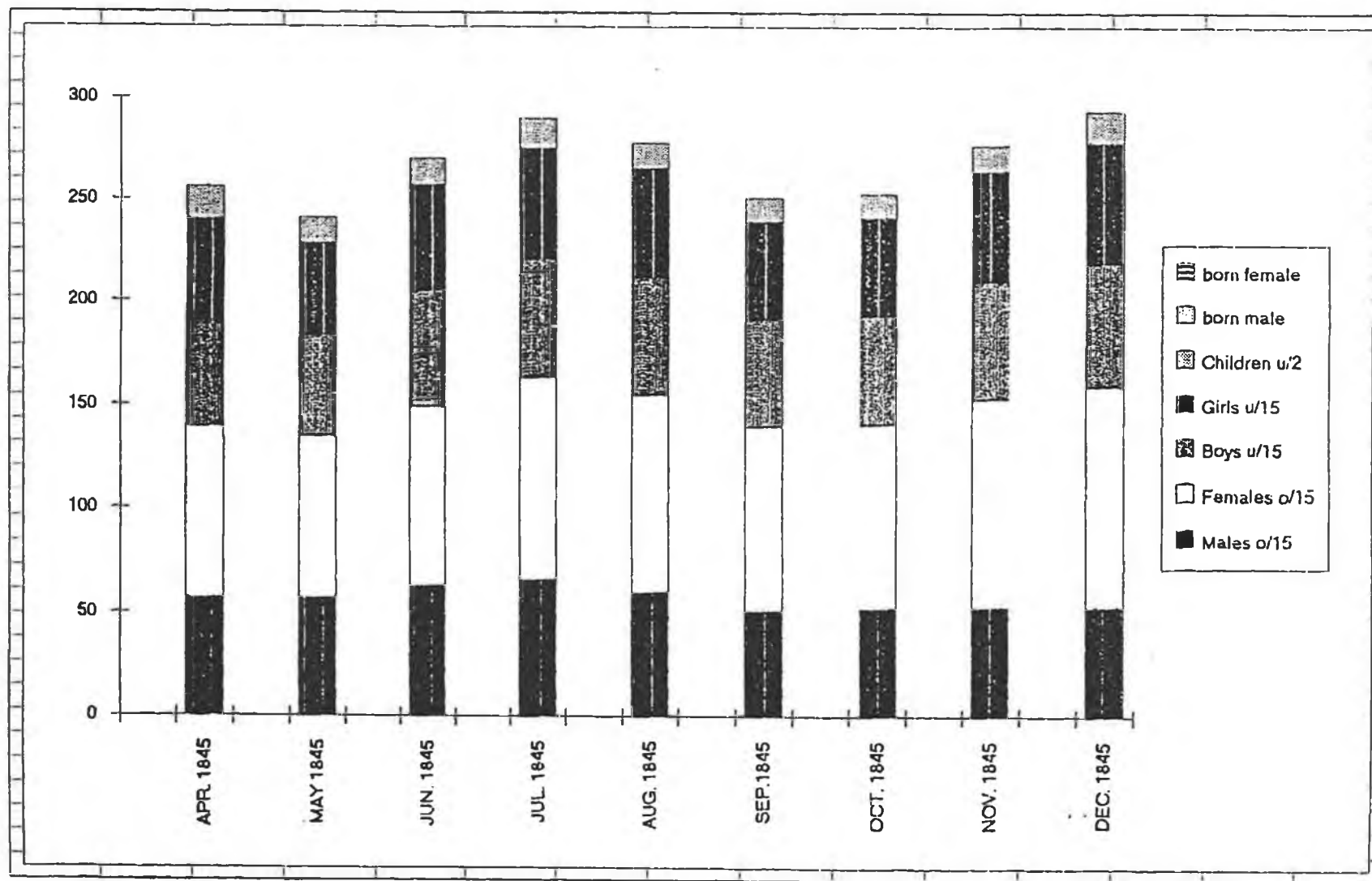
As page 3/sheet 3 shows there was a gradual increase in people staying in the workhouse during October, November and December 1847 with another increase in January 1848. The number of inmates passed the 1500 mark for the first time ever on 1st January 1848 when there were 1519 "inside".

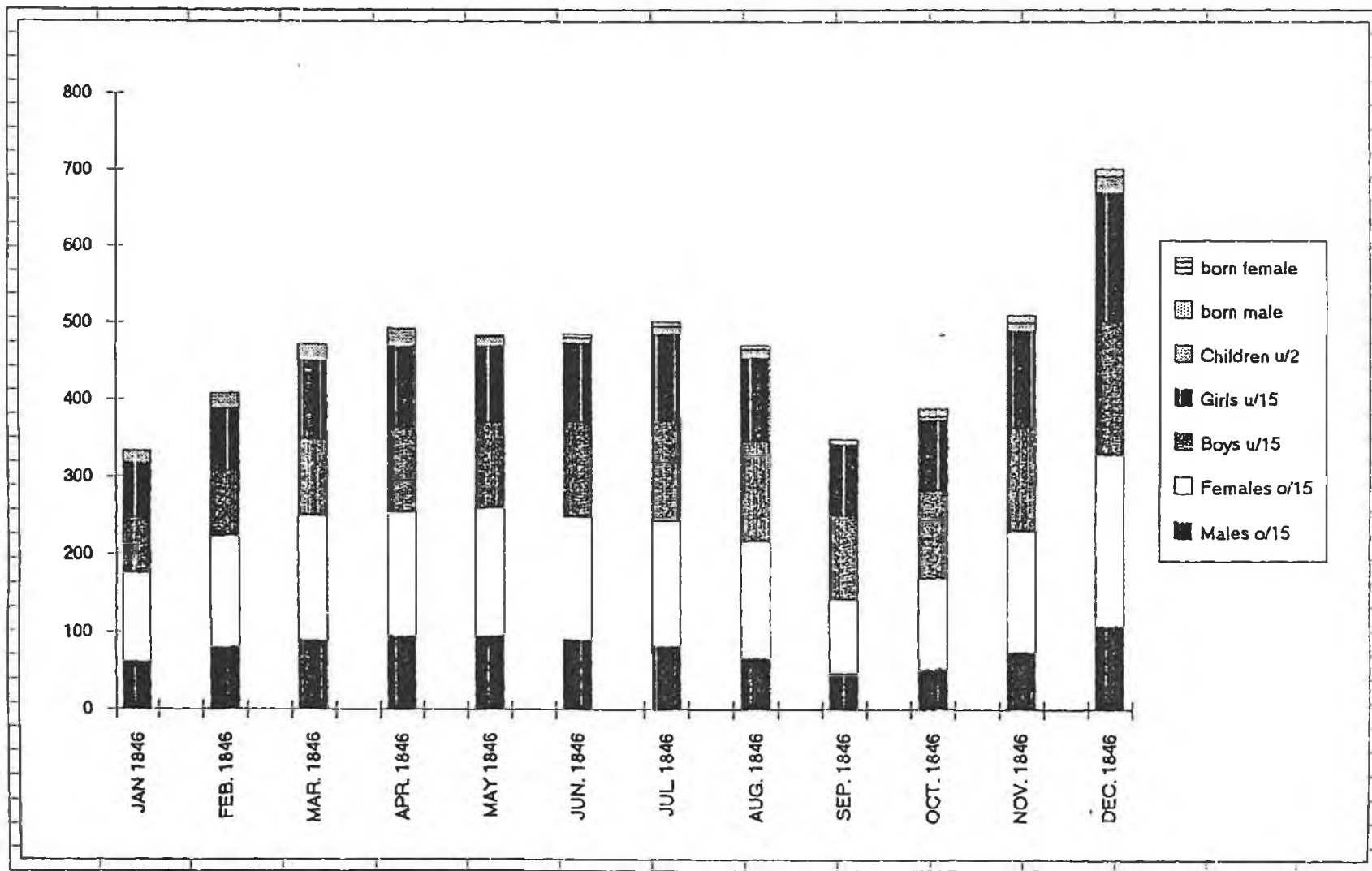
This shows a 365 increase over the September 1847 figures. It also shows an 87% increase on the figures for December 1846 - a huge increase over one year. Adult males for 1st January 1848 are 239 - an increase of 98% over the year; adult females are recorded at 480 an increase of 85%. The adult males of 239 comprise of 16% of the total and the adult females of 480 comprise of 32% of the total on 1st January 1848. A noticeable feature of all

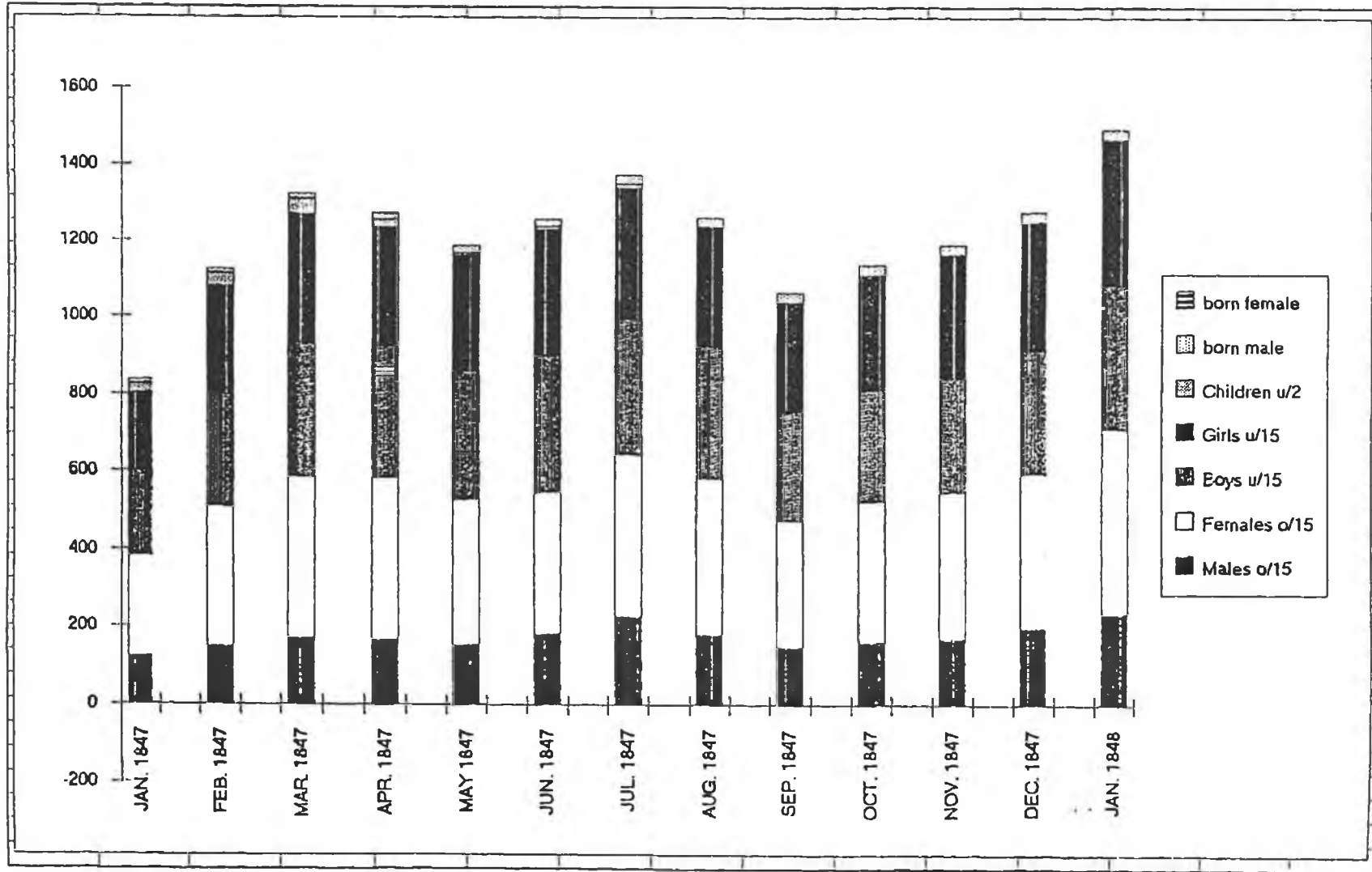
these figures is that while the adult females hovered around the 32% of the total over these few years the adult male figures fluctuated between 14% and 19%. There was always a large percentage discrepancy between males using the workhouse and females using it as can be seen from page 5/Char XLS, page 4/sheet 3, both dealing with males and page 6 /Char XLS dealing with females.

Perhaps some of the conclusions reached by Dympna McLoughlin in "Workhouses and Irish Female Paupers 1840-1870", may explain the wide gaps in numbers of males and female inmates. "The real conclusion that can be drawn with respect to these women is that even in the most trying of situations and pressing of circumstances they were resourceful and came up with survival strategies - be it the short term stay in the workhouse, the temporary abandonment of children.....

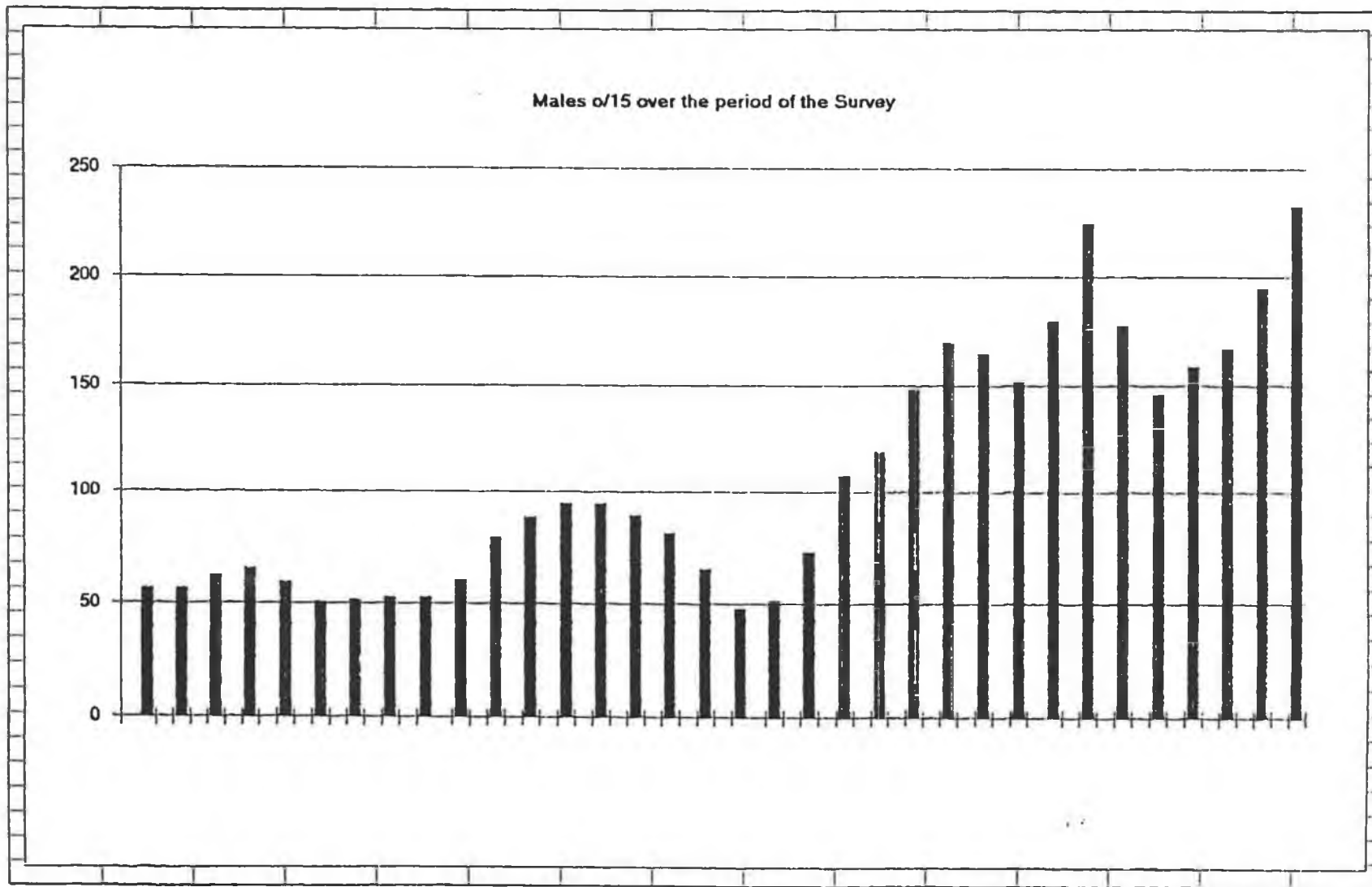
A further point of note is that within the limited range of options to them, these women made the choices affecting their own lives. Their relationship to their men was of association and mutual benefit. These women could and did look after themselves".



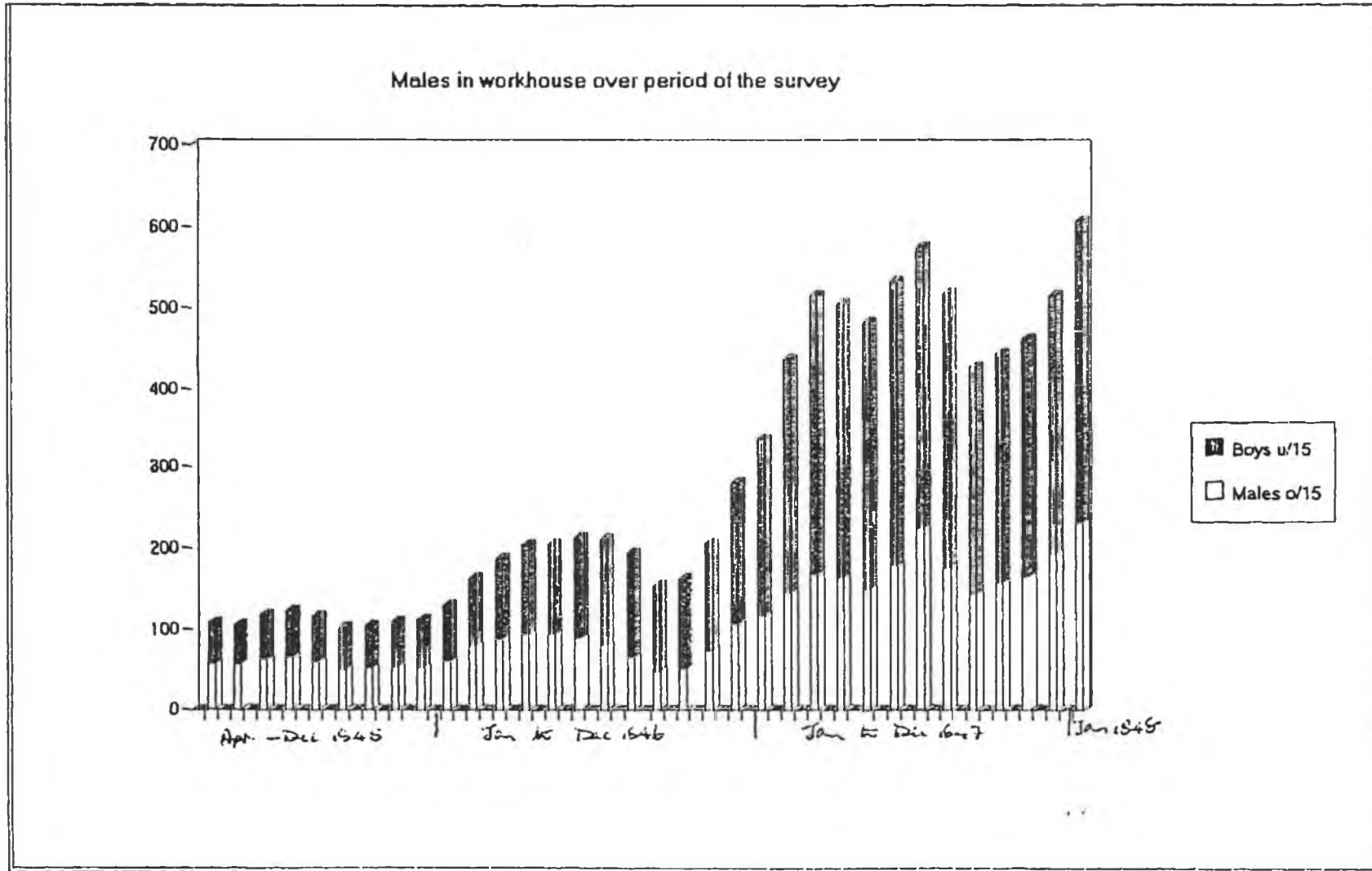






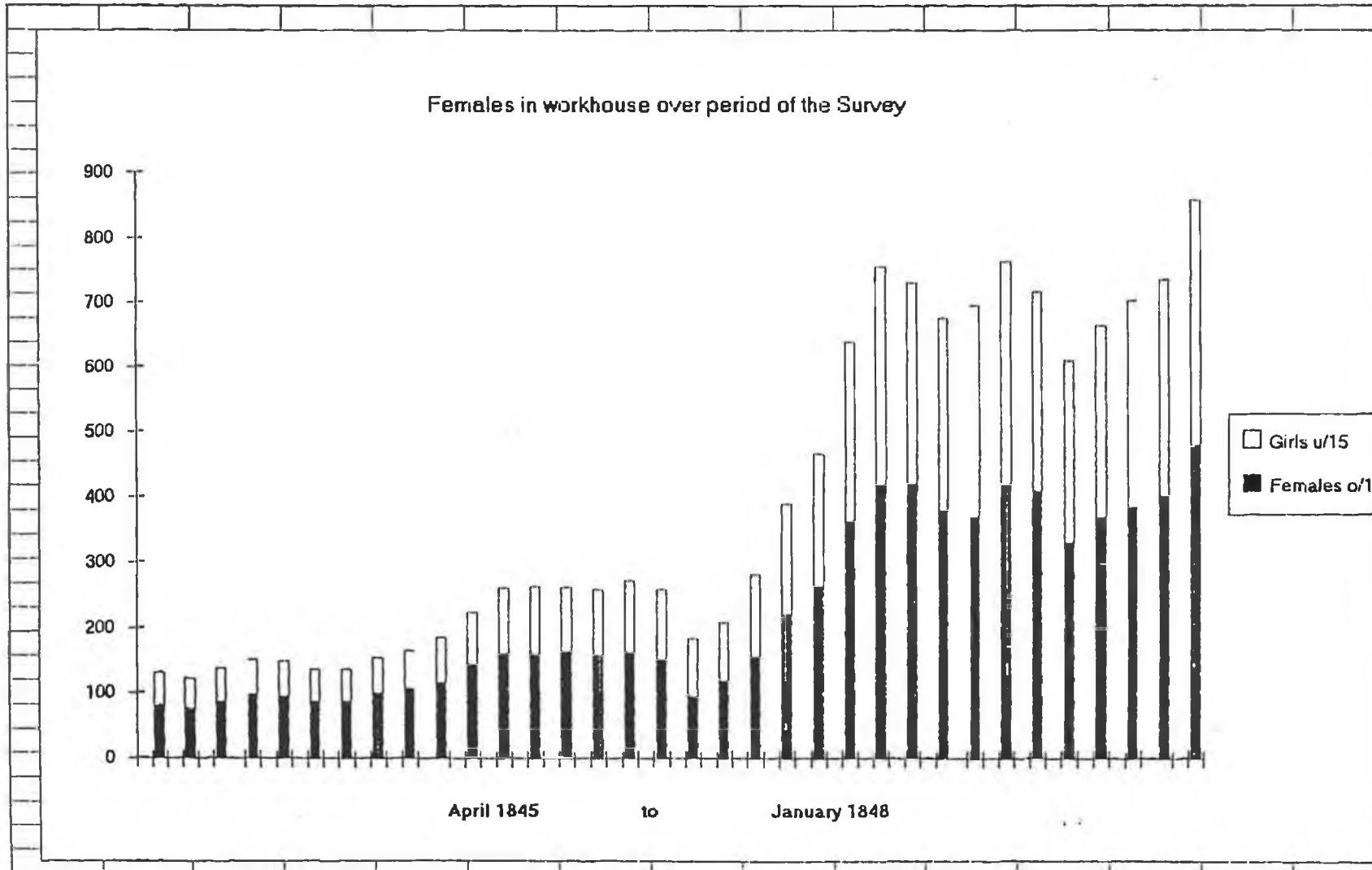


CHARXLS



45

CHARXLS



## DEATHS IN CARLOW UNION WORKHOUSE.

PERIOD; APRIL 1845 - DECEMBER 1847.

In an age of laissez-faire individualism, poverty was not seen to have a social cause, but was an outward manifestation of the failure of individuals to secure work and support themselves as a result of their own particular vices such as idleness, sloth or laziness. However, when individuals were destitute through illness or misfortune they were perceived in a new light as the "deserving poor". It was for this category of people that the workhouse was intended.

The surviving Minute Books for the Carlow Union Workhouse being in April 1845. Our period for the purpose of statistics covers from that date up to the end of 1847. On the week of 5th April 1845 there were 247 people in the workhouse with 36 of those in the hospital attached to the Union and 1 in the fever hospital - one man died that week.

These 247 people were obviously regarded as the "deserving poor". Comprising that 247 were: 54 adult males; 82 adult females; 48 boys under 15; 47 girls under 15 and 16 children under 2. One man died that week. Watching these figures of April 1845 and keeping an eye on them as they move through the year we have to be conscious of the fact that the cause of the Famine of the 1840's i.e. the potato blight - did not make its appearance in County Carlow until September of that year and that the Constabulary reported the general crop to be good and not as badly affected as in other counties. Bearing in mind then that April 1845 was not really a bad time it is of interest to note that there were actually 247 people in the Carlow Union Workhouse. One death was recorded, but cause of death is not noted. One can possibly take from the graph page 1/sheet 2, running through the year to December 1845 that the deaths recorded in the workhouse would have been working out at an average acceptable ratio with the number of inmates there.

Some considerable portion of the potato crop was saved in 1845 for seeding in 1846 but the crop failed again in 1846. Nevertheless the deaths recorded are above the average for 1845 as can be seen from Graph - Page 1/sheet 2, but whereas the figures for paupers in the workhouse during 1845 were varying between 245 and 300 - page 1/sheet 3 with the high peaks in June; July and August and again in November and December, the year 1846 saw a most noticeable increase in workhouse numbers rising in February, March and April. A slight

decrease in May and June - with a marked intake of people raising the numbers in the workhouse to high numbers in November and December 1846. The numbers then were averaging at 820 a week. Deaths in November were rising to 10 in December.

Page 1/sheet 2 shows 1845 and 1846 as varying 0-10 in deaths per month in the workhouse during those years. 1847 shows an alarming increase in deaths per month as can be seen again on Page 1/sheet 2. This was indeed Balck '47. Deaths rose from January in which 21 deaths were recorded to 51 deaths an increase of 143% in February and 48 deaths in March an increase of 129% over January. The adult male deaths are higher generally than the adult female deaths i.e. 18 male deaths in February 1847 and 14 female deaths the same month. This makes an interesting statistic as the average weekly number for adult males in the workhouse that month was 164 (deaths 10.9%) as against the average weekly number of females for February was 393 (deaths 3.5%). This begs the question were women better survivors i.e. had they the capacity to use every means of survival more capably than men? In an article "Workhouse and Irish Female Paupers 1840 - 1870", Dympna McLoughlin states, "Adult able-bodied females tended to outnumber their male counterparts by a ratio of 3:1". This leads to other arguments but Dympna McLoughlin at the conclusion of her article mentioned above states, "The only real conclusion that can be drawn with respect to these women is that even in the most trying of situations and pressing of circumstances they were resourceful and came up with survival strategies".

Page 2/sheet 2 gives a breakdown of deaths in the workhouse for the First Quarter of 1847. A steady rise in deaths is noticeable for the months of February and March. Again it will be noted that males over 15 were the most vulnerable which goes back to the same question asked earlier and drew the quoted conclusion from Ms. McLoughlin. Other factors enter here. The winter of 1846/47 was a most severe prolonged one with severe snowfalls recorded in February of 1847. Of the 1320 inmates in the workhouse in the week of 27th February 1847 only 171 - (12.9%) were males over 15 while there were 408 - (30.9%) females over 15 there at that time. Did the men not use the workhouse for themselves? Did they use it to keep their womenfolk and children alive as they roamed about outside seeking other means of survival? Had some emigrated and their womenfolk used the workhouse as a means of joining the emigration trail? Clearly there are factors which must be taken into account. Also the various illnesses which follow famine, typhus, cholera, dysentery etc. must also be taken into account. These combined with the severe weather, lack of food, inability to adjust to the Indian Meal diet must have had certain influences on the death rate. Indian Meal was not all that uncommon as it had been used during previous famines in the years between 1800 and 1845.

The breakdown of deaths in the workhouse for the month of March 1847 shows 37 deaths - 8 adult males; 8 female adults; 4 boys under 15 years; 11 children under 2 years. These numbers are fairly evenly distributed which begs the assumption that perhaps most of the deaths in that month would have been the result of disease/illness.

Page 3/sheet 2: The breakdown of 54 deaths in April 1847 shows 20 adult males; 13 adult females; 4 boys under 15 years; 7 girls under 15 years; 10 children under 2 years. Again when one examines the figures in the workhouse for that month there was an average of 159 men each week there and an average of 5 male deaths each week - approximately 1 death for every 32 - 3.1% male inmates; there was a weekly average of 394 female inmates with an average of 1 death for every 121 - 0.8% female inmates. This may raise the same question as before - were the women of the Famine time better survivors? The figures certainly are most interesting. The month of May saw a drop in the number of deaths as the graph on Page 3/sheet 2 shows with another drop again. Interestingly enough, there were 11 adult female deaths as against 7 adult male deaths in the workhouse that month.

Page 4/sheet 2: The breakdown of deaths for the 3rd Quarter 1847 shows that there were 55 deaths during the month of July 1847 - 18 men and 14 women. The average death per week that month was 11 - the average number of paupers in the workhouse per week was 1312 - an average 201 men and 407 women per week among that number. Again it can be seen that the number of deaths among men was much higher than among women.

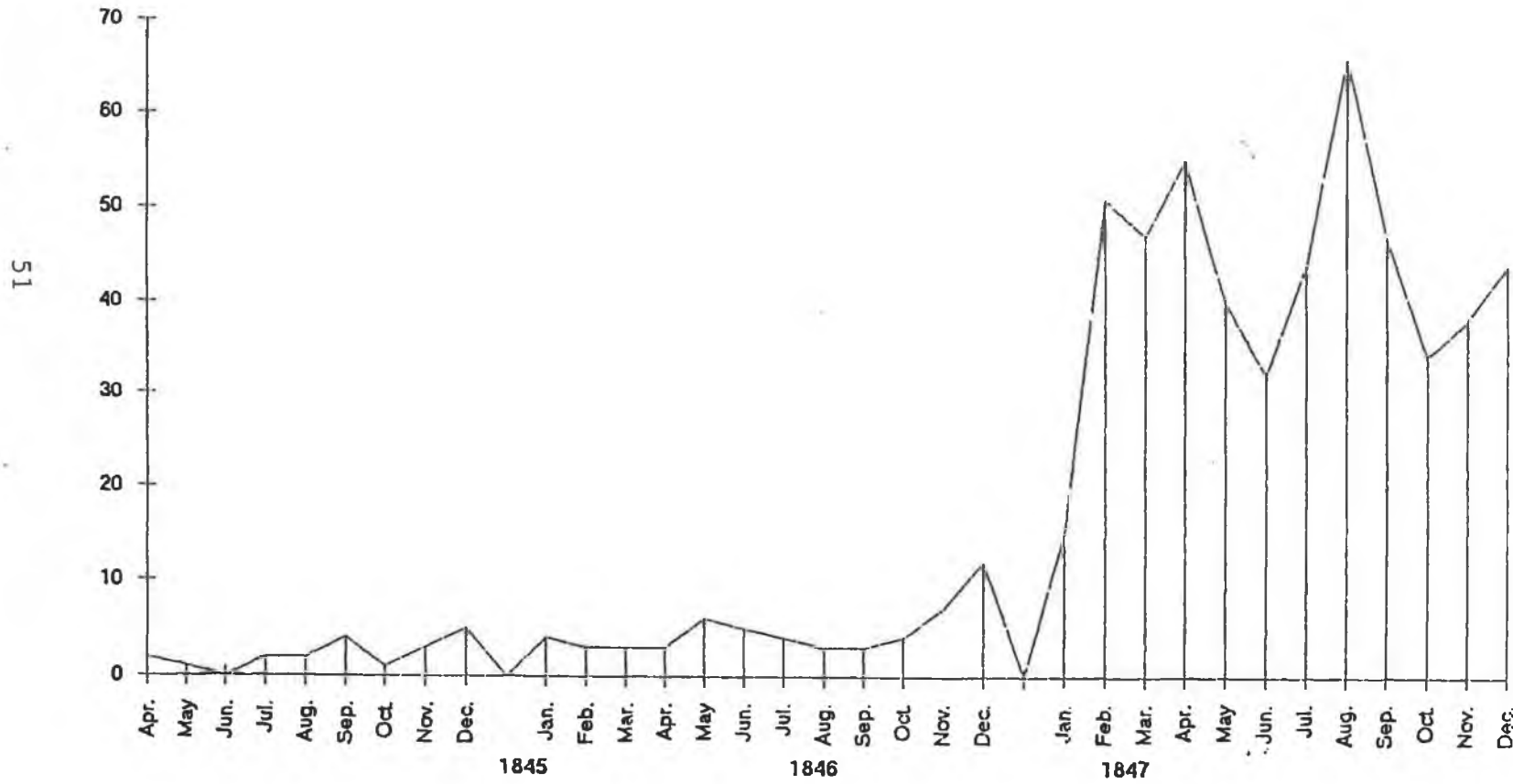
In the month of August 1847, 64 deaths were recorded - with 17 recorded for boys under 15 years - Page 4/sheet 2. This was the last month before the new crop of potatoes were ready for harvesting. Sickness was rampant - there were 241 patients in the workhouse hospital and 289 patients in the Fever hospital during the week 7th August 1847 making it 530 patients between the two. The hospital figures were equally high in the month of July which shows that the various sicknesses which are associated with Famine were fairly widespread among the poor and destitute. Page 4/sheet 2. The last four weeks of the 3rd Quarter 1847 i.e. September shows 52 deaths - a drop of 12 from the previous month. This drop in deaths could hardly be attributed directly to an improvement in the potato crop i.e. an improvement over the previous 2 years which were disastrous. At least some of the 1847 crop could be saved. What may have some influence on the drop in deaths in September was the drop in the weekly average of inmates in the workhouse from 1312 in the previous July to 1120 for September - a drop of 14.6%.

Page 5/sheet 2: gives a breakdown for the last 3 months of 1847. October showed another drop in deaths to 42 for the month in spite of an average of 1173 per week staying in the workhouse and over 580 patients between the workhouse hospital and the fever hospital. In November 1847 there were 38 deaths - this is 4 fewer than October but five weeks entries are recorded for this month in the Minute Book as against November being a four week month.

However, when one examines the average number of paupers in the workhouse per week at 1218 the drop in the death figures is more significant. Seven men as against 13 women died that month. Ten boys under 15 years and 6 girls under 15 died that month.

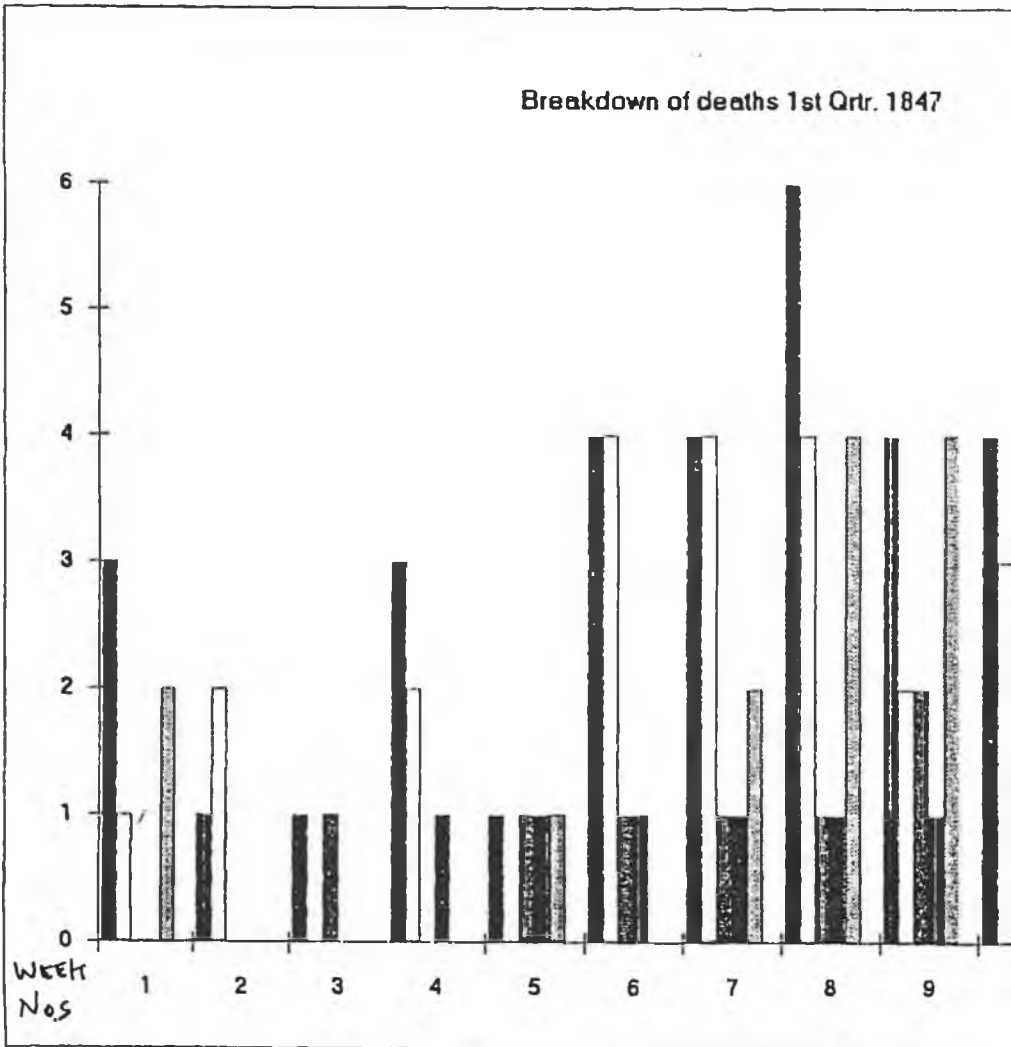
Page 5/sheet 2: the last 5 weeks show the December figures - 66 deaths recorded - a sharp rise again. Note that five weeks are taken into account and the last week shows 23 deaths alone. The figures for men and women deaths are fairly even - 17 men and 19 women died in December - a frightening figure is that 6 children under 2 years of age died in the last week of 1847. However, the workhouse had its highest ever weekly average of inmates in December 1847 standing at 1434 - an increase of 15% on November average. This rising graph of paupers in the workhouse and deaths in December show that a new panic had obviously hit the poor - bad as they were the workhouses were the only places of semi-refuge for the unfortunates of this country at that dreadful time.

Deaths in the workhouse over period of the survey

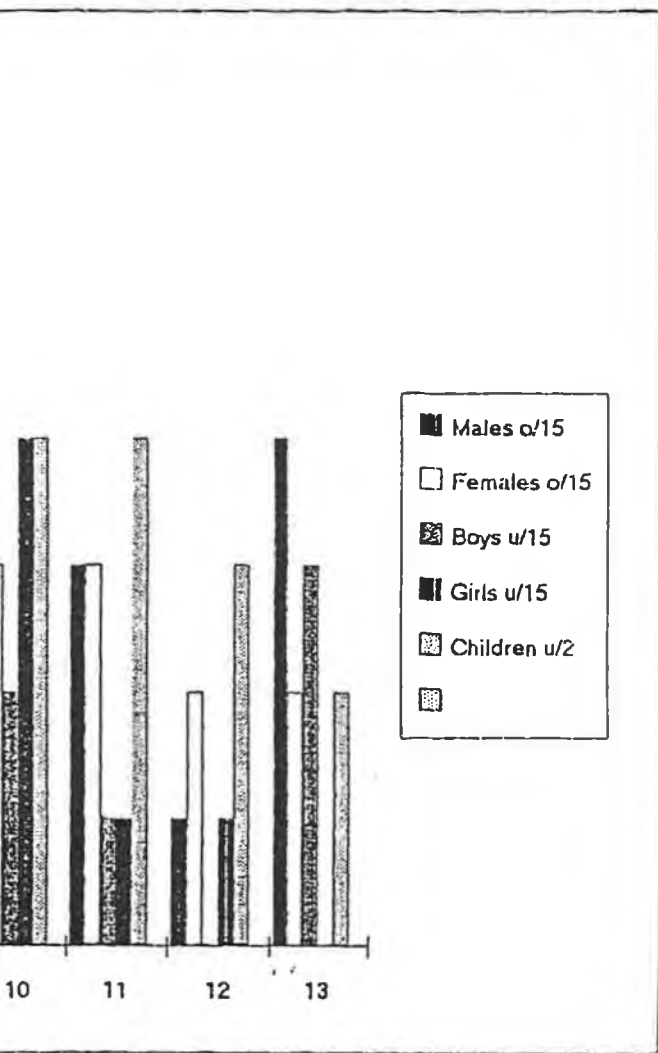




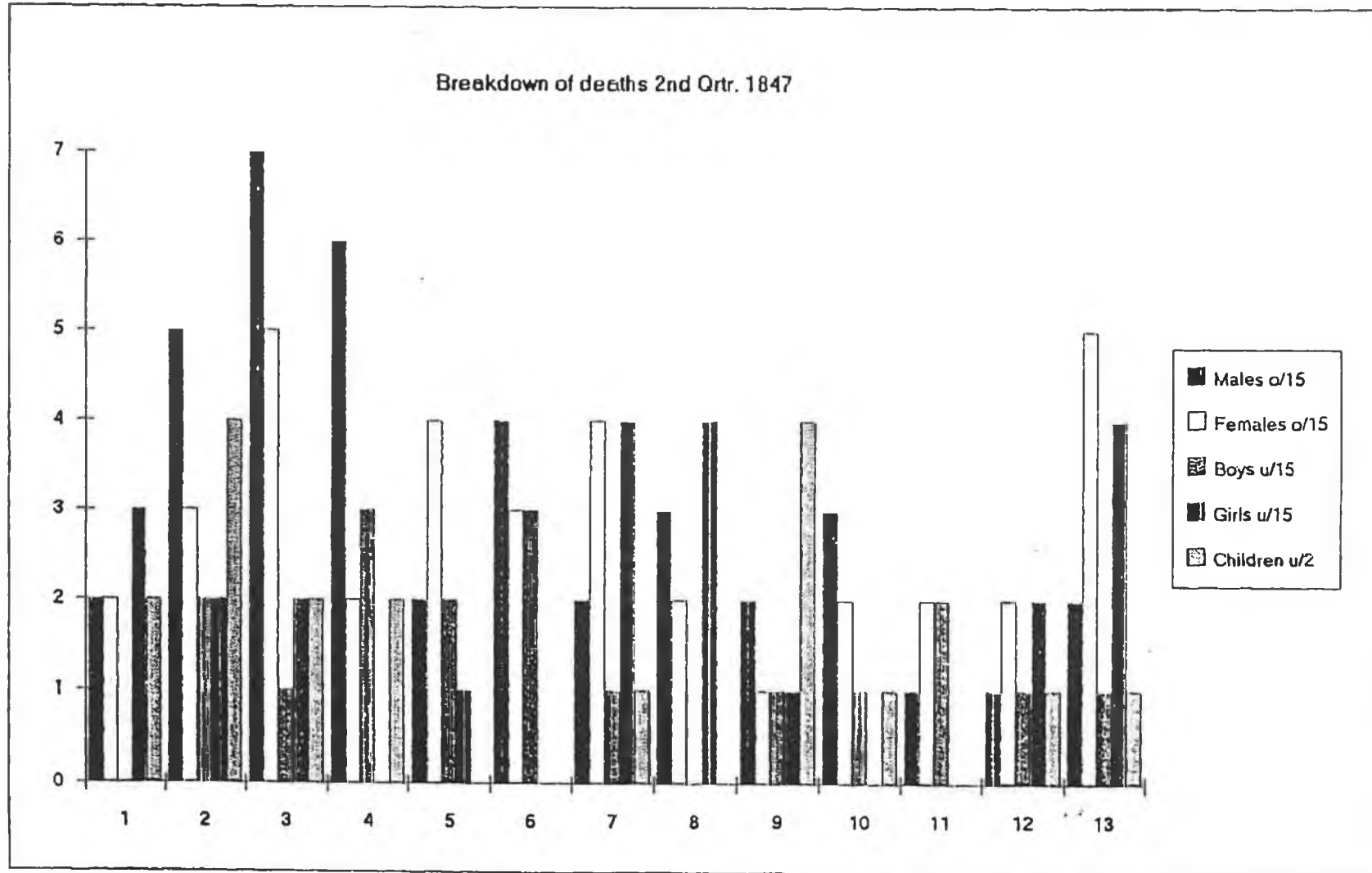
Breakdown of deaths 1st Qtr. 1847



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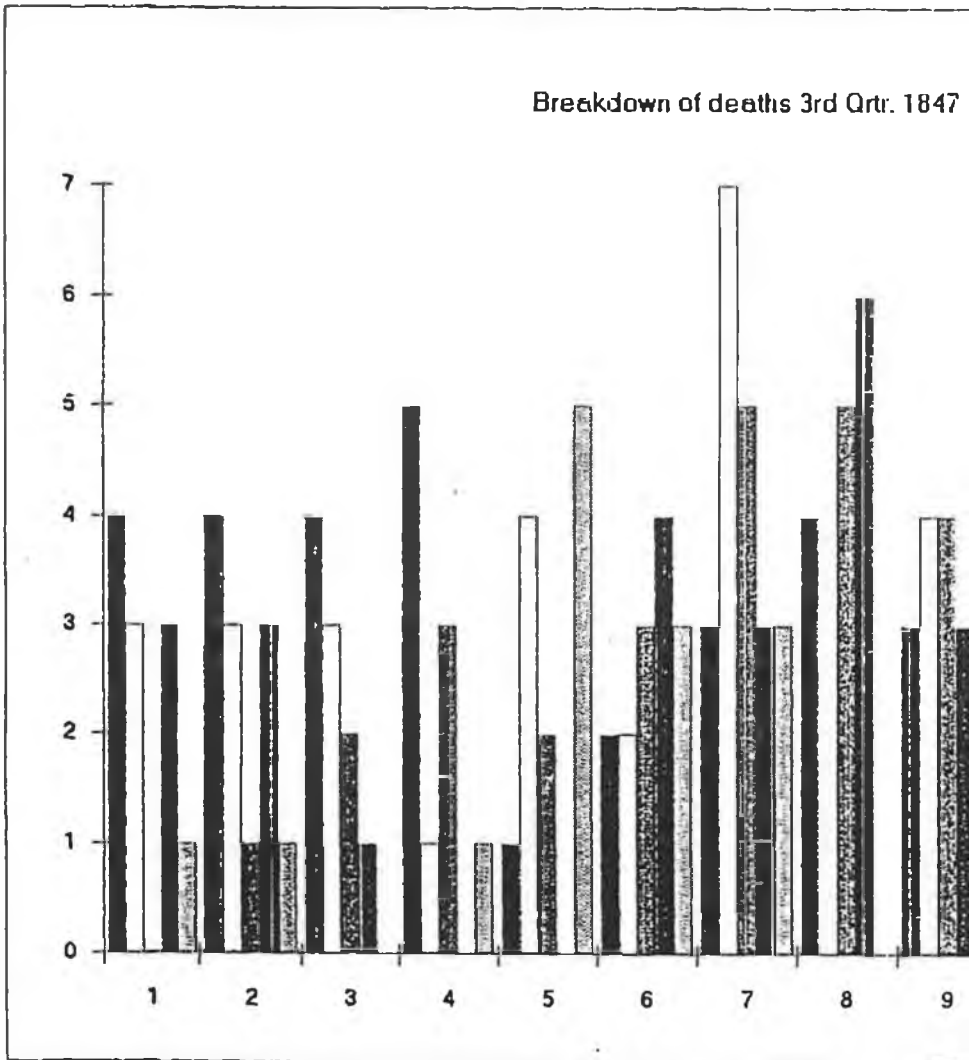


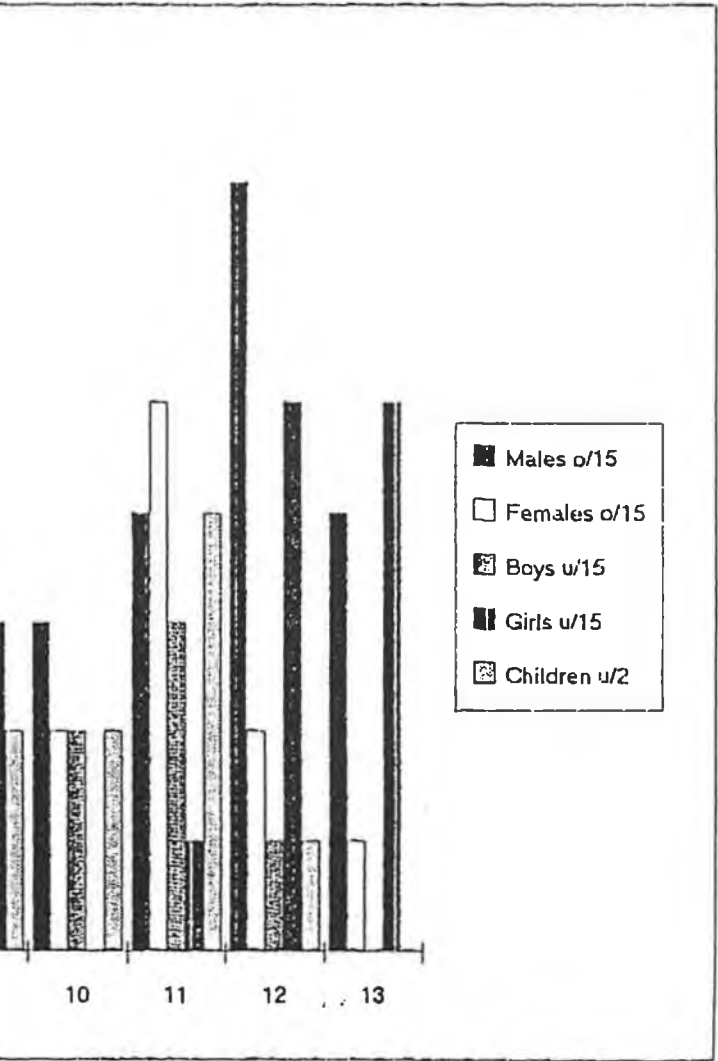
Breakdown of deaths 2nd Qtr. 1847



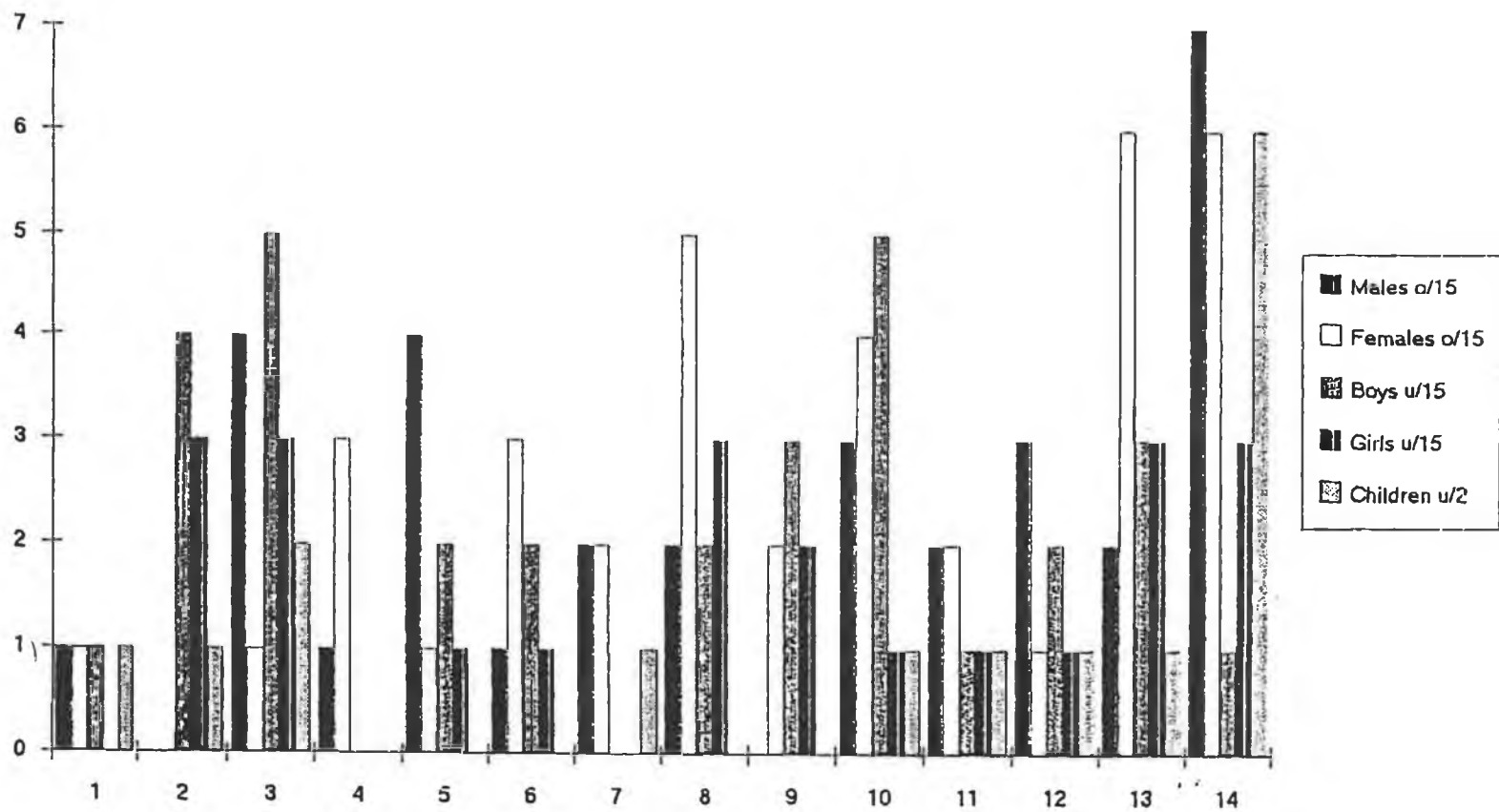
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Breakdown of deaths 3rd Qtr. 1847





Breakdown of deaths 4th Qtr. 1847



## CONCLUSION

The examination of various local sources has given us an interesting insight of the Carlow Union and how it enacted its part during the Famine years 1845-'47. The parish registers, Diocesan records and the Annals of St. Leo's Convent combine to give us a fascinating picture of Carlow during this time. The Minute Books are a unique source of day to day information and like the other records - give us further information of the effects of the famine locally. They further show how the Guardians were merely administrators of the decisions sanctioned by the Poor Law Commissioners.

Quite noticeable in the Minute Books is the continuous rise in the numbers of people using the workhouse during the famine. Like the entire system the Carlow workhouse in spite of the dedication of the Guardians was unable to cope with the huge demands placed upon it. The inadequacies and weaknesses of the system exacerbated the suffering of the population who, even though conditions in the workhouse were unbelievably appalling had no other choice but to seek admittance.

Although Carlow being a prosperous area suffered less than other parts of the country which suffered greater deprivation and higher fatality rates it was still a tremendous blow to the locality. As this thesis only studies the Minute Books of 1845 - 1847 further study of the Minute Books of 1848 - 1851 could be undertaken to see how the area recovered and what effects the Famine had on Carlow.

Probably the greatest external change to be noticed between 1841 and 1851 is a general decline in population from 86,228 in 1841 to 68,075 in 1851 in the County. The barony of Carlow did not suffer nearly such a heavy loss as the other baronies as the population of the town increased from 9,901 to 10,292 in this period due largely to the influx of the poor into the town and its institutions such as the workhouse and the jail. (131)

According to the 1851 census there were 1,334 in the workhouse, 250 in the Lunatic Asylum, 135 in the jail, 35 in the Infirmary and 14 in the Fever Hospital. (132)

Another effect of the Famine was the reduction of holdings of between one and fifteen acres in County Carlow. In 1841 there were 4,290 such holdings within the category in the County. At the end of the Famine there were only 2,098 holdings within that category in the County. (133)

The landlords, as a body, played a noble part in assisting the poor during those dreadful times. They took their places on Relief Committees and devoted their time generously to the activities of those Committees - and were not afraid to tax themselves and their equals to get government schemes under way. Quite a number of landlords worked privately to alleviate the hardships of their own tenants and these people were caught to pay also for the tenants of a negligent absentee landlord.

It is also noteworthy that clergy and religious of all dominations worked with a great spirit of co-operation to help alleviate the distress in the area - something that was always been remembered with gratitude around the Carlow Town area.

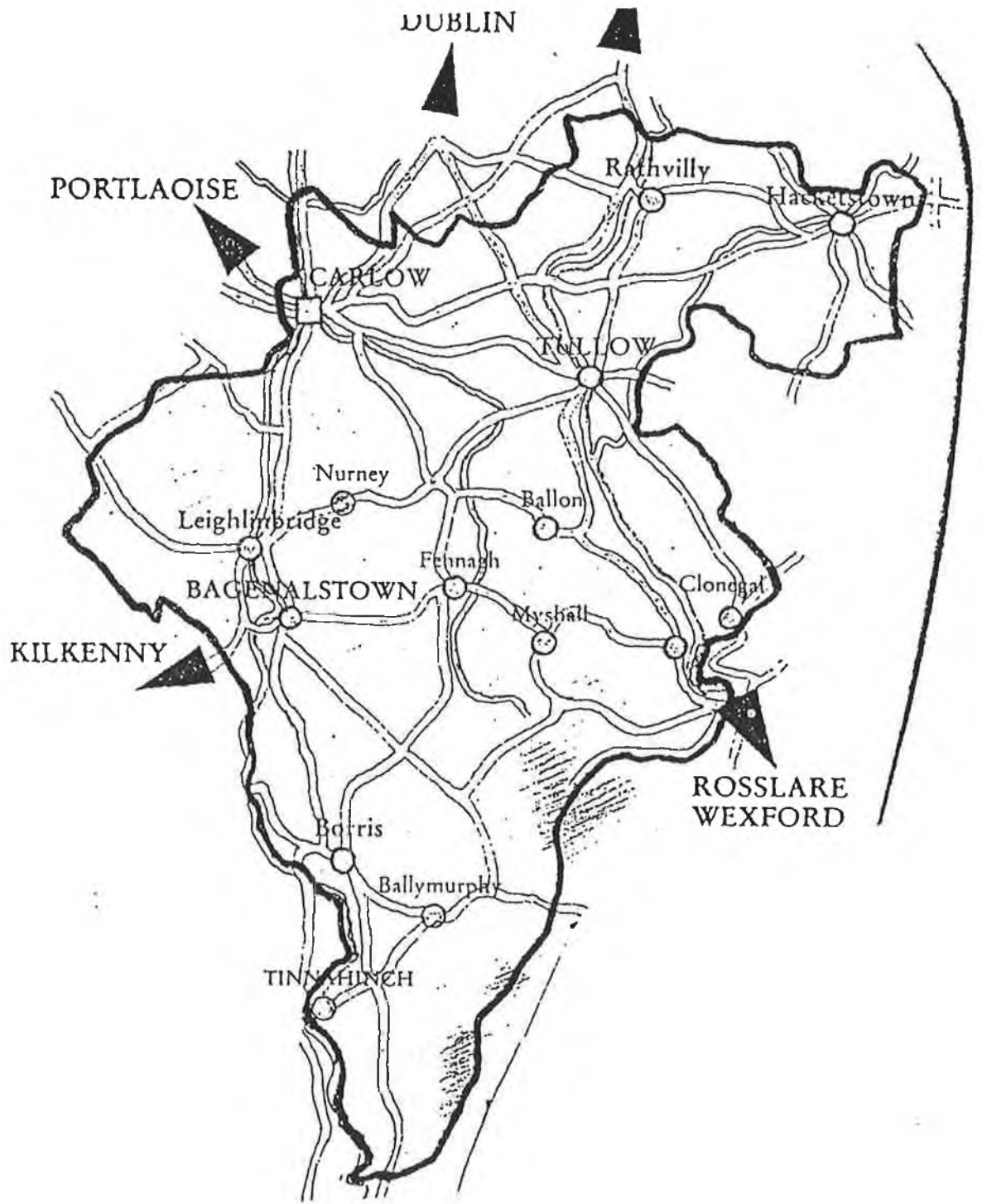
Gradually, however, the country began to recover and the famine and fever faded into the past. The recovery was slow and much slower still in the minds of people whose memories of that period influenced their attitudes to land and survival for many years to come.

- (131) Census of Ireland 1851. Volume 1 pts 5/1/4.
- (132) Census of Ireland 1841. page 454.
- (133) Census of Ireland 1851. pt. 2 page 22.



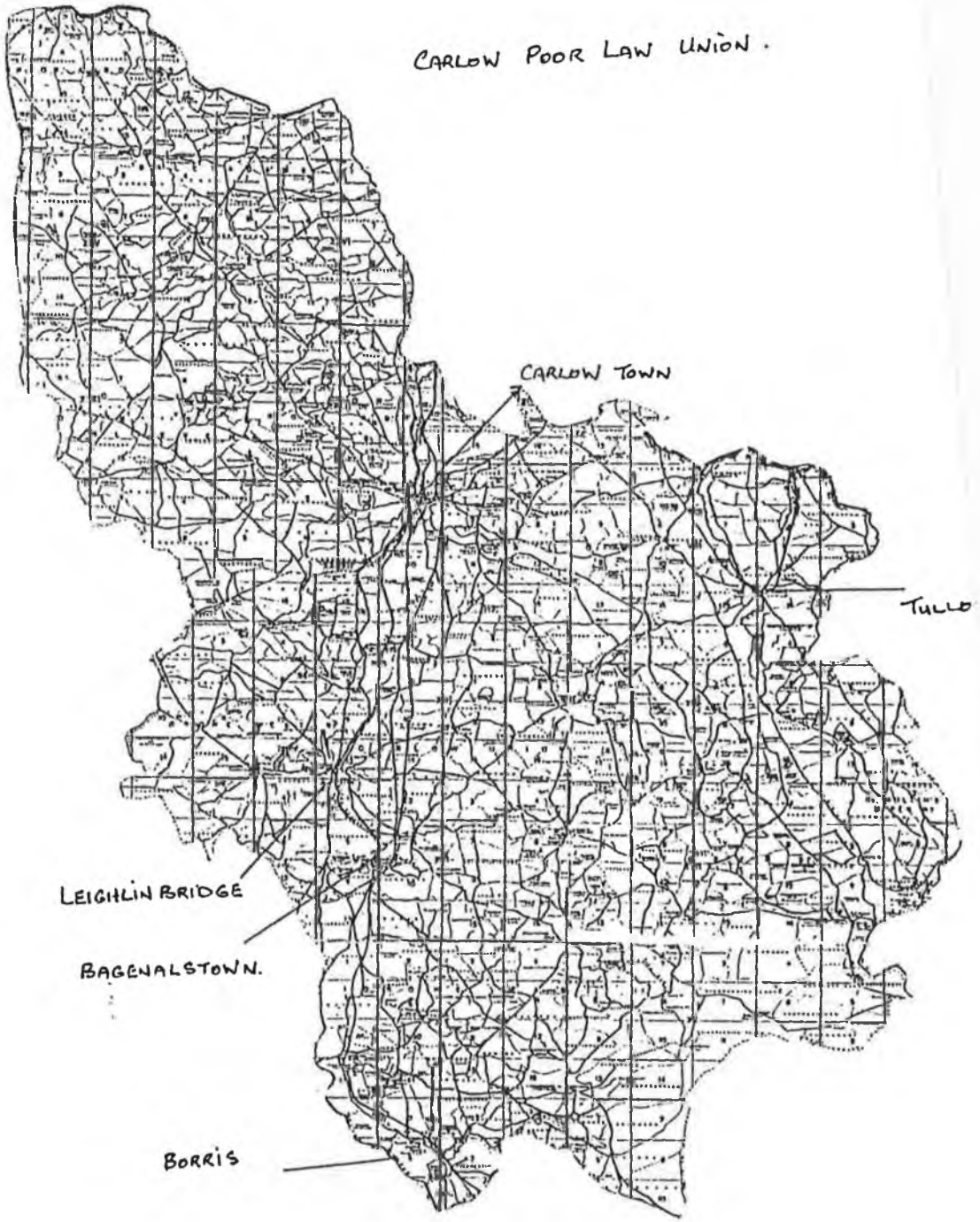


Map 1: Ireland, showing counties and principal towns

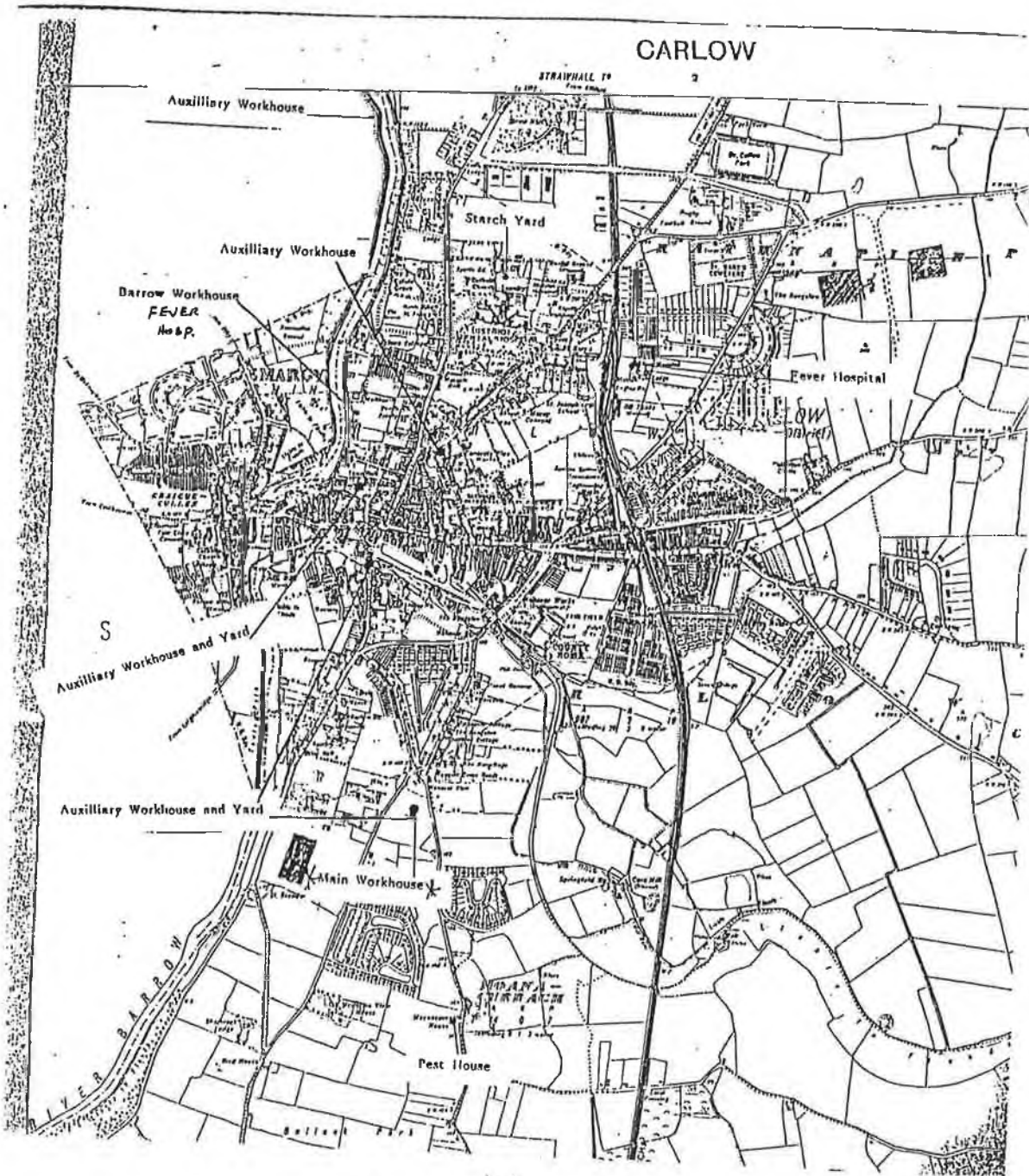


MAP 2. Co. CARLOW.

CARLOW POOR LAW UNION.



MAP 3. CARLOW POOR LAW UNION.



Map 4.

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