

The Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire  
Faculty of Film, Arts and Creative Technologies

Landscape as Witness:  
Aftermath Photography, Oral History, and  
Ethnography in Representing the Public Works  
Scheme of the Great Irish Famine

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## Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art, Design & and Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the Masters by Research. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

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## **Abstract**

The story of the Great Irish Famine/An Gorta Mór (1845-52) has been passed down over the years through the media of literature and art. This research critically evaluates these media, with particular reference to the famine constructions that were built as part of the Public Works Scheme. The historic role of photography (including Aftermath Photography) is also explored. Additionally, the use of oral history and ethnography as research tools are investigated. An analysis of how historical events, including the Famine, are typically represented through literature and art will be an essential starting point before contrasting how the Public Works Scheme constructions have been treated. The genre of Aftermath Photography, its effectiveness in representing traumatic past events, as well as its potential within the context of the Public Works Scheme constructions, will be explored. The unique contribution of oral history and ethnography as historical sources, particularly with regard to these constructions, will also be discussed.

In conclusion, this thesis will demonstrate how a combination of Aftermath Photography, oral history, and ethnography can be used to effectively represent the constructions built as part of the Public Works Scheme during the Famine years. Consequently, a new and fresh perspective will be gained with regard to this previously overlooked part of Irish history, which has impacted on Ireland and its diaspora throughout the world.

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## Introduction



Figure 0.1 'Sunset', Henry Mark Anthony (c. 1847)

Henry Mark Anthony's 'Sunset' depicts the ruins of the Rock of Cashel at the height of the Famine years (c. 1847). Although an enormous amount of suffering was taking place at the time, this is not the main focus of the painting. The viewer is immediately drawn to the beautiful, vibrant colours that appear in the sky, and the silhouettes of the ruined buildings on the horizon. In contrast to this, the viewer can barely make out two figures in worn clothes making their way through the village in the bottom half of the image. This miserable scene depicting a decrepit village is shrouded in shadow, which is in stark contrast with the beautiful scenery on display in the top half of the image.

'Sunset' demonstrates how certain histories can be overlooked at the time of their occurrence, resulting in their absence from the greater historical narrative. To focus on one aspect of a historical event (the beautiful skyline above the Rock of Cashel), it is thought that one must exclude various other histories that are deemed to be 'insignificant' or contradictory to the greater narrative (the figures

walking through a decrepit village). However, this is not the case. These seemingly insignificant histories are what we must pay particular attention to, as they allow us to form a more 'complete' picture of a historical event rather than the general summary that the popular narrative often depicts.

Despite occurring over 170 years ago, the Great Irish Famine of 1845-52 remained largely neglected by Irish historians and artists until recent years. It has been suggested that this may be to do with the psychological impact caused by the trauma of Ireland losing a quarter of its population during this time (Marshall 2014: 17). In the years following the Famine, Ireland continued to be a country plagued by poverty, resulting in high emigration rates throughout a large part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Marshall 2014: 17). On this subject, Catherine Marshall observes that, "In these circumstances, there was no possibility of any real sense of closure to the trauma of the Famine" (Marshall 2014: 17). Marshall suggests that this was also due to the fact that "Rampant poverty and disease never accord with the desired imagery of any country", and that "...images of heroic endeavor are generally thought to be more uplifting and better for public morale, at least in the short term" (Marshall 2014: 17), leading to the dark event being shunned. Whatever the reason, the Famine remained increasingly neglected as a matter for commemoration for many years<sup>1</sup>. It wasn't until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, coinciding with the Celtic Tiger and the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event, that the Famine and its causes became the centre of attention for many artists and historians. More importantly, the majority of works produced were from an Irish perspective, and resulted in a critical view of the British government's involvement in the events surrounding the Famine. The use of workhouses was examined in detail, and their awful living conditions were highlighted. The enormous amount of evictions that occurred during the Famine years were analysed, as well as the laissez-faire politics that resulted in a lack of charitable action from the British government at the time.

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, there was no official commemoration of the centenary. Instead, the government chose to host an exhibition of painting and sculpture relating to Irish history at the National College of Art in Dublin, entitled *The Thomas Davis and Young Ireland Movement Centenary Exhibitions of Pictures of Irish Historical Interest*. Although it included artworks depicting the Famine, this was not the exhibition's primary focus. (Marshall 2014: 15).

At last, the historical significance of Famine was being given the attention that it deserved. However, one particular aspect of the Famine failed to be examined as much as others: the Public Works Scheme and the constructions that were built as a result of it.

In most cases, those who are in power at the time write the popular historical narratives that are consumed to this day. Because of this, the various histories of the common folk are often those that are cast aside. This was very much the case with the Famine, as Niamh Ann Kelly points out:

Though in many senses a well-documented famine, those who suffered the most died and many of the rest were socially and culturally muted, and so contemporary accounts of the Famine are predominantly reliant on those who managed relief, mismanaged relief and those who observed, such as journalists, philanthropists and travellers (Kelly 2018: 69).

It is this managed/mismanaged relief that will be the main focus of this research. Sir Robert Peel initially implemented a temporary relief commission during the first year of the Famine (Crowley et al. 2012: 77), resulting in outdoor relief (rather than labour in workhouses) being available to the Irish people for the first time. This meant that the destitute could be employed to build roads, walls, ditches, and various constructions of a similar nature (Crowley et al. 2012: 79). For a day's work, the builders of these constructions received money (approximately a penny per day) or food (typically Indian grain) as payment (Crowley et al. 2012: 79). It was initially thought that these schemes were largely positive. At their peak, these measures employed around 700,000 people (Nally 2011: 142) and, although the salaries they paid were very low, it is thought that they were the main reason that there were relatively few deaths in 1845<sup>2</sup> (Kinealy 2001: 35). The measures remained in this form until the unseating of the Tory government in July 1846, and in August Charles Trevelyan (the assistant secretary to the Treasury) went about devising a new system of public relief. This is usually regarded as a particularly negative turning point in the Famine in terms of the quality of relief that was distributed. Perhaps this is the reason why the Public Works Scheme and its subsequent constructions often

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<sup>2</sup> On the subject of Robert Peel's policies at the time, *Freeman's Journal* commented "...no man died of famine during his administration" (Daly 1986: 69).

appear as a mere footnote in the grand narrative of the Famine. After all, on the surface it seems that the scheme was a positive one in comparison with what was to follow.

*Landscape as Witness* is the title of the project that is associated with this research. Through the use of photography, oral history, and ethnographic research, this project aims to represent the forgotten history of the Public Works Scheme, bringing to light its constructions that still exist all over the Irish landscape to this day. Focusing on North Clare, a total of nine weeks were spent travelling through the countryside by bicycle and on foot, interacting with various locals in an attempt to discover the area's history in relation to the Famine. Images were taken of the Public Works Scheme constructions, as well as of the landscape that surrounded them. The project deals with the theme of memory, highlighting not only the additional information that can be gained from oral history, but also the lack of information that has been passed down through the generations. Through displaying the resulting images alongside quotes from the various interviews undertaken throughout the field trips, this project aims to make sure that this important part of Irish history is never forgotten.

This thesis will begin by exploring the Great Irish Famine in more detail, analysing the Irish Poor Law in an attempt to discover the conditions that resulted in the Public Works Scheme being implemented. From there, it will highlight subjectivity in relation to historical documentation. Academic literature on the Famine will be discussed, as well as the role that oral history has played in representing the event. The notion of 'forgetting' will be examined, and how modern societies have the potential to forget significant historical events such as the Famine. Following on from this, the idea of 'art as representation' will be analysed, highlighting how historical events have traditionally been portrayed through artworks over time. The notion of 'representation' will be dissected, emphasising how a 'documentation' of the past is merely a representation of reality, not reality itself. The 'act of seeing' will explore the subjective viewpoints of artists/historians that represent historical events, as well as the importance of

understanding these viewpoints while observing their work. From there, the thesis will explore how the Famine has been represented through art over the years, examining in particular why there were so few artworks depicting the Famine as it was taking place. The various art styles that existed around that time will be discussed in this context, providing an insight into why this was the case. Similarly, although photography was in existence for many years prior to the Famine, there are no known photographs documenting the tragic events that were taking place. On this note, it will be discussed how the term 'documentary photography' didn't come into existence until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. From there the work of the Illustrated London News will be discussed, in particular their visual representations of the Famine at the time. Post-famine artwork depicting the event will then be compared and contrasted with the artwork that was created closer to that time.

In relation to *Landscape as Witness*, Aftermath Photography will be introduced; a genre of photography that involves the photographing of a dark event after it has taken place. Two subgenres of Aftermath Photography will be highlighted, that of 'Post-Violence' and 'Commemorative'. The effectiveness of Aftermath Photography in terms of representing past events will be argued, paying particular attention to how its banal nature can be used to great effect in engaging viewers with the work, as well as facilitating political action to take place in response to it. The use of Aftermath Photography to represent the constructions built as part of the Public Works Scheme in *Landscape as Witness* will be discussed. From there the thesis will focus on the methodology of the *Landscape as Witness* project, namely that of ethnography. The definition and history of ethnography will be explored, as well as how various methods such as field notes and blogging were implemented during both field trips. Oral history will also be discussed, in particular the advantages and disadvantages of using it to uncover previously neglected histories. Although the subjectivity of oral account has often been questioned, it will be argued that this subjectivity exists throughout all methods of documenting history, including those of text and photography. The method of using photography alongside oral history will also be explored, drawing attention to projects that have already used this method, as

well as how it was implemented in *Landscape as Witness*. From there the thesis will focus on the dissemination of the project; beginning with value of the blog and how effective the medium is at reaching a wide, varied audience that would otherwise have been near impossible to reach. Various analytics from the *Landscape as Witness* blog will be shown, further highlighting this fact. The subjectivity of the blog and its corresponding field notes will also be discussed, exploring how it can be important to make this subjectivity visible when representing a particular historical event. The photobook will then be discussed, and its importance in disseminating information will also be analysed. Various decisions that were made during the creation of the photobook will be highlighted, such as its layout and design, and the explanations behind them will be provided.

## **1 - Remembering to Forget**

The pay was from 2d. to 4d. a day, while the overseers had the lion's share. It is said that many poor starving men were unable after a day's work to reach their home in the evening and were found dead in a dyke or trench the following morning. (Póitair 1995: 158).

## The Great Hunger

Between the years of 1845 and 1852, Ireland was hit by a series of failed potato crops for several years in succession (Kinealy 1990). As the majority of the Irish peasantry at the time were dependent on a diet consisting primarily of potatoes<sup>3</sup>, many were left starving as a result of these crop failures (Ó Gráda 1993: 22). Christine Kinealy observes that Ireland had already been home to partial crop failures in the years preceding the famine, in 1817, 1822, 1831, 1835, 1836, 1839, and 1842 (Kinealy 1990: 158). It is unusual, therefore, that the country seemed so ill-equipped to deal with crop failures of 1845-52. Rev. John O'Rourke also discusses these earlier famines, as well as analysing the introduction of the potato to Ireland and how a large percentage of the peasantry became dependent on it in the first place<sup>4</sup> (O'Rourke 1902: 58). It is this dependency that had a major part to play in the death of one million Irish people<sup>5</sup> (O'Rourke 1902). The British government was criticised for their handling of the situation, which resulted in the emigration of a further million (Quinn 2001: 74). Food continued to be exported from the country rather than being distributed to those most affected by the famine, as it was believed that the market was "...the arbiter of justice" and should not be meddled with out of fear of its collapse (Gibbons 2014: 21). The role that the British government played in the events leading up to and during the famine years will be examine in more detailed as this chapter progresses. The chapter will also explore how the famine has been traditionally analysed in academic literature, which has resulted in certain events being documented relatively thoroughly in contrast to those that have been swept under the rug of history.

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<sup>3</sup> The Lumper potato featured most prominently in the diets of the peasantry around that time, with a report in 1840 suggesting that the average daily intake of potatoes for a labourer was between 10 and 14 lbs. Unfortunately, the Lumper offered little resistance to the blight (*hytophthera infestans*) that caused the series of crop failures to occur during the Famine years (Ó Gráda 1993: 23).

<sup>4</sup> The potato was "...received by philanthropists and economists with joy" on its introduction, as it was thought to provide "...a certain protection against that scarcity which sometimes resulted from short harvests" (O'Rourke 1902: 58). In 1662 a letter was sent to the Royal Society by a certain Mr. Buckland from Somersetshire, "...recommending the planting of potatoes in all parts of the kingdom, *to prevent famine...*" (O'Rourke 1902: 59).

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the course of the Famine, the British government hoped that their policies would "...loosen the hold of the Irish people on the potato and facilitate a transition to large scale farming" (Kinealy 1990: 161).

## The Irish Poor Law and the Public Works Scheme

Corruption, favouritism and intimidation were features of the public works scheme, and far more people suffered rather than gained from the whole operation (Crowley, William, & Murphy 2012: 49).

Prior to the famine of 1845-52, there was a law in place to accommodate the destitute in Ireland entitled the 'Irish Poor Law'. Kinealy discusses the introduction of the this law to Ireland, describing it as follows:

The Irish Poor Law divided the country into 130 new administrative units known as Unions, each of which was to have its own workhouse. Each workhouse was administered by an elected Board of Guardians and was financed by rates which were levied locally. Every Poor Law Union therefore was to be financially self-supporting (Kinealy 1990: 158).

However, this law was not suited to the conditions of the famine, partly due to the fact that it did not state that anyone in Ireland had the right to outdoor relief. The extent of the famine led to the introduction of a temporary relief commission, "...which was to operate parallel to, but distinct from, the Poor Law system" (Kinealy 1990: 158). Sir Robert Peel set up this relief system between 1845-46 (Crowley et al. 2012: 77). These policy changes eventually led to outdoor relief for the first time, meaning that the destitute in Ireland could be employed to build roads, walls, ditches, and various constructions of a similar nature (Crowley et al. 2012: 79). As payment, the builders of these constructions would receive either food<sup>6</sup> or approximately a penny-a-day (Crowley et al. 2012: 79). The majority of these constructions had no practical purpose other than to give work to those in need. This resulted in roads that lead to nowhere, and walls that separated unused, barren land. In instances where the constructions were practical, they were often as a result of the exploitation of the relief system by local landlords to improve their own estates (Crowley et al. 2012: 77).

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<sup>6</sup> 'Indian grain'/'Indian meal' was commonly distributed as a form of payment among the labourers (Póirtéir: 161), hence roads built as part of the scheme are sometimes referred to as 'Male [Meal] Roads'. However, many were unfamiliar with this form of food and therefore were unable to cook it correctly (Crowley et al. 2012).

In August 1846, the Labour Rate Act was introduced (Harzallah 2009: 85). Although funding for the relief works had been shared between the government and local baronies during the first year of the famine, the introduction of this act meant that, "...all expenditure was to be the responsibility of the localities" (Harzallah 2009: 85). Landlords were expected to take out loans from the government for these relief works, which were to be paid back at a later date (Harzallah 2009: 85). Furthermore, the Quarter Acre Clause was introduced as part of the Poor Law in 1847 (Kelly 2018:53), meaning that relief was not to be given to those who owned more than a quarter-acre (Kinealy 2012: 92). As alluded to previously, this way of thinking was typical of the economic ideology of 'Political Economy' that was popular within the new Liberal government at the time (Harzallah 2009: 83). As Mohamed Salah Harzallah says, "[Political Economy]...discouraged all forms of governmental intervention whether in the economy or in the field of public charity. The provision of assistance to the needy in society was even regarded as being detrimental to both the paupers and the economy" (Harzallah, 2009: 83).

The motives of the relief scheme were questionable – "Despite the high costs of the relief works (which would account for some £5 million in 1846-47), the outcome of the system was almost certainly to augment rather than contain excess mortality." (Crowley et al. 2012: 79). Peter Gray notes that by December 1847, "...the failure of the public relief works was indisputable. Reports of mass mortality and inquests attributing deaths to the Board's negligence became common' (Gray 1995: 51). Similarly, David Nally argues that looking into the development of the Irish Poor Law system "...exposes the growing perception that agricultural rationalization, fiscal restructuring, and population clearances were necessary to 'ameliorate' and 'improve' Irish society" (Nally 2008: 714)<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Niamh Ann Kelly also touches on this subject, highlighting the fact that "Successive Tory-and Whig-led governments had sought to utilize the Famine as a means to radically modernize Ireland's economy: putting an end to potato dependence, revamping a blatantly irresponsible landlord system and excluding absent or ineffectual systems of management" (Kelly 2018: 55)

Nally also introduces the term “governmentalization of famine”, which he describes as when “...hunger and famine come to be theorized and judged as a legitimate field for government administration and intervention” (Nally 2008: 716). Rather than treating the situation as a national crisis, it is thought that those who held powerful positions in government at the time were more interested in ‘improving’ Irish society as a result of their unfortunate circumstances. On the subject of the Public Works Scheme, Harzallah acknowledges that while certain historians believe that the British government did everything within their power to alleviate the destitute during the famine, there are others who are more critical and are of the opinion that the British government deliberately caused the Irish to suffer (Harzallah 2009: 83). Luke Gibbons also speaks in length on this subject, highlighting the troubled relationship that existed between Britain and Ireland at the time by stating that, “In Ireland, the poor were excluded not only from the benefits of the “invisible hand” of commerce but also from the ministrations of charity, due to the abrogation of even a semblance of sympathetic ties between Britain and Ireland” (Gibbons 2014: 21). Ireland was seen very much as separate from the rest of Britain<sup>8</sup>, with Lord Clarendon (the Lord Lieutenant at the time) suggesting that the Irish poor were treated with the same disregard as the aboriginal first peoples of Australia (Gibbons 2014: 21). This lack of sympathy toward the Irish people, as well as the fervent belief that the market was the arbiter of justice, resulted in a lack of charitable aid being supplied by the British government during this time<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> This is evident in a private note sent from Queen Victoria to Lord Russell in 1847 on her concern for the “Foreign Affairs” in Ireland at the time. (Gibbons 2014: 21)

<sup>9</sup> Some would argue that this mentality has lasted close to the present day. In 1995, then UK prime minister John Major claimed that the majority of Britons were of the opinion that Ireland was “just another island” and they “don’t really care what happened elsewhere in the world” in a private phone call with the US president at the time, Bill Clinton (Carswell 2019).

This lack of sympathy is captured in the following correspondence between Lord Clarendon and John Russell:

Upon the closure of the last soup kitchen in October 1847, Lord Clarendon wrote to John Russell (then Prime Minister of England) claiming that “Ireland cannot be left to her own resources, they are manifestly insufficient, we are not to let the people die of starvation.” John Russell replied, “The state of Ireland for the next few months must be one of great suffering. Unhappily, the agitation for Repeal<sup>10</sup> has contrived to destroy nearly all sympathy in this country” (Woodham-Smith 1962: 317).

## Documenting the Famine

...to avert one’s gaze from the sufferings of past generations or to seek to immunize them by recourse to the distancing devices of academic discourse (Bradshaw 1989: 341)

This relationship between Britain and Ireland must be kept in mind when analysing accounts from the time of the Famine. As the sources of these accounts have the potential to be biased, it can be difficult to determine fact from fiction. Many historians may have had particular agendas when it came to documenting the Famine, resulting in certain events being overlooked or falsely documented. Eileen Moore Quinn looks to construct an alternative view of Famine, making it clear why the most popular narrative regarding the event should not always be regarded as 100% factual. As evidence of this, Quinn quotes Angela Bourke in saying, “The Irish Folklore Commission never collected from dirty houses” while collecting various local histories at the time (O’Giolláin 2000: 140). As Quinn explains, this meant that, “...collectors chose their informants according to the ideals and standards being promulgated by the young Irish republic” (Quinn 2001: 72). As well as this, Quinn points out that, “Recounted by family and friends, then edited by the Irish Folklore Commission as representative of the new nation’s “folk,” their status had been achieved at the behest of those who deemed the Irish past worth preserving – or forgetting” (Quinn 2001: 73). It is therefore clear that the existing narrative of the famine can contain a significant

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<sup>10</sup> This is a reference to the repealing of the Corn Laws in 1846. The Corn Laws consisted of tariffs and trade restrictions on imported food and grain in the United Kingdom between 1815 and 1846. Robert Peel’s decision to repeal the Corn Laws has often been attributed to the fact that it allowed for cheap corn to be imported for the destitute during the Famine years, however it has also been suggested that this was just another step in the direction of a free trade policy that Peel had been working towards since his return as Prime Minister in 1841 (Kinealy 2001: 93).

amount of bias, and that there could be many stories that have been deemed 'unworthy' to be recounted as part of Irish history.

Although a number of academic texts have been written about the famine, relatively little has been reported on the constructions that were built as a result of the Public Works Scheme. The *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine* and *Imaging the Great Irish Famine* provide rare and thorough overviews of the scheme, however further details on the building of these constructions have remained undocumented for the most part. As Niamh Ann Kelly points out, "The remnants of relief works, in particular roads and walls, built during this period are at best barely marked with many yet unknown or unclear in place authenticity" (Kelly 2018: 471). There are notable exceptions, as locations of larger constructions in particular have been documented more frequently. This could be to do with the impact that they had on the community in which they were built, an impact that the smaller constructions would have to a lesser degree. Another explanation could be to do with the amount of people employed to undertake the building of these larger constructions. The more people involved, the more likely it was that the local community would remember the construction and its history. One such example involves the draining of the River Fergus in County Clare, which is relatively well-documented in comparison to other constructions of a similar nature<sup>11</sup>. Unfortunately this type of detailed documentation is rare, with the majority of Public Works Scheme constructions still depending on word of mouth for their history to be preserved<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> The draining of the River Fergus, County Clare, was one of the biggest public works schemes undertaken in Ireland during the Famine. It was started under the Drainage Act of March 1846 and lasted into the mid-1850s. The Ballyhee Cutting, three miles north of Ennis, half a mile long and in places over forty feet deep through limestone rock, is the most impressive surviving aspect of this scheme. In mid-July 1847, when all the local road schemes had been closed down, the Fergus scheme was the only source of relief work and employed 600 labourers (Ciarán Ó Murchadha, 1998: 259-66).

<sup>12</sup> A number of word of mouth accounts regarding these constructions can be found in Cathal Póirtéir's 'Famine Echoes' (Póirtéir 1995).

## Oral History

...it was like as if they were knitting a tapestry of the local knowledge where everybody fitted in through one way or the other...even the passers through had a role to play in this magnificent tapestry that was all stitched together by conversations around the fire (Appendix II: C).

Similarly, many of these so-called “unworthy” histories have become dependent on being passed down by word of mouth to preserve them. Harzallah discusses the importance of oral history in relation to the Famine by observing how it is remembered, drawing upon Cathal Póirtéir who indicated that “...the huge amount of written sources about the Famine lack the perspective of ordinary people” (Harzallah 2007: 43). Harzallah reinforces this statement, saying that, “Unlike those who had the opportunity to leave written records of their views on the famine events, Póirtéir observes that the experience of the Irish-speaking paupers remains unknown” (Harzallah 2007: 43). This is yet another example of the story of the Famine not being told in its entirety, particularly in regard to the stories of those who were most affected by it. As some experiences are remembered, others are forgotten. Harzallah acknowledges that oral history has flaws of its own, but refers to Cormac O’Grada who felt that it provided a distinctive interpretation of the famine events (Harzallah 2007: 43), and should nevertheless be adhered to.

Mark McGowan explores these aforementioned flaws of oral history, specifically in relation to the famine. McGowan mentions the ‘famine diaries’ that were brought over by Irish immigrants to Canada when they were forced to flee during and after the Famine took place in Ireland. According to McGowan, these diaries have “incorporated themselves into the Irish nationalist narrative of the Famine” (McGowan 2007: 48), despite the fact that “some diaries would be challenged as inauthentic, acts of fantasy not fact – mere fabrications to serve ideologies that offered a charged interpretation of the events of 1847” (McGowan 2007: 48). It is with regret that McGowan says “Such fabrications have provided lasting images that are not easily exorcised from either the historiography of the Famine or the popular collective memory of the Famine moment” (McGowan 2007: 48). Similarly to written history, there is a tendency

for subjectivity and bias to creep into the telling of a narrative. However, if this can be said for both oral and written history, then there is no reason for either discipline to be rejected on those grounds.

Cathal Póirtéir's book entitled *Famine Echoes* contains oral histories collected throughout Ireland in the 1940s (Póirtéir 1995). The aim of this book was to capture the thoughts and memories of the ordinary people during the famine – the people whose lives history has deemed unworthy of recording on a grander scale. Those being interviewed had either direct or indirect connections with those who were alive during the time of the Famine, and they were able to share experiences and memories that had been passed down to them by word of mouth. Many other texts refer to the hardship and struggle that the Irish people endured as part of this scheme, but this particular book gives personal accounts of what took place during that time. Póirtéir's book fills a particular gap in history, as it has an entire chapter that revolves around the buildings constructed as part of the Public Works Schemes, containing information that may never been documented otherwise<sup>13</sup>. This demonstrates how oral history can be used to uncover previously undocumented information in relation to neglected histories.

The obvious risk associated with acquiring information from oral history is that of forgetting, something that has become a particular problem over the past century or so. As Fredric Jameson says, "...our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past" (Jameson 1985: 125). Eric Hobsbawn believes this is due to the fact that "Most young men and women at the century's end grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in" (Hobsbawn 1994: 3). Paul Connerton echoes these thoughts, by placing the blame for forgetting on modernity.

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<sup>13</sup> See page 155 of Cathal Póirtéir's *Famine Echoes* for an account of a road-making scheme implemented around this time (Póirtéir 1995: 155).

Modernity, as Connerton puts it, is:

...the objective transformation of the social fabric unleashed by the advent of the capitalist world market which tears down feudal and ancestral limitations on a global scale, and psychologically the enlargement of life chances through the gradual freeing from fixed status hierarchies (Connerton 2009: 4).

Therefore, modernity "...covers the period from the mid nineteenth century accelerating to the present" (Connerton 2009: 4). Connerton believes that during this period, it is the increase in technology available to the masses that has resulted in the alteration of cultural memory (Connerton 2009: 86). This is due to the fact that the human mind was not created to deal with such an excess of information. Another cause of cultural forgetting is that of mass migration (Connerton 2009: 135), something that often occurred during the Famine years. The process of emigration results in the forgetting of local roots, and therefore specific memories are lost (Connerton 2009: 135).

One method of preventing cultural memory loss is that of memorialisation, the act of preserving the memory of people or events. As Mieke Bal explains, this is an active process that takes place in the present "...in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future" (Ball 1999: vii). Bal explains that the discourse of cultural memory<sup>14</sup> allows us to "...mediate and modify difficult or tabooed moments of the past moments that nonetheless impinge, sometimes fatally, on the present" (Bal 1999: vii). The Famine certainly qualifies as one of these "tabooed moments", giving that the fact that the event has been relatively ignored until recent years. Bal goes on to mention the importance of art in memorialising traumatic events:

Art and other cultural artifacts such as photographs or published texts of all kinds can mediate between the parties to the traumatizing scene and between these and the reader or viewer. The recipients of the account perform an act of memory that is potentially healing, as it calls for political and cultural solidarity in recognizing the traumatized party's predicament (Bal 1999: x).

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<sup>14</sup> "...the term cultural memory signifies that memory can be understood as a cultural phenomenon as well as an individual or social one" (Bal 1999: vii).

A method of memorialising an event is that of commemoration, the act of marking the anniversary of said event. Perhaps not unusually, the need to commemorate increases when there is a fear of forgetting (Connerton 2009: 27). This may explain the increase in Famine commemorations in the mid 1990s for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Famine itself. However, the act of memorialisation can be problematic. As Connerton puts it, “Memorials conceal the past as much as they use to remember it” (Connerton 2009: 29). Once a particular history is commemorated in the form of a monument, for example, there is a risk that the memory of that history will slowly disappear from the culture. This is due to the fact that there is no ‘fear’ encouraging people to remember, as the memorial is doing the remembering for them.

This chapter explored the Great Irish Famine in detail, analysing the Irish Poor Law and highlighting the laissez-faire politics that resulted in the Public Works Scheme being implemented instead of more charitable measures. It went on to discuss the range of academic literature that has been written on the Famine, making sure to highlight the subjectivity that occurs when representing historical events. This was kept in mind while discussing the role of oral history in representing the Famine, highlighting that there are no grounds to dismiss this method of collecting information due to the subjectivity associated with it. The notion of ‘forgetting’ was examined; in particular how modern societies have the potential to forget significant historical events like the Famine. This raises the question of how one would best represent a historical event, particularly one at risk of being forgotten such as the Public Works Scheme constructions. To do this, one must first look at how the rest of the Famine has been traditionally represented: through artwork.

## **2 - Representing the Unrepresented**

...I asked one of the locals whether he knew of the exact location of this workhouse. I had been under the impression that the building was long gone, however he informed me that a nearby overgrown wall had been part of the original construction, or at least that was what he had always been told. I had passed by this wall multiple times before, never noticing its existence as it was so engulfed by the surrounding undergrowth. I captured a few images of it before heading towards my next destination, the 2nd bridge in Lismactagh (Appendix I: Aa).

## Daniel MacDonald



Figure 2.1 'Irish Peasant Family Discovering the Blight of their Store', Daniel MacDonald (c. 1847)

In the above painting, vacant expressions can be seen on each individual's face. An infant is left unattended on the lower left-hand side of the painting. The families' clothes are in tatters, indicating their lack of prosperity. A young woman on the lower right-hand side of the painting buries her head in her lap; clearly distraught at the situation in which she and her family find themselves. The man in the centre of the image gazes into the distance with a defiant expression on his face. There is a sense of anger about him, and his clasped hands are an indication of his uncertainty about what may lie ahead. Dark clouds loom overhead, a warning of what is yet to come<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> This is an example of allegory in art, which is when "...the subject of the artwork, or the various elements that form the composition, is used to symbolize a deeper moral or spiritual meaning such as life, death, love, virtue, justice etc." ("Art Term: Allegory", n.d.). Allegory is often used to illustrate complex ideas in a digestible form ("Art Term: Allegory", n.d.), a method that is utilised in the imagery from *Landscape as Witness*.

Although a distressing scene is being depicted, the colour palette somewhat contrasts with this. A warm glow fills the painting, suggesting that the scene was captured at sunrise or sunset. This warmth contrasts with the sombre nature of the image. Some of the colours are vibrant, such as the teal shawl worn by one of the young women. This may be alluding to the fact that the family had once seen better times. Curiously, the majority of the group appear to look reasonably healthy in spite of the situation that they find themselves in. The young child on the left-hand side looks to be in particularly good health, even appearing to have rosy cheeks.

Daniel MacDonald's *Irish Peasant Family Discovering the Blight of Their Store* (Figure 2.1) is one of the few paintings that highlight the dire circumstances of the Famine as it was taking place, depicting a family's reaction when they realise that their potato crop has failed. Despite the seemingly mild depiction of these awful conditions, MacDonald's painting was in fact quite shocking at the time. Niamh O'Sullivan explains that "Victorian painting was hierarchical in subject matter, technically controlled, restrained in sentiment, and respectful of propriety" (O'Sullivan 2018: 9). MacDonald's painting was an attempt to depict the horrors taking place whilst adhering to the art style of the time, and without resorting to melodrama. The painting was so shocking for its time that it was critically ignored whilst being exhibited at the British Institution in 1847, with the exception of in the journal *Art Union* (O'Sullivan 2018: 9). To discover why this image was so shocking, one must further explore how historical events were being visually represented around the time of the Famine.

### **History Painting**

For a period, history painting was the most popular method of representing historical events through art. Originating in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, history painting was a result of the "...theoretical deliberations of successive generations of French Academicians..." throughout the 100 years or so prior to that (Green & Seddon 2000: 6). History paintings emphasised a "...significant moment or action..." in the story that had been chosen by the artist (Green & Seddon 2000: 7). These stories were usually selected from various Greek

mythologies and figures, or the Bible (Berger 2008: 100). The artist made certain that consequences of the depicted moment/action would be clearly portrayed to the viewer (Green & Seddon 2000: 7). It was the aim of the artist that the viewer would perceive a sense of virtue in the image, which would be relevant to their own time as well as having a sense of timelessness (Green & Seddon 2000: 7). The artist attempted to centre everything on the viewer rather than forcing them to place themselves in the past being depicted.

History paintings were traditionally seen as being more highly valued than still-lives, portraits, or landscapes (Berger 2008: 101). This was due to the moral value that was "...ascribed to the study of the classics..." (Berger 2008: 101). The reason for this was that "...the classic texts, whatever their intrinsic worth, supplied the higher strata of the ruling class with a system of references for the forms of their own idealized behaviour" (Berger 2008: 101). By funding the painting of these works of art, the ruling class were reinforcing their position in society by normalising it.

### **The Act of Seeing and Subjectivity**

The act of funding brings in an additional element of subjectivity to artworks, on top of the existing subjectivity of the artist. Often when viewing an image, be it a painting, a photograph, or a sketch, it is easy to forget the original intentions of its creator, the artist. The viewer focuses on the meaning of the image as it is in front of them, but rarely brings the viewpoint of the artist into the equation. The artist's viewpoint is crucial, as it can have a dramatic effect on how an image is read. John Berger describes this viewpoint as the act of 'seeing', explaining that "...we only see what we look at" (Berger 2008: 8). By doing so, we exclude everything else in our surroundings. This act of 'seeing' or 'looking' is a selective choice. Similarly, an image created by an artist is, "...a sight which has been recreated or reproduced" (Berger, 2008: 9). By 'looking' at an image, we are witnessing how the artist 'saw' the world at that particular time. An image is therefore representative of a selective viewpoint from a moment in time. By viewing an image, it is crucial that one should be conscious of this fact. An artist's viewpoint cannot be all encompassing, and hence, we should be aware of what is

excluded from the image, as well as what is included. The same could be said about the viewpoint of a historian, or any other person representing history for that matter. Berger refers to this act of inclusion/exclusion by explaining how the choice of subject in an image reflects the artist's way of seeing:

Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented; it then showed how something or somebody had once looked – and thus by implication how the subject had once been seen by other people (Berger 2008: 10).

Berger also highlights the difficulties of viewing artwork that is representative of a time gone by. Although one can read an image as being the artist's viewpoint of a certain event, the reading of the image also heavily depends on the viewer's own viewpoint (Berger 2008: 10). An example of this can be seen when an image is presented as a work of art. Upon viewing the image, the viewer's reading of it is affected by their previous assumptions about art that they have picked up over the course of their lifetime (Berger 2008: 11). The viewer may think that 'art' is meant to look a certain way, or that a certain image belongs to a particular category of art. These assumptions may be appropriate while viewing contemporary artwork, but images from the past were created with radically different assumptions in mind. By viewing artwork with our own assumptions, we are denying the artist's way of seeing. Berger explains that, "When we 'see' a landscape, we situate ourselves in it. If we 'saw' the art of the past, we would situate ourselves in history" (Berger 2008: 11). To truly see the past event as the artist saw it, the viewer must forget about assumptions that they have collected over time. By retaining these assumptions, the past that is being depicted often becomes mystified as a result of contemporary viewers not being able to situate themselves in that history (Berger 2008: 11). As Fustel de Coulanges says, historians should "...blot out everything they know about the later course of history" if they want to truly "relive an era" (Benjamin 1968: 256). Berger refers to perspective in relation to this. Unique to European art, the convention of perspective "...was first established in the early Renaissance..." and "...centres everything on the eye of the beholder" (Berger 2008: 16). This meant that the imagery was addressing a single spectator, no matter the time or space they were in, resulting in said spectator becoming detached from the past being

depicted in artwork. Although it has been made clear that we must acknowledge the image as being the viewpoint of the artist, it should be noted that the artist itself would have had various assumptions that in turn influenced the creation of the image. David Green and Peter Seddon refer to this point, saying that “...every representation of the past carries with it specific *ideological* implications...” (Green & Seddon 2000: 2). Hayden White also writes at length on this subject, saying:

...the issue of ideology points to the fact that there is no value-neutral mode of emplotment [the assembly of a series of historical events into a narrative with a plot], explanation, or even description of any field of events, whether imaginary or real, and suggests that the very use of language itself implies or entails a specific position before the world which is ethical, ideological or more generally political... (Green & Seddon 2000: 2).

This highlights the fact that no representation of history is without its subjectivity. From the artist selecting the particular scene/event being depicted, to the viewer giving their own reading of the resulting artwork, there are plenty of instances in which that particular history could be interpreted differently.

### **Artwork of the Great Famine**

The power of the ruling class over works of art can also be seen in artwork depicting the Famine itself. Whilst discussing Henry Mark Anthony's *Sunset* (Figure 0.1), Niamh O'Sullivan states “...we can see some of the pressures placed on conventional art by the forces that brought devastation to both country and city in Ireland” (O'Sullivan 2018: 6). The viewer's attention is brought to the rich colours depicted in the sky, as the framing of the image takes away the focus from the derelict conditions of the peasants who reside in the scene. A deliberate act has been made to divert the attention from the suffering that was taking place at the time the painting was created. O'Sullivan also alludes to the tendency for history in general to focus more on “...great deeds by great men rather than voices from below...” (O'Sullivan 2018: 7), suggesting that this may have caused the Famine to be overlooked in the Irish narrative for so many years. Artists of the time tended to use more acceptable themes whilst depicting the Famine, as well as drawing upon previous imagery of the Irish and the surrounding landscape to aid them in completing their artwork (O'Sullivan 2018: 6). This

resulted in paintings depicting starving Irish paupers as having rosy cheeks and being reasonably well-clothed and healthy considering their dire circumstances. O'Sullivan explains that this was due to the fact that the art styles of the time were not able to capture such a horrific reality, and that it was only in the years following the Famine that artists began to visually represent the event in such a way:

In the case of post-Famine generations, the opportunity to represent it aesthetically had to await changes in visual styles that could absorb unsettling historical subject matter, as art itself moved beyond representation to grasp forces released by the shock of modernity (O'Sullivan, 2018: 7).

There is also a suggestion that the past (especially a traumatic one) can become easier to deal with as time goes by, which would explain why so few images of the Famine were created at the time (O'Sullivan 2018: 7). The other side of this is that as time passes, the more difficult it can be to understand that particular past (O'Sullivan 2018: 7).

### **Absence of Photography**

Whilst discussing the visual representation of the Famine, a point has been made about the lack of photographic material representing the suffering that took place around that time. Although in its early stages, photography had been in existence for around half a decade by the time the Famine had struck Ireland, and was very much in use around the world. However, Liam Kelly points out that the photographic process was slow around that time and therefore not ideal for journalism, and mostly used for taking upper-class portraits instead (Kelly 2008: 28). Justin Carville discusses this topic in detail and provides an alternative explanation for the absence of photography during the Famine years:

It can be quite easy to make the claim that since most of the people who had cameras in that period were landlords, and since the decimation caused by the Famine was happening within their lands, they had a vested interest in not photographing it (Carville 2011).

This theory could also be applied to paintings, as the artists' patrons (many of whom could have been landlords themselves) would not have been inclined to document the Famine at the time. Carville adds, "...during that period the

aesthetic interests in photography were centred on things like landscape and trying to make photographs overtly artistic.” (Carville 2011). The style of documentary photography that we are familiar with simply did not exist at the time. The lack of photographic material depicting the Famine cannot therefore be seen as a deliberate overlooking of the event. Although photography was not used to depict the Famine at the time, the concept of the image as evidence still existed. The image was still viewed as the depiction of truth, in contrast to how text was perceived. For this reason, the imagery in illustrated newspapers had documentary authority when it came to documenting the Famine (O’Sullivan 2014). The main sources of contemporary visual representations of the Famine at the time were from these illustrated newspapers. Similarly to MacDonald’s painting, the images depicted in these newspapers may seem quite mild but were shocking to the Victorians (O’Sullivan 2018: 10).

### **The Illustrated London News**

Coincidentally, the Famine occurred a mere three years after the foundation of the Illustrated London News, which had quickly gained widespread popularity (O’Sullivan 2018: 10). Because of this, the Famine became one of the first major catastrophes to be documented by popular press (Foley, 2015). The illustrators that were employed by the Illustrated London News were put in a precarious position when they were tasked with documenting the Famine. Unlike many artists of the time, these illustrators were expected to represent the event factually, without any imaginative compositions (O’Sullivan 2018: 10). At the same time, their representations “...needed to be framed in such a way as to attract audiences without disturbing them” (O’Sullivan 2018: 10). If the image was too graphic, the viewer was more likely to be disgusted rather than sympathetic with the victim being portrayed (Mark-Fitzgerald 2010: 195). Similar to the artists of the time, illustrators were expected to follow and represent whatever prejudice their newspaper/patron had. As British newspapers were not usually sympathetic to the struggling Irish, this was reflected in their illustrations (O’Sullivan 2018: 10). Published in 1842, ‘Attack on a Potato Store’ depicts the Irish as being wild and unruly, further enhancing their stereotype at the time as being savages (Figure 2.2). Some newspapers

recognised this prejudice, and made a conscious effort to employ Irish illustrators and reporters (O'Sullivan 2018: 10). The issues that were previously raised about art representing history can be seen in the case of these illustrations, as O'Sullivan explains:

Constructed as they are by a chain of hands, the opportunities for insinuation were rife. From the original sketch by the artist in the field, through the elaboration of the sketch by the home-based illustrator on the wood panels in the office, and the dividing of the image into blocks for engraving, the process of production offered many opportunities for manipulation, if only to accord with the house style (O'Sullivan 2018: 11).



Figure 2.2 'Attack on a Potato Store', Illustrated London News (1842)

Many illustrators were simply not able to document the horrific events that were taking place, even without the restraints of their newspaper's bias. They were trained to view the body in the same way as they viewed the ancient Greek and Roman casts (O'Sullivan 2018: 12). Even though there have been many paintings of atrocity throughout history (in the form of history painting), these paintings were created years after the event that they were depicting had taken place (O'Sullivan 2018: 12). Moreover, history painting was meant to commemorate the past, not to act as a documentary account of the events that they were

representing (O'Sullivan 2018: 12). In fact, the act of depicting an atrocity as it was taking place is relatively non-existent before the late 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>16</sup> (O'Sullivan 2018: 12).

### **Post-Famine Visual Representations**

As time passed by, artists began depicting the Famine in a more harrowing light. This was a result of the art styles evolving so that it allowed artists to portray these horrific events visually, as well as the fact that the upper classes had less of an influence on the artwork that was produced. Today, these are the types of images that one might associate with the event. One such painting that exemplifies this style is Lillian Lucy Davidson's 'Gorta' (Figure 2.3). This is a completely different perspective to that which was portrayed for the majority of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The figures in this painting are frail, with their skin weathered and worn. This is in contrast to the figures depicted in MacDonald's painting, where the figures look comparatively healthy. These figures almost appear skeletal, indicating the effect that the famine has had on them. Each individual's eyes are either closed or barely remain open, indicating their lack of hope. It is almost as though they have accepted their fate. The elderly woman on the left-hand side of the painting can barely hold up the deceased infant due to exhaustion, as a similarly weary man begins digging its grave. Their clothes are a dull brown, again indicating the lack of hope in their lives. A muted blue colour can also be seen throughout the painting, particularly on the individuals' skin and in the clouds above them. Unlike MacDonald's painting, the colour palette in this piece invokes a sense of mourning as the figures grieve both the deceased child and the circumstances in which they find themselves.

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<sup>16</sup> In *Los Desastres de la Guerra*, Francisco Goya documented the famine that occurred in Madrid between 1811 and 1812 (O'Sullivan 2018: 13). Goya was known to be one of the first artist's to depict atrocity as it was taking place, and his imagery would have proved invaluable for artists that were hoping to depict the Famine in a similar way. However, Goya's images were not published until 1863 (O'Sullivan 2018: 13).



Figure 2.3 'Gorta', Lillian Lucy Davidson (1946)

Davidson's use of shocking imagery is a good example of how famine is visually represented in the media today. Speaking about contemporary works with famine as their subject matter, Debbie Lisle explains how modern photojournalists:

...willingly recycle stereotypical images of abject, starving victims in exotic war zones, and media outlets willingly publish such images, as both parties assume that viewers will respond through the predictable emotional pathway of shock → pity → compassion → anger → political action (Lisle 2011: 877)

In a similar vein, Virginia Woolf believed that "the shock of such pictures cannot fail to unite people of good will" (Sontag 2003: 6). However, in recent years this position has been challenged. Luke Gibbons explores this subject extensively, highlighting the need for art to encourage "...participation and engagement on the part of the viewer rather than a dispassionate gaze" (Gibbons 2014: 7). Most artists portraying the Famine attempt to lay bare the suffering felt by the struggling Irish at the time, raising feelings of sympathy or compassion in the viewer. This may be effective for charitable purposes, as one may want to help those depicted in such a state of suffering. However, Gibbons is wary that this

runs the risk of repeating the events of the Famine, where “...the alleviation of distress and suffering was left to charity and philanthropy – the domain of sympathy rather than justice – the latter constituting a duty of care incumbent on the government itself” (Gibbons 2014: 9).

To summarise, Gibbons questions whether certain visual representations of the Famine could be doing more to depict the lack of justice that took place during those years instead of removing the subjects’ dignity by subjecting them to sympathy:

Sentimental images may certainly prompt charitable and philanthropic responses but are they in a position to raise questions about the system itself, to point to injustices stemming from the impersonal forces of an unfettered market, or laissez-faire policies prohibiting state intervention, even in the conditions of crisis and emergency? (Gibbons 2014: 14).

Hannah Arendt echoes this, stating that the expression of sympathy and compassion do not allow for the “universal remit of justice” (Gibbons 2014: 17). Arendt warns that the focus on feelings/passion can result in the converting of “politics into mere personal sentiments” (Gibbons 2014: 17). As feelings/passion can only be directed at individuals, Arendt concludes that, “...justice is best served by anonymity and a dispassionate exercise of reason” (Gibbons 2014: 17). Canon John O’Rourke is of a similar opinion, stating that the real tragedy was not in the suffering of individuals during the Famine, but the failure of the British government and the economic system at the time (Gibbons 2014: 18).

Whether sentimental or not, various events from the Famine have been represented visually, such as the potato blight itself (Figure 2.1), the effect of the famine on the Irish peasantry (Figure 2.3), and the evictions that took place at this time (Figure 2.4). However, certain aspects of the Famine have rarely been represented visually, such as the Public Works Scheme constructions. The question must be raised why certain aspects of the Famine were not documented to the same extent as others. As well as the art style not allowing for certain events to be documented, there was also the feeling that it would have been improper for such horrific events to be turned into art (O’Sullivan 2018: 14). The

influence of the upper classes cannot be underestimated in this regard. As O'Sullivan points out, "Historically, violence or distress in art was softened for the sensibilities of the rich – distanced in time, and cloaked in mythology or allegory" (O'Sullivan 2018: 14). For artwork to be sold to the upper classes, artists would have to "soften" their depictions of distressing events that were taking place during the time of the Famine. Moreover, the upper classes would simply have no interest in acquiring artwork depicting of something as horrific as the Famine, such as rotting crops or diseased, starving peasants (O'Sullivan 2018: 14). Unfortunately, the exchange between the artists and their respective patrons had an enormous impact on the artwork that was produced at the time, resulting in this filtered representation of certain historical events at the expense of neglecting others completely (O'Sullivan 2018: 14).



Figure 2.4 'Eviction Scene', Daniel MacDonal (c. 1850)

This chapter began by exploring the idea of 'art as representation', and explored how historical events have traditionally been portrayed through artworks over time (i.e. history painting). Here attention was drawn to the fact that artists would often create work for the patrons, the people who would purchase their various artworks. This is where the idea of subjectivity was introduced, with the 'act of seeing' exploring the subjective viewpoints of artists/historians that represent historical events, as well as the importance of understanding these viewpoints while observing their work. From there, the chapter explored how the Famine has been represented through art over the years, examining in particular why there were so few artworks depicting the Famine as it was taking place. It was concluded that this was due to the fact that the artists' patrons would not have been interested in purchasing artwork depicting horror and starvation. In order to sell their work, the artists would have had to create images that were less graphic and less likely to offend the patrons in question. Another factor that resulted in the lack of Famine-related artwork was that the art styles of the time didn't allow for such subject matter to be painted. Similarly, although photography was in existence for some years prior to the Famine, it was shown how the term 'documentary photography' didn't come into existence until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century resulting in a lack of photographic imagery documenting the event. From there the work of the Illustrated London News was introduced, in particular their visual representations of the Famine at the time. Post-famine artwork depicting the event will be compared and contrasted with the artwork that was created closer to that time.

Having explored how the Famine has been traditionally represented over the years, one must now question the best way to visually represent it in this day and age, particularly in relation to the Public Works Scheme constructions. One such method of representing used in the *Landscape as Witness* is that of Aftermath Photography.

### **3 - Presenting the Past**

I was definitely in the right place, as clear walled boundaries could be seen up the side of the valley that corresponded with the boundaries shown on the map. The location of the site also fit in with the theory that it had been deserted during the famine. Many Irish peasants at the time lived up in the mountainous regions in harsh conditions surrounded by barren land, while the wealthy enjoyed the fertile soil down below. However, very little remains of the village itself. The boundary walls still stand firm, and even the foundations of an old mill can be seen, but these appear to be the sole remnants. Every other structure has seemingly been devoured by the karst landscape, taking the history of the village with it (Appendix I: D).

## Aftermath Photography

...from a documentary photography perspective, I was drawn to the idea of arriving somewhere 100 years afterwards. It's almost the opposite of war photography. So, instead of the photographer bearing witness, it is the landscape that has witnessed the event and I who am having to go into that landscape in the hope of finding anything tangibly connected to the event. It was almost like having to find a new language or way of seeing – Chole Dewe Mathews (O'Hagan, 2014).

With regard to representing historical events that occurred over a century ago, artists nowadays are left in the difficult position of having little to no physical evidence remaining of the event in question ever taking place. In some cases, however, there are many remnants hidden in plain sight. Ruins of the constructions built as part of the Public Works Scheme can be seen throughout Ireland, merging with the surrounding landscape<sup>17</sup>. To visually represent this history as part of the *Landscape as Witness* project, the genre of photography entitled 'Aftermath Photography'<sup>18</sup> was used. This genre consists of "...the documenting of places and things connected to often awful events" (Bush 2013). In this case, these "places and things" were the remnants of the Public Works Scheme constructions, as well as the surrounding landscape that has engulfed them. Popularised in the 1990s through the photography of ruined buildings and mundane landscapes in which conflict or suffering had taken place, early examples of Aftermath Photography can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century<sup>19</sup> (Tello 2014: 555). It is in the 1990s that the genre was used to photograph ruined buildings and mundane landscapes in which conflict or suffering had taken place (Tello 2014: 555).

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<sup>17</sup> Niamh Ann Kelly describes these remnants as having the "...potential as commemorative culture and extend discussions on formalized sites of history, and their intervening relationship to cultural memory, beyond the parameters of museums, heritage sites, tourist trails, memorial parks and monuments" (Kelly 2018: 472).

<sup>18</sup> Also known as 'Late Photography'.

<sup>19</sup> One example is Roger Fenton's Valley of the Shadow of Death an image that was taken during the Crimean War, depicting a desolate valley littered with cannonballs. Crucially it was taken soon after a battle had taken place in that area. In fact, Fenton had organised the cannonballs to be placed on the ground to replicate the aftermath of the battle (Tello 2014: 555).

Chloe Dewe Mathews' *Shot at Dawn* is a modern example of a body of work that utilises this genre. The work documents the execution sites of deserted British and French soldiers during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. This is a project that Mathews was commissioned to create for the commemoration of the event in 2014. Mathews' photographs were taken as close to the time of day of the execution as possible, which was primarily at dawn (Mathews 2013). This resulted in a banal aesthetic style that fits into David Company's description of the genre's images. Company notes that this style of imagery is made to "studiously avoid" the aesthetics of imagery that are found circulating in the media, instead opting for a more mundane and less dramatic look (Company 2003: 44).



Figure 3.1 'Shot at Dawn', Chloe Dewe Mathews (2014)

Mathews' images are dark, de-saturated, and the landscapes depicted are often barren and desolate (Figure. 3.1). It is this banal quality of Aftermath Photography that Company is particularly critical of whilst discussing the genre. Company explains that this could cause a sense of "indifference and political withdrawal" within the viewer (Company 2003: 132). In other words, the dull aesthetic of the photographs could in turn dull the viewers' reading of the images, as they would fail to draw them in or interest them. Company also

believes that the images risk being too ambiguous, hindering their ability to be used for cultural or political analysis (Campany 2003: 132). Justin Carville references Campany's criticism of the 'banality' of the images, but believes that this can be seen as a benefit rather than hindrance. In his essay entitled *The Violence of the Image*, Carville draws upon the musings of Paul Virilio, who observes that due to the excess in imagery and the rate in which it travels around the world, humanity is struck by "a foreclosure of the perceptual vision" – myopia (shortsightedness)<sup>20</sup> (Carville 2014: 72). Virilio believes that to avoid this myopia, society is required to start viewing images from another angle, to take a step back and create distance from the rate at which all this imagery is distributed globally (Carville 2014: 72). Carville argues that it is exactly this that Aftermath Photography is successful at doing. By arriving after the event has taken place, it is taking a much more measured approach. The images are not created to be seen and then forgotten about in an instance, they are meant to be considered over time<sup>21</sup>. Whilst talking about Campany's criticism of the banality of the genre's images, Carville states, "...I take [this banality] to be an exemplary visual example of Virilio's call to step back from the accelerating velocity of the global image world"<sup>22</sup> (Carville 2014: 73). Carville goes on to suggest that the ambiguity of the imagery may provide for "an active reading" (Carville 2014: 74), where other genres of photography may be limited. By being so ambiguous, viewers are forced to interact and project their own meaning onto the image, as the image is without a set meaning. Kate Palmer Albers also references this limited nature of photography for representing historic events. Palmer does not see this limitation as a "dead end", but echoes Carville's sentiments by saying that it is "...a generative space for the viewer's own productive engagement with construction of history" (Albers 2015: 4).

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<sup>20</sup> These thoughts echo those made by Paul Connerton in Chapter 1, regarding the excess of information that results in the forgetting of past events.

<sup>21</sup> John Roberts also mentions this idea that the photograph becomes "...a site of 'glacial' contemplation" (Roberts 2009: 292).

<sup>22</sup> David Campany also alludes to this, stating that photography is seen as rescuing "...the processes of our memory that have been made so complicated by the sheer amount of information we assimilate from diverse technologies" (Campany 2003: 126).

Mathews' work is an example of Commemorative Photography, a subgenre of Aftermath Photography (Laoide-Kemp 2017). Work under the term Commemorative Photography involves the photographing of dark events that occurred years ago, as opposed to Post-Violence Photography that documents the event soon after it has taken place. This can range from a matter of seconds to months later (Laoide-Kemp 2017). The time between the event happening and the photograph being taken is significant, as will be shown by Shai Kremer's Post-Violence project, *Infected Landscape*. Kremer's project documents the Israeli landscape, portraying the wounds and scars that recent conflict has dealt to it. Unlike Mathews' work, remnants of this relatively recent history can still be seen scattered throughout the landscape, such as the bullet holes in abandoned buildings<sup>23</sup> (Figure 3.2).

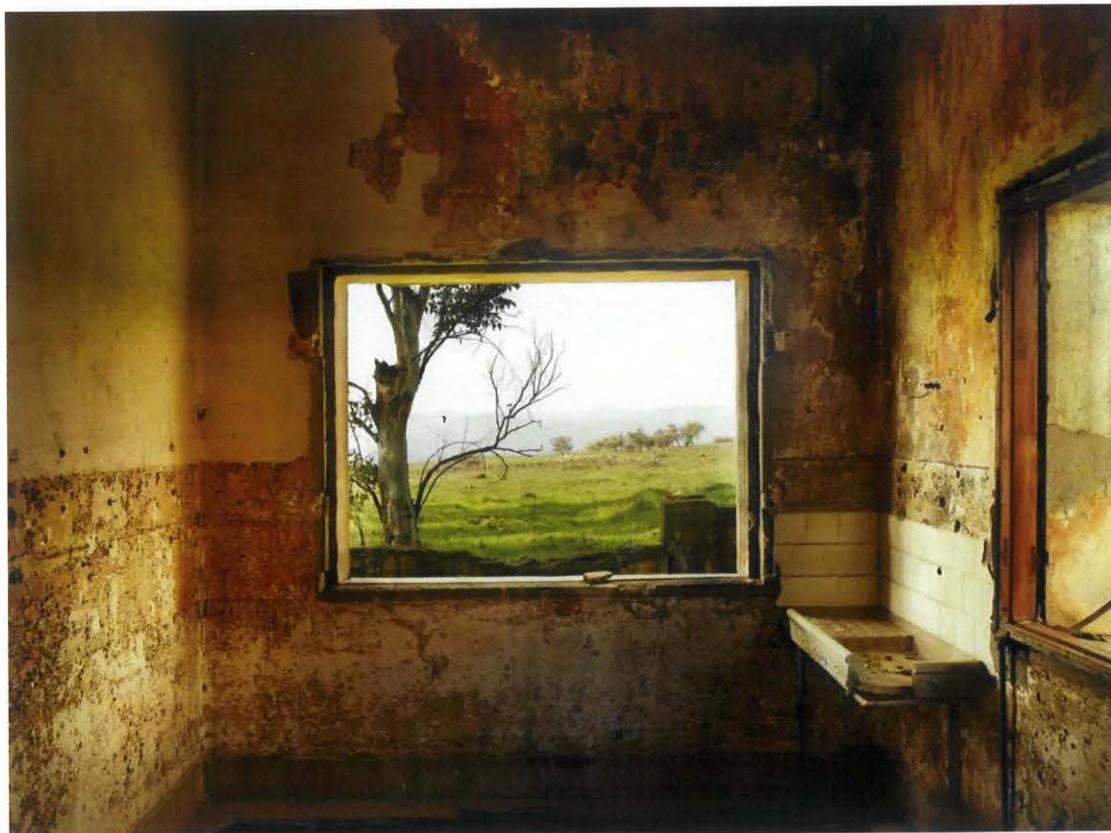


Figure 3.2 'Infected Landscape', Shai Kremer (2008)

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<sup>23</sup> Although this is the case, both sets of images still have 'absence' as their centre focus. In *Shot at Dawn*, this absence is depicted through the lack of physical evidence remaining that the executions ever took place. *Infected Landscape*, captures this absence through the lack of people portrayed in each image. This symbolisation of absence is a common trait of Aftermath Photography (Lisle 2011: 877)

As the conflict occurred in living memory, this affects how its images are 'read' by the viewer. In all likelihood, the viewer may have already come across this information in a newspaper or from a personal contact. However, this is not the case with a commemorative work such as Mathews' *Shot at Dawn*. Since the event occurred over 100 years ago, the chances are that the reader has come across information on this event in a historical text, or a textbook at school. As the information of the soldier's deaths only went public in the 1990s, there is a strong possibility that the viewer has not come across this particular history at all. This greatly affects their reading of each image, as they have fewer preconceptions than if they were to view a modern-day battleground in Israel, for example. In the case of *Landscape as Witness*, the majority of people would be unaware of the Public Works Scheme constructions built during the Famine years, apart from those who have heard of 'famine roads' and 'famine follies'<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, the majority of those viewing the project's images will not have many preconceptions regarding the constructions and their history.

Given that the Famine occurred over 170 years ago, imagery from *Landscape as Witness* is associated with Commemorative Photography. An attempt was made throughout both field trips to capture images that were quite 'banal', to encourage the viewer to delve deeper into their meanings, as the answers are not initially provided to them. The locations surrounding the Public Works Scheme constructions were also photographed, highlighting how they seamlessly merge into the landscape. This alludes to how entrenched this history is in the Irish culture, as well as drawing attention to the fact that this same history is at risk at being forgotten altogether.<sup>25</sup> The Public Works Scheme constructions, as well as their surrounding landscape, were primarily photographed during an overcast day to achieve the 'banal' aesthetic (Figure 3.3). Various ethnographic notes accompany the images, as well as transcriptions of the recorded conversations that took place.

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<sup>24</sup> 'Famine Follies' is a term used to describe constructions that were built during the Famine years with no practical purpose in mind.

<sup>25</sup> While discussing photographs of former Holocaust death camps, Ulrich Baer observes that: "The framing of such sites in terms of landscape art forces us to recognize the disappearance of the event as part of its inherent and original dimension and possibly motivates us to halt this disappearance" (Baer 2000: 55).



Figure 3.3 'Landscape as Witness', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

Similar to Mathews' work, these provide context for the viewer, and gives them a window to explore the seemingly mundane images further to unlock their deeper, historical significance. When *Shot at Dawn* is exhibited, a book containing the entire body of work accompanies the images. Each image has some text describing the subject matter of the photographs in detail (name, time of death, location, etc.). As well as this, there is a separate body of text discussing the subject matter of the work in general, explaining how the deserters would often be traumatised after facing the horrors of war, and how this was not seen as a valid excuse for desertion.

While discussing Aftermath Photography, Debbie Lisle references the fact the photographs of war, conflict, and atrocity have always tread a fine line between recording the world accurately, and creating aesthetically pleasing images (Lisle 2011: 875).

Lisle notes that *Aftermath Photography* consists of “...classically composed shots that follow the canonical rules of photographic composition” (Lisle: 2011: 876):

...for example, the rule of thirds (in a frame divided 3x3, objects should be located along horizontal or vertical lines or at their intersections); the reliance on basic symmetrical shapes (triangles, rectangle, ‘S’ curves); the use of leading lines and diagonals which draw the eye into the picture; and either heavily contrasting light and shade (black and white) or a predominance of muted colours (Lisle: 2011: 876).

These various “canonical rules of photographic composition” can be seen in the images taken from the *Landscape as Witness* project. A 3x3 grid was displayed on the viewfinder throughout the duration of both field trips, as the rule of thirds was used to a great extent in the composition of each image.



Figure 3.4 ‘Landscape as Witness, Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

As can be seen in Figure 3.4, the wheel is the main focus of the image. This was achieved by positioning the object near the intersections of the grid, which is where the viewer’s eye is naturally drawn. Evidence of “muted colours” can also be seen in this image, which was also a conscious decision. Although many of the images appeared naturally muted due to the overcast nature of the weather during both field trips, the saturation was also reduced in post-production.

This guaranteed that each image would achieve that muted look, as well as maintaining a visual consistency between them.

As was previously alluded to, the advantage of using Aftermath Photography to represent past events is that of its ability to facilitate political action being taken in response to the atrocities being depicted. Traditional methods of visually documenting war, atrocities, and famine, result in images created to shock the viewer. It is hoped that by shocking the viewer, by evoking a sense of pity/anger, this will in turn result in political action being taken on their part (Lisle 2011: 874). However, as was discussed in Chapter 2, this is not the case. In an essay regarding Aftermath Photography documenting such atrocities, Debbie Lisle explores how this particular genre can be used to overcome the problematic "...asymmetrical ethical viewing relation..." that exists in traditional depictions of these subjects: "...viewers are privileged in their benevolent acts of pity, whereas other spaces (i.e. foreign war zones) and other people (i.e. the pitied) are reduced, distanced, and reified by their difference" (Lisle 2011: 874). Lisle goes on to explain that this relation fixes the producer and the viewer as "...morally concerned and compassionate political agents", and that Aftermath Photography draws attention to these relations (Lisle 2011: 878). Because of the contemplation that Aftermath Photography allows for, viewers are denied the satisfaction of "...smug feelings of benevolence or righteous feelings of moral outrage" (Lisle 2011: 878).

However, there are also risks that come with the various advantages that have been described. By being so ambiguous and allowing additional time for contemplation, there is a danger that the viewer will not be able to decipher the image in front of them, resulting in them becoming frustrated, angry, or bored. Even if they were able to decipher meaning from the image, there is a chance that the meaning will not be that which the photographer intended. Therefore, the genre "...can never be fully disciplined or driven towards an instrumental political end." (Lisle 2011: 875). It can encourage the political reading of an image, but in doing so it lacks the ability to direct the viewer towards a certain political message.

In summarising her thoughts on this matter, Lisle states that:

In this sense, viewers' encounters with the Late Photography of War are not governed by the reductive dispositions of either a critical stance (which leads to political action) or an uncritical stance (which misses the meaning of the picture altogether). Rather, these encounters exemplify ambivalent modes of attention which do not paralyse but instead facilitate a creative 'writing in' process characterised by an active negotiation between viewer and viewed (Lisle 2011: 883).

The ambiguity that Aftermath Photography possesses is exactly why it is such an effective tool for facilitating political action. It allows the viewer to break free from the standard viewing relation that results in the viewer becoming privileged, by allowing them to contemplate the meaning that they are deriving from the image (Lisle 2011: 883). Aftermath Photography can be used as a tool for artists to "...find a balance that allows the spectator to...imagine the disaster, but that disallows an over-appropriative identification that makes the distances disappear, creating too available, too easy an access to this particular past" (Hirsch 1999: 10).

In this chapter, the genre of Aftermath Photography was introduced, as it plays a pivotal role in the *Landscape as Witness* project. Its two subgenres, 'Post-Violence' and 'Commemorative', were compared and contrasted. From there the effectiveness of Aftermath Photography in representing past events was explored, paying particular attention to how its banal nature can be used to great effect in engaging viewers with the work, as well as facilitating political action to take place in response to it. The use of Aftermath Photography to represent the constructions built as part of the Public Works Scheme in *Landscape as Witness* was then discussed, highlighting the various compositional techniques that were used to do so. Although Aftermath Photography was used to visually represent the Public Works Scheme constructions and their surroundings, various other research methods were implemented throughout the duration of the project. As well as photography, ethnographic note taking and interviews played a vital role in unearthing more about this particular history, as well as highlighting the risk of it disappearing from the popular narrative of the Famine.

#### 4 – Documenting the Undocumented

*I eventually arrived at the wall in question, which wasn't too hard to spot. Standing at over 6-feet tall, it towered over the other walls that I had come across en route. Just to the south of the main construction was a smaller wall, built in exactly the same way and even had similar 90° turns as its larger counterpart. What made this wall particularly unusual was how short it was in length, almost ending before it had even begun. All signs pointed towards this also being a famine wall, with the OSI maps backing this up. It had been built in the middle of nowhere with no sign of any practical use, a characteristic that is quite common with these famine constructions. The zig-zag nature of the wall also made it highly unusual, as well as the fact that construction on it had obviously stopped abruptly. This used to happen when the funding for a Public Works Scheme construction had run out, resulting in many constructions being left incomplete (Appendix I: V).*

## **Ethnographic Research**

Over the course of the *Landscape as Witness* project two field trips of significant length were taken. The first of these field trips took place in January 2018 for a duration of three weeks, and the second took place in July 2018 for a duration of six weeks. On both occasions I stayed in a research facility just outside the small village of Carron in North Clare, operated by NUI Galway (National University of Ireland, Galway) at the time of writing. As I was unable to drive, I found myself being restricted to cycling from one place to the other for the duration of both field trips, often having to head back to the research facility prematurely due to the fading light on the narrow, country roads. This method of transport was strenuous and full of complications, especially considering I would have to travel approximately 30km per day. However, it was only by cycling that I was able to experience the surrounding landscape in a way that wouldn't have been possible by car:

I find that cycling through the Burren landscape to be much more engaging than if I were to drive instead. Because of the slower travelling speed, I find that I am able to take in more of the landscape as I pass through it, observing the minute changes that occur from day to day. I am also more affected by the elements, and for better or worse, I almost become part of the landscape itself (Appendix I: G).

Throughout the field trips to North Clare I was able to immerse myself in various different communities around the area, such as in Ballyvaughan, Bellharbour, Carron, Kilfenora, and Kilnaboy. This involved attending talks in the area, conversing with the locals that I encountered on my daily journeys, as well as recording conversations with a number of them. This method of research (ethnography) is a concept that Martyn Hammersley & Paul Atkinson discuss in depth. The authors make it very clear from the outset that there is no set definition of ethnography and that the term itself contains many variables (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 1). They explain that its origins can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "...where an ethnography was a descriptive account of a community or culture, usually one located outside the West" (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 1).

As years went by<sup>26</sup>, ethnography came to refer to “...an integration of both first-hand empirical investigation and the theoretical and comparative interpretation of social organization and culture” (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 1). The authors describe this form of ethnographic research as follows:

Fieldwork usually required living with a group of people for extended periods, often over the course of a year or more, in order to document and interpret their distinctive way of life and the beliefs and values integral to it (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 1).

In the latter stages of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term ‘ethnography’ tended to be used to describe general, qualitative approaches. However, Atkinson and Hammersley make sure to acknowledge that ethnography “...still retains some distinctive connotations” to separate it from various other research methods (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 2). They also point out that the ever-changing nature of ethnography has its advantages, saying, “...its sense has been reinterpreted and recontextualized in various ways, in order to deal with particular circumstances” (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 2). Although it is possible to come up with a definition for ethnography, it must be made clear that this definition doesn’t capture its meaning in every context, as a result of the researcher being able to adapt the method for “particular circumstances” that they encounter (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 2). This adaptability makes ethnography an appealing research method to use for many researchers, and it played a part in why I chose to conduct ethnographic research over the course of both field trips.

One of the main aspects of ethnographic research consists of note taking, something that I did in abundance throughout my stay in North Clare. This consisted of carrying around a small notebook and jotting down any thoughts or ideas that came to mind during my time spent there, whether it was a point that was discussed in a conversation, or simply an observation.

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<sup>26</sup> Around this time, ‘ethnography’ was contrasted with the term ‘ethnology’, which was the historical analysis of non-Western communities (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 1). Soon ‘ethnology’ went out of fashion when anthropologists started to conduct their own research (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 1)

These ethnographic notes would eventually come together in the form of a blog<sup>27</sup> (Figure 4.1), detailing various events that had occurred throughout that day and making them accessible to a wider audience.



Figure 4.1 'Landscape as Witness – Blog', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

It was made clear that this blog wasn't to be seen as an objective account of reality. Rather, it was a subjective view of the information collected throughout the research process, including that of sensory documentation. The blog was also used as a self-reflective form of documentation. As Sarah Pink states, the form of ethnography is "...a reflexive and experiential process th[r]ough which understanding, knowing and (academic) knowledge are produced" (Pink 2009: 8). Various blog entries are included throughout the photobook, accompanying images that were taken during both field trips.

Although ethnographers tend to draw upon multiple sources of information<sup>28</sup>, they usually rely on one source in particular (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 3). In the case of *Landscape as Witness*, the main source of knowledge was the

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>28</sup> "In terms of data collection, ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry" (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 3).

people living around the area in which the research took place, North Clare. Each field trip consisted of speaking with various locals about their area's history, specifically relating to the Famine years and the Public Works Scheme constructions. It was through these conversations that the locations of multiple constructions around North Clare were discovered – constructions that I would have otherwise been unable to locate. Upon arranging to meet up with a number of these locals to discuss my project, I made sure that they would be able to choose the location and time that suited them best. This was because I wanted to help them feel as comfortable and relaxed as possible whilst conversing with me. Atkinson and Hammersley refer to the importance of this, stating that ethnographers are expected to study people's actions in everyday contexts, not in conditions created by the researcher. (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 3). This results in the participants becoming more willing to share information, an action that requires a lot of trust.

*Landscape as Witness* focused on the relatively small area of North Clare, rather than expanding to cover the entire island of Ireland. Ethnographic research in general is an in-depth study of a community, meaning that, "The focus [of research] is usually on a few cases, generally fairly small-scale, perhaps a single setting or a group of people (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 3). The information produced from an ethnographic study is usually "...verbal descriptions, explanations, and theories", meaning that "...quantification and statistical analysis play a subordinate role at most" (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 3). Accordingly, the pieces of information collected across both field trips were primarily "verbal descriptions" in the form of informal interviews, rather than any statistical analysis such as surveys<sup>29</sup>.

Throughout the second field trip I made a conscious effort to 'open up' to my surroundings, and this was highlighted through the act of photography. Rather than going out each day with a set image in mind, I opted to photograph the surroundings as I interacted with them. This resulted in a more authentic

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<sup>29</sup> Methods such as observation schedules or questionnaires tend not to be used as part of ethnographic research (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007: 3).

documentation of the place in which I found myself (Figure 4.2), and distanced me (the researcher) from the selective gaze (Stoller 1989: 38) that would result in a lot of valuable information being lost (Stoller 1989: 39).



Figure 4.2 'Landscape as Witness', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

These are various observations that Paul Stoller expresses whilst discussing the subject of ethnography, in particular the senses in relation to it. It is Stoller's belief that there is too much focus on the observed objective reality, and that a lot of valuable information is lost in the process. He quotes Merleau-Ponty in saying "...we lose much of the substance of life-in-the world by thinking operationally, by defining rather than experiencing the reality of things" (Stoller 1989: 37). Stoller mentions the importance of the "gaze", which is "...an act of seeing; it is an act of selective perception" (Stoller 1989: 38). He explains that, "Much of what we see is shaped by our experiences, and our "gaze" has a direct bearing on what we think." (Stoller 1989: 38). Stoller also believes that what we see and think influences what we say and how we write (Stoller 1989: 39). During fieldwork, anthropologists tend to focus too much on their gaze, which results in a lot of valuable information being lost to them. Rather than letting their senses be penetrated by their surroundings, they choose to allow their

senses to penetrate their surroundings instead (Stoller 1989: 39). The result of this is that anthropologists tend to "...represent the other's world in a generally turgid discourse which often bears little resemblance to the world we are attempting to describe" (Stoller 1989: 39). It is only when anthropologists "open up" (Stoller 1989: 38) to their surroundings that they can truly collect the valuable information required to document a place. What Stoller is referring to is that often researchers can become so immersed in their own ideas and presumptions, that they neglect any other information that they come across, subconsciously or not. The ethnographic notes (Figure 4.3) taken during the field trips allowed for a documentation of these various sensory experiences that would not have been able to be portrayed using photography alone.

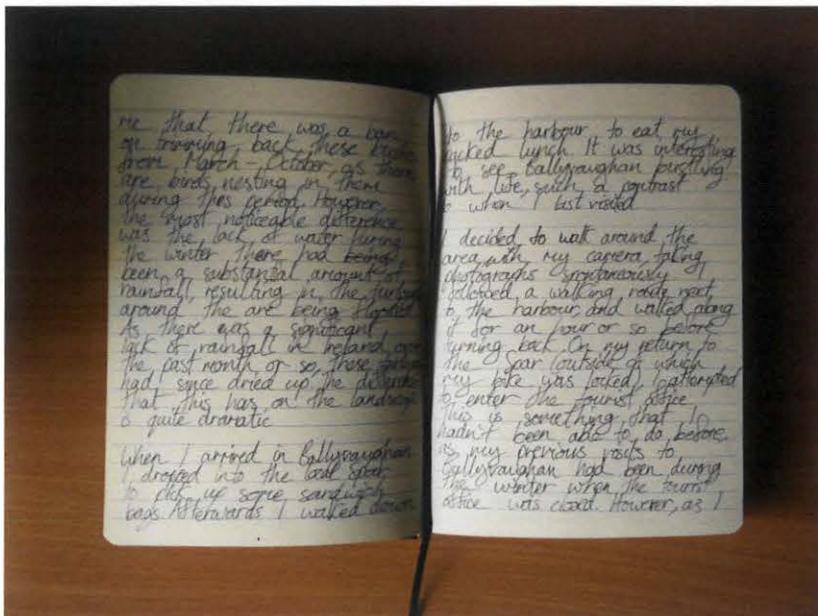


Figure 4.3 'Landscape as Witness – Ethnographic Notes', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

Field recordings were also taken, capturing the ambient sound of the landscape in which I found myself. Although vision is commonly thought as the most important sense with regards to documentation, Stoller points out that the likes of smell, touch, taste, and hearing can be just as crucial. He states, "In many societies these lower senses, all of which cry out for sensuous description, are central to the metaphoric organization of experience; they also trigger cultural memories" (Stoller 1997: xv).

## Interviews

To say that this person has helped with the furthering of my research would be an understatement. I had already known how much knowledge he had of the area and its history, so I had been relishing the idea of discussing my project with him. Straight away he was able to point out the locations of three Public Works Scheme constructions that were built around Ballyvaughan, which he marked out for me on the map that I had brought along with me (Appendix I: H).

As mentioned previously, multiple interviews were conducted during both field trips<sup>30</sup>. The interviews themselves were informal, and consisted of a recorded conversation with the participant. I made an effort to get to know the participant and build up enough rapport, before sitting down with them to undertake the interview, making sure that they were comfortable enough to share their views freely. Barbara Sherman-Heyl emphasises the importance of getting to know the participant beforehand, stating that 'ethnographic interviewing' includes projects,

...in which researchers have established respectful, on-going relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for these to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds (2001: 367).

A premise was set as a means of focusing the conversation, but there were no restrictions or limitations put in place in terms of the subject matter discussed. This allowed the conversations to flow freely, meaning that the participant was able to express any bit of information that they deemed to be relevant. Once the *Landscape as Witness* project is exhibited, a recording of the interviews will be played on a speaker. This will allow the 'viewer' to experience the ambient sound that can be heard throughout each interview, a detail that is lost once it is transcribed. Sarah Pink explores the idea that the interview also has material and sensorial components. This can range from the scent of the room, the sound of the wind outside, having food or drink, or viewing a photograph (Pink 2009: 82). Pink explains that these interactions should be taken into account, and that all too often "...an emphasis on 'talk' in discussions of what interviewing involves, and dependency on conversation analysis as a means of understanding the sorts of interactions that occur during interviews...limits the ways interviews can be understood" (Pink 2009: 82). By conducting the interviews with these

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<sup>30</sup> See Appendix II for transcripts.

multiple senses in mind, it "...opens up possibilities for understanding how and what we might learn about other people's worlds through the interview" (Pink 2009: 82). It is also stated that a sensory approach to interviewing allows the interviewee to talk back, giving a voice to those who otherwise might not be heard<sup>31</sup> (Pink 2009: 83).

### **Oral History and Photography**

After recording for about 40 minutes or so, we decided to have a look at the famine village that was just down the road from his house. When he was younger he had been able to play amongst them with his siblings and friends, however the area in which they were situated was now incredibly overgrown. Because of this, we were only able to access 2 of the 6 houses in the area. Even then, these houses were completely hidden from view. Trees now grew up from their foundations, with ivy and moss covering almost every inch of stone. This village was deserted during the Famine years, although it may have only been built in the early 1800s. He told me that he had felt an overwhelming sense of sadness whenever he made his way towards two of the houses in particular; so much so that he had since stopped visiting them. (Appendix I: R).

Following each interview, I enquired whether the interviewee would allow me to take their portrait. As with the rest of the interview, I would only do so if they were completely comfortable with the idea. Various excerpts from the interviews undertaken throughout the field trips (such as the one above) are displayed alongside imagery relating to the interviewee, whether that be a portrait of the person themselves (Figure 4.4), or an image that relates to the subject matter they are describing. By doing this, it will aid viewers to understand the historical significance of the project, as well as their own personal connection in relation to this particular history.

Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson discuss the relationship between oral history and photography in detail. The authors explain the importance that both oral history and photography have in relation to history, stating that without them "history was dead" (7) (Freund & Thomson 2011: 2).

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<sup>31</sup> "As researchers, we should be able to allow interviewees to communicate to us in multiple ways about their experiences, moralities and situatedness, in ways that allow us to use all our own resources of empathy and imagination to know about their ways of being and understanding" (Pink 2009: 87).



Figure 4.4 'Landscape as Witness', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

They also observe how alike the two mediums are, observing that they are both “...used as forms of evidence; both require “memory work”; and both are forms of storytelling” (Freund & Thomson 2001: 2). Examples of using photographic imagery alongside oral history are also given, highlighting the positive effect that one has on the other in terms of understanding historical significance:

Tamara Hareven and Randolph Lagenbach reported that Lagenbach’s exhibition of photographs dramatically changed the interviewing process, because it was only after seeing historical photographs and portraits of themselves that townspeople and workers understood the historical significance of their lives and the necessity to tell their stories (Freund & Thomson 2011: 4).

This chapter focused on the methodology of the *Landscape as Witness* project, firstly by defining ethnography. The history of ethnography was then explored, as well as how the various methods such as field notes and blogging were implemented field trips. Oral history was discussed, in particular the advantages and disadvantages of using it to uncover previously undocumented histories. Although the subjectivity of oral account has been questioned, it was argued that this subjectivity exists throughout all methods of representing historical events, including those of text and photography. The method of using photography alongside oral history was also explored, drawing attention to projects that have already used this method, as well as how it was implemented in *Landscape as*

*Witness*. Having highlighted the various research methods used throughout both field trips to North Clare, it is only natural to discuss not only how to best present the information for popular consumption, but also the most efficient way of disseminating the information collected over the nine weeks. *Landscape as Witness* was disseminated in two forms; as a blog and a photobook.

## 5 - Dissemination

I became acutely aware then of the information that was held by the old folks that wasn't being passed on, or if it was being passed on it wasn't much listened to, just like me as a kid growing up. I was more interested in listening to the radio than what my father and the old elders, who gathered in this house...this was a house where a lot of people would gather to play cards, to talk...my mother had a shop, my father was a blacksmith...and so the stories that were told here...oh my gosh, I wish they had the memory and the tape recorder (Appendix II: C)

## The Blog

August 28, 2018

During a recorded interview a few weeks ago I had been told of two bridges around Ballyvaughan that had been built during the Famine years, or else they had undergone upgrades around that time. Originally I had thought that the bridges in question were actually the flood preventions built just south of the local church. However, upon emailing the interviewee to confirm this he informed me that one of the bridges was built next to the pier, with the other being built about 2km up the Lismactagdh valley. I took advantage of the overcast weather and made my way down to Ballyvaughan to see if I could document both constructions.

I found the bridge next to the pier easily enough, and was able to position myself so that I was looking at its side profile. From this angle I was able to capture the countless number of tourists and buses crossing the bridge over the short space of time that I was filming. After photographing and filming the construction from a couple of different viewpoints, I decided to search for the site of the 2nd workhouse in Ballyvaughan that had been situated next to the local GAA pitch.

On arriving at the pitch, I asked one of the locals whether he knew of the exact location of this workhouse. I had been under the impression that the building was long gone, however he informed me that a nearby overgrown wall had been part of the original construction, or at least that was what he had always been told. I had passed by this wall multiple times before, never noticing its existence as it was so engulfed by the surrounding undergrowth. I captured a few images of it before heading towards my next destination, the 2nd bridge in Lismactagdh. En route I bumped into the local taxi driver, and I filled him in on the constructions that I had discovered since we last spoke. He told me that the bridge next to the pier was in need of upgrading once again, as it wasn't built to handle the amount of traffic that passed over it each day. Upon hearing about the bridge in Lismactagdh, he informed me that it was more than likely the first bridge that I would encounter along that road, and proceeded to tell me the best route to take.

It was only as I was got closer to the Lismactagdh valley that I realised I had actually been there a few times before. Micky Vaughan had lived in the valley itself, and I had travelled along this road multiple times while visiting him. The first bridge I encountered looked promising, as its construction was similar to that of the bridge at the pier in Ballyvaughan. I made my way further up the road just in case, as I wasn't sure if I had travelled 2km along it yet as instructed. Only a few hundred metres away was another bridge, which didn't look too dissimilar either. However, I remembered visiting this particular bridge with Micky earlier on in the year. We had stopped and he had pointed out the size of the stones that were used to build it, marvelling at how the builders had been able to transport them to the site all those years ago. I had been keeping notes throughout the tour that he had been giving me, and upon looking over them I noticed that I hadn't written anything down about the bridge. This confirmed to me that it hadn't been built during the Famine, as I would have noted that down immediately if Micky had mentioned it. Because of this I made my way back to the first bridge that I had encountered and proceeded to document it, filming and photographing the construction from multiple angles before making my way back to the facility. (Appendix I: Aa)

Throughout both field trips as part of the *Landscape as Witness* project, a blog was kept. This was a way of documenting any events or ideas that occurred throughout the field trip, and presenting them articulately and concisely to the general public for further reading (Saka 2008: 2). Although blogging emerged as a communication tool in the late-1990s (Lawson-Borders & Kirk 2005: 548), it is only in recent years that it has become an effective research tool for those conducting ethnographic fieldwork (Saka 2008: 1). As well as this, it also served as a self-reflective method of documenting the events of the previous day. Upon completing the field trip, the decision was made to maintain the blog and continue to document the process of the project. Following the field trips, the blog consisted primarily of monthly updates; detailing the stage the project was at, as well as hinting at what was yet to come.

It has been stated that blogging "...occupies an interesting place between the personal and the public": as soon as a researcher starts blogging, they become public (Saka 2008: 2). Although the contents of the blog were mainly personal thoughts and observations, they had to be formulated in such a way that meant they were ready for public consumption. At the same time, these personal observations are an essential part of ethnographic note taking, and a conscious effort was made not to over-edit them whilst writing the blog. In fact, this personal nature is known to be lacking in contemporary media, and therefore is seen as one of blogging's greatest strengths (Lawson-Borders & Kirk 2005: 554). However, this method of balancing the personal with the public can often be challenging. As Erkan Saka states:

Personal experience has been increasingly embedded in recent anthropological production but this is still inscribed after the experience/after the fieldwork part [is] done and it is subject to varying levels of filtering during the phase of writing (Saka 2008: 4).

This was the case during the second field trip to North Clare, as the blog was usually written the morning after the events being documented. Although the intention was to articulate the events from the day exactly as they occurred, the act of documenting/writing after the event often resulted in slight alterations or "levels of filtering", as previously described.

As mentioned previously, maintaining the blog was primarily a way of keeping record of the ethnographic notes that were kept during the field trip, as well as general updates relating to the project. However, it was also used as a method of spreading information about the project (Stoller 2018b: 1). Paul Stoller is an anthropologist who writes extensively about this subject. Stoller discovered that as the years went by, fewer people were inclined to read texts on anthropology, including his own (Stoller 2018a). Because of this, he decided to pursue blogging. This consisted of "...transforming complex ideas into simply stated and crisply written posts of 750 to 850 words" (Stoller 2018a), making the information more digestible for the potential readers. As a result of this migration to the form of blogging, more people began to interact with Stoller's work. As Stoller himself says, "In some cases, 50,000 to 75,000 people would read my posts..." (Stoller 2018a). While talking about his book on the subject, *Adventures in Blogging*, he explains how he wishes "...to show – rather than tell – anthropologists how they can use the medium as a powerful tool for mass education, a platform that connects disparate audiences" (Stoller 2018a). In relation to *Landscape as Witness*, it was noted how unlikely it would be for the general public to stumble across it by chance, given the relatively niche subject matter with which the project deals. Because of this, the blog proved to be an effective way of ensuring that the project's audience grew larger, reaching people that would otherwise have been completely unaware of its existence. The use of social media was key in making sure that the project reached this wider audience. Accounts were created on three different social media platforms to spread information about the project: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. To explore their effectiveness at spreading this information, the analytics from a single post on each platform will be compared and contrasted.

'Reach' is a measure of the total number of unique accounts that have seen the post, whereas 'Impressions' is a measure of the total number of times that the post was viewed. According to the analytics, the post on Twitter was viewed the highest number of times (Figure 5.2), with 478 impressions and 4 'likes'. In comparison, the Instagram post had 152 impressions and 47 likes (Figure 5.1), whereas the Facebook post reached a mere 38 people and received only 7 'likes' (Figure 5.3).



Figure 5.1 'Instagram Analytics', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

Tweet Activity



Figure 5.2 'Twitter Analytics', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

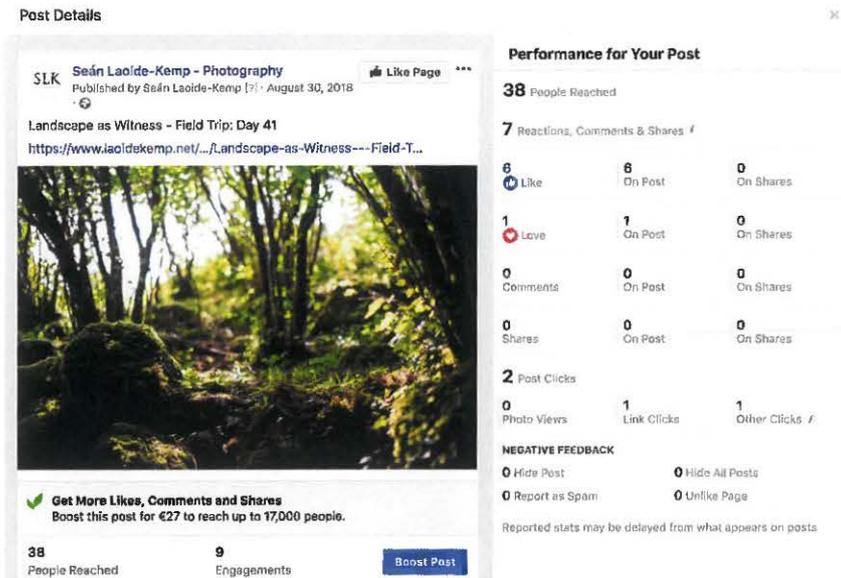


Figure 5.3 'Facebook Analytics', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

However, these analytics do not tell the full story. Although 7 accounts 'liked' the Facebook post, the link to the blog was only clicked once. Similarly, 47 accounts 'liked' the Instagram post, yet the link to the blog was also only clicked once. Although only 4 accounts 'liked' the Twitter post, the link to the blog was clicked three times. This raises the concern about what it means to 'like' a post, and whether or not it is an authentic engagement with the post in question. Instagram in particular is known for having a 'like-for-like' culture, resulting in users 'liking' a random selection of posts in the hope that they will receive a 'like' or a 'follow' in return. The post on Twitter initially didn't appear to reach as wide an audience, however the interactions with them seemed to be more authentic: a higher percentage of users who 'liked' the post actually followed the link to the blog.

Of course, this is the data from one post in particular. There is evidence of certain posts performing better or worse on each platform, however they are to be viewed as outliers. The analysed post was uploaded near the conclusion of a 6-week field trip, giving ample time for trends to set in. However, the analytics from the blog itself tell a slightly different story. Firstly, it is interesting to note that out of all the visits to the blog, almost 300 visitors came directly from social media (Figure 5.4). This alone proves the impact that social media had on spreading information about the project, and encouraging engagement with a

wide audience. Also noteworthy is the fact that the majority of visitors arrived through Facebook, with Twitter a close second and Instagram falling well behind the two (Figure 5.5). This highlights the fact that the amount of 'likes' received on each platform does not indicate actual engagement. A much higher percentage of 'likes' received on the Facebook and Twitter posts resulted in the link to the blog being clicked, compared to the 'likes' received on the Instagram posts.

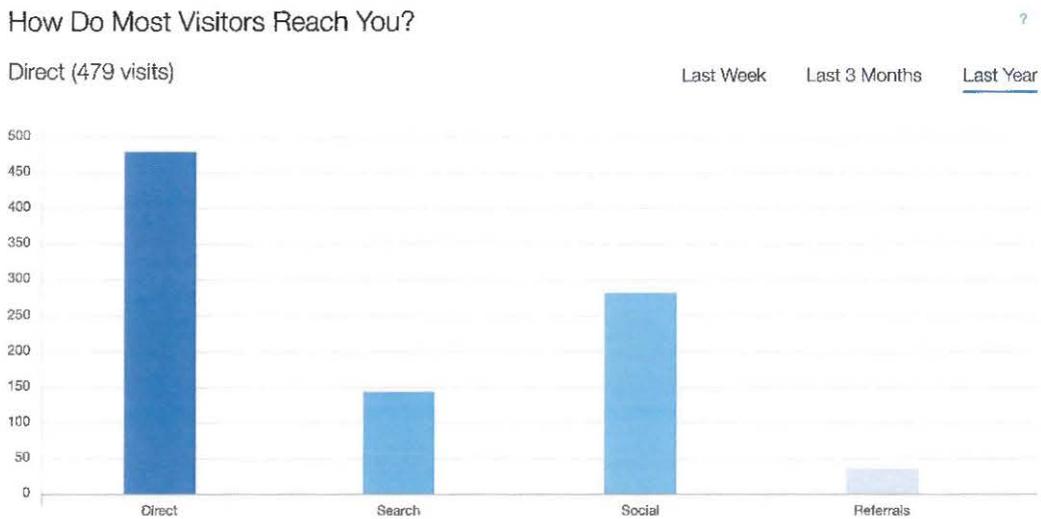


Figure 5.4 'Blog Analytics - 1', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

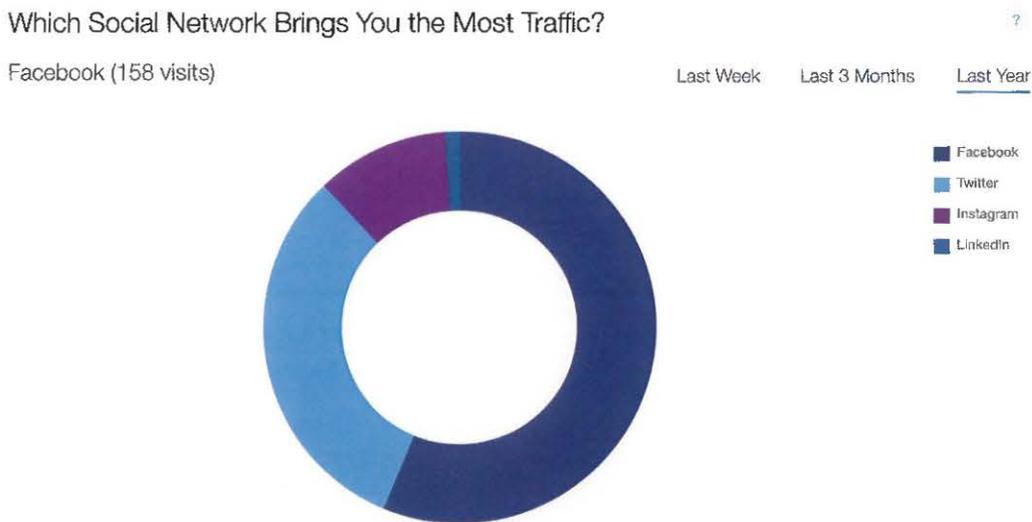


Figure 5.5 'Blog Analytics - 2', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

On the subject of the blog itself, Stoller explains that there are two types of blogs: a microblog, and a public blog (Stoller 2018b: 1). Both styles of blogging are “...an invitation for an online conversation...”, however a public blog is “...longer and more detailed than a microblog” (Stoller 2018b: 1). Another difference is that the goal of a public blog is to reach a wider audience, “...beyond the blogger’s personal network” (Stoller 2018b: 1), as are the intentions of the *Landscape as Witness* blog. Public blogs are usually written from a point of expertise, explained in a short, concise piece of text (Stoller 2018b: 2). The *Landscape as Witness* blogs are accordingly quite short, rarely exceeding the ideal 750-850 word count stated by Stoller. As was explored earlier, this attribute increases its chances of attracting a large amount of people to read it (Stoller 2018b: 2). Because of this, an increasing amount of scholars are using blog as a way of communicating their ideas and insights (Stoller 2018b: 2). Stoller concludes by saying, “Blogging, then, is an effective way to contribute slowly developed insights in a culture of speed and expedience” (Stoller 2018b: 2). According to the analytics of the *Landscape as Witness* blog, it was viewed over 1,000 times in the space of a year (Figure 5.6).

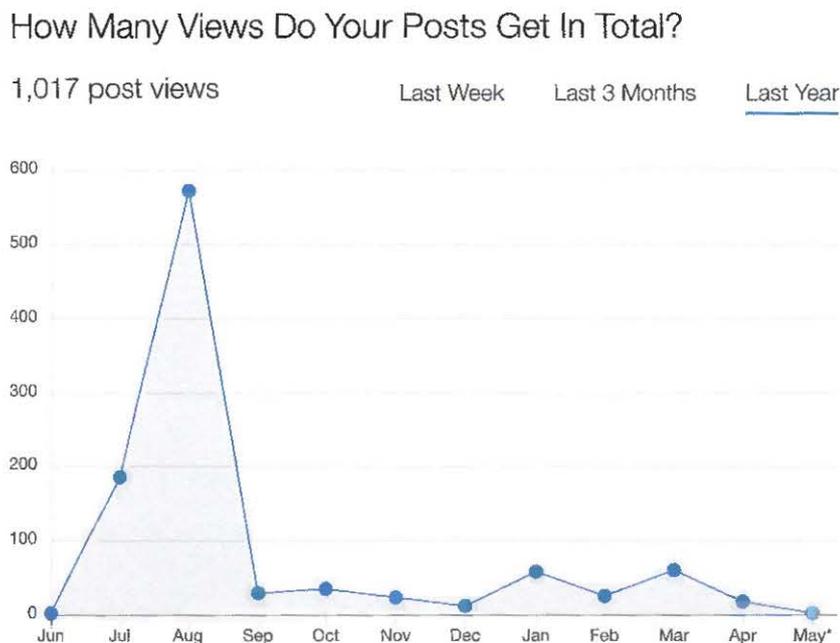


Figure 5.6 'Blog Analytics – 3', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

Although these views may be a result of the same people viewing the blog multiple times, it does not take away from the fact that it has been viewed by a significant number of people over the past 12 months or so. In fact, the repetition of viewers can be seen as a positive, as it shows that people are returning again and again to the blog. People viewing the blog are not solely from Ireland either. The analytics show that although 687 visits to the blog originated in Ireland, a further 154 were from the United States. As well as this, 46 were from France, 42 were from the United Kingdom, and 7 were from Germany (Figure 5.7). This highlights the power that the blog had in not only increasing the audience of the project, but also reaching a wide variety of people all across the globe.



Figure 5.7 'Blog Analytics – 4', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

## The Photobook

A photobook is an autonomous art form, comparable with a piece of sculpture, a play or a film. The photographs lose their own photographic character as things 'in themselves' and become parts, translated into printing ink of a dramatic event called a book (Prins 1969).

The final iteration of this project came together in the form of a photobook. Although the concept of books being made up primarily of photographic imagery has been around since the invention of photography itself<sup>32</sup>, the term 'photobook' has only been conceived in recent years (Campany 2014). Martin Parr and Gerry Badger describe the criteria that a photobook must adhere to:

A photobook is a book – with or without text – where the work's primary message is carried by photographs. It is a book authored by a photographer or by someone editing and sequencing the work of a photographer, or even a number of photographers. It has a specific character, distinct from the photographic print, be it the simply functional 'work' print, or the fine-art 'exhibition' print (Badger & Parr 2010: 6).

Patrizia Di Bello and Shamooun Zamir take issue with the first point, "...the work's primary message is carried by photographs." As the authors point out, many of the photobooks referenced by Badger and Parr contain text that is crucial to the overall message of the book, and to suggest that its role is merely to support the images is incorrect (Di Bello et al. 2012: 3). They explain that although imagery in the photobook moves beyond being simply illustrations, this does not mean that they "...transcend the texts that accompany them...." (Di Bello et al. 2012: 4). Rather, "...image and text work within a dialectical relationship", complementing and competing with each other (Di Bello et al. 2012: 4). This is similar to Allan Sekula's theory on the photographic meaning, i.e. how the meaning of an image can change depending on the context in which the image is viewed. Sekula explains, "...the photograph, as it stands alone, presents merely the possibility of meaning", and that "...any given photograph is conceivably open to appropriation by a range of 'texts,' each new discourse situation generating its own set of messages" (Sekula 1982: 7). Similarly, Roland Barthes believed that "...still photographs do not and could not predicate – only their titles or captions could

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<sup>32</sup> Henry Fox Talbot published a book entitled *Pencil of Nature* (1844-46), consisting of a series of six fascicles (Di Bello, Wilson, & Zamir, 2012: 1). It has been argued "...the book is the first and proper home of the photographic image from which it moved out to take up residence in the fine art gallery and the modern museum in the early twentieth century..." (Di Bello et al. 2012: 1).

do so" (White 1988: 1196), implying that the meaning of a photograph relies heavily on the text that accompanies it. This is highlighted by the problem of "...editors and sub-editors who randomly added captions or who relied on stock phrases and stereotypes to make photographs more appealing to viewers" (Quanchi 2006: 167). It must be noted that this issue is not only related to accompanying text, but the general context in which the photograph is viewed. For example, Max Quanchi states that:

...photographs spill out of their ethnographic frame as they are used and read today in ways contrary to the intention when they were first mounted or pasted in an album, used in a billboard, became a postcard, a book frontispiece or a photogravure feature in a magazine or encyclopaedia (Quanchi 2006: 167).

As text plays a large role in the *Landscape as Witness* project, its book was designed with this "dialectical relationship" of text and imagery in mind. Each image is accompanied by a caption detailing where the image in question was taken. Although this was meant to 'ground' the image in some way, and to give the viewer a sense of place, I was also aware of the complicated nature that captions have with Aftermath Photography in particular. As was explored in Chapter 3, the effectiveness of this genre of photography lies in the fact that its images are open to interpretation (Lisle 2011: 885), often resulting in different meanings than the photographer originally intended. As Lisle puts it, "Captioning assumes that the process of gaining knowledge is instigated by an authoritative textual and linguistic anchor..." (Lisle 2011: 885), resulting in the photography having more of a set meaning. Because of this, the captions in the *Landscape as Witness* book never give more detail than the corresponding image's location. The captions never appear on the same page as an image, giving space for the image to be read independently and allowing space for the viewer to interpret the image themselves.

Originally each caption was to be located beneath its corresponding image. However, a decision was eventually made to have the two on separate pages. Shai Kremer's method of captioning each image in *Infected Landscape* was particularly influential in this regard, with the captions being positioned in such

a way that they didn't distract from the images themselves. Most of the time, Kremer includes one photograph per double-spread, with a caption on one page and an image on the other (Figure 5.8). Whenever there were two images on a double-spread, Kremer opted to place their corresponding captions on the preceding or following page. This meant that the images could be read independently, without the viewer becoming too distracted by their captions.

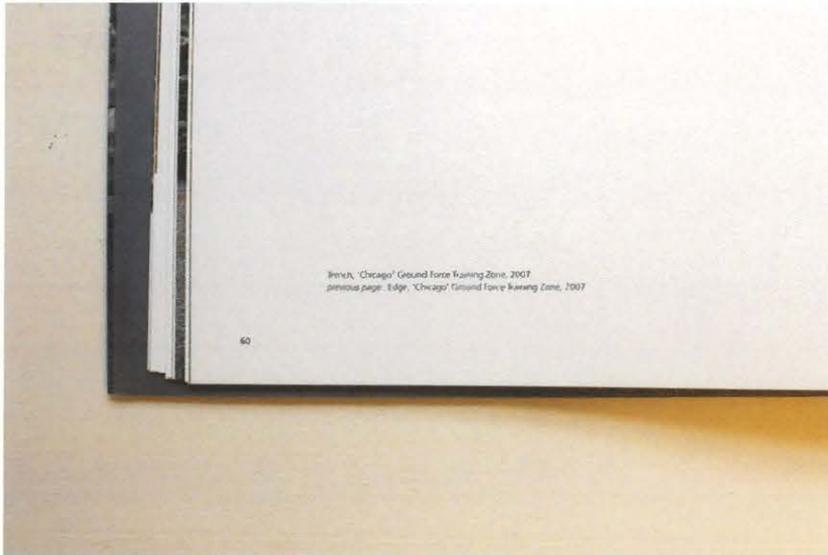


Figure 5.8 'Infected Landscape', Shai Kremer (2008)

Mathews' *Shot at Dawn* also uses this technique effectively, choosing to keep the soldiers' names, the location of the execution, and the time of death on the accompanying page (Figure 5.9)

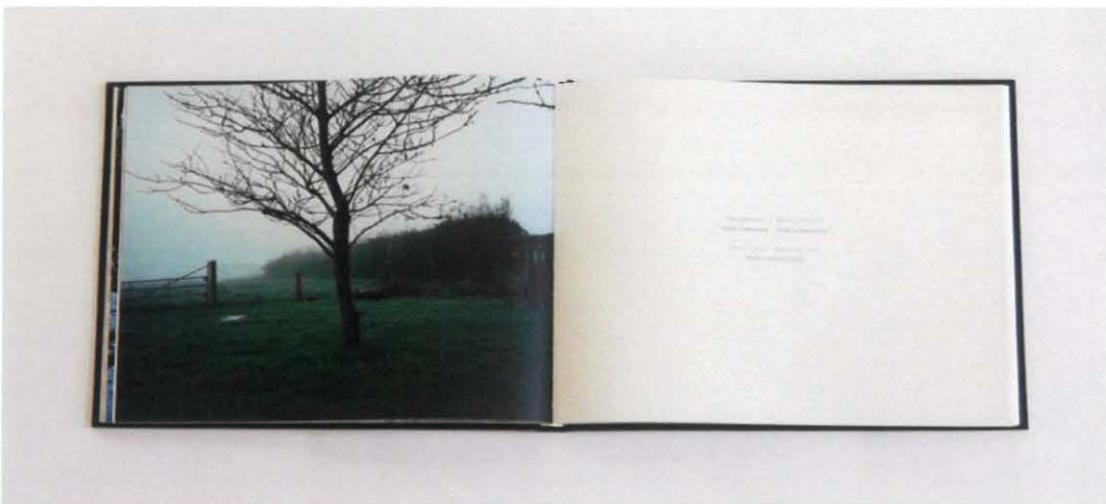


Figure 5.9 'Shot at Dawn', Chloe Dewe Mathews (2014)

The captions are not the only examples of text in the photobook, and there are plenty of instances where it is crucial that the text in question appears alongside the imagery. Examples of this can be seen in the various quotes that are scattered throughout the photobook, from a combination of blog posts and interview transcripts (Figure 5.10).



Figure 5.10 'Landscape as Witness – Photobook', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

In these scenarios a similar decision was made to keep the text on a separate page to the corresponding image, meaning that the image could be viewed independently while at the same time allowing the text to provide some context. As this project contains such a large quantity of text, the majority of it was kept at the end of the book in the form of transcripts. Here the viewer can read the transcripts in their entirety, without the large quantity of text taking away from the rest of the photobook. Another method of reducing the amount of text in the photobook was to include a photographic index towards the end of the photobook (Figure 5.11). This enabled additional image-related text (i.e. the accompanying field notes) to be excluded from the main body of work.



Figure 5.11 'Landscape as Witness – Photobook', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

Rather than including more text, each image has a dynamic QR code<sup>33</sup> embedded into it. Once scanned by the reader's mobile phone, these codes provide external links to the field notes that correspond with image that was scanned. An example of this is when a quote from an interview is included with a QR code accompanying it. When the viewer scans the QR code in question, it will bring them to a website that contains the entire interview.

Choosing the size of the images was also a crucial part of the design process, as it can give emphasis to core images if used correctly. This can be seen in Kremer's book, which contains a 'standard' format that consists of an image surrounded by a white border a couple of inches in width (Figure 5.12). When this standard format is altered, so too is the viewer's perception of the image. If another image is printed full-bleed (a larger image with no border), the image is emphasised. This emphasis is due to the fact that the image format differs from the standard format of the book, not simply to do with the fact that it is large in size. If every other image in the book were full-bleed, then this emphasis would be lost on the reader.

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<sup>33</sup> A dynamic QR code allows the link to be edited after the code has been generated. They are also more reliable to scan than regular QR codes ("What Is A Dynamic QR Code?", 2012).



Figure 5.12 'Infected Landscape', Shai Kremer (2008)

This method of emphasis was used in the *Landscape as Witness* photobook (Figure 5.13), with the standard format consisting of an image surrounded by a relatively wide border, and the core images of the project being emphasised by appearing full-bleed or across double-spreads. Multiple blank pages are placed throughout the photobook, allowing the viewer time to analyse and dissect the each individual image.



Figure 5.13 'Landscape as Witness – Photobook', Seán Laoide-Kemp (2019)

This chapter focused on the dissemination of the *Landscape as Witness* project; beginning with value of the blog and how effective the medium is at reaching a wide, varied audience that would have been near impossible to reach otherwise. Various analytics were shown from the blog kept as part of the project, further highlighting this fact. The subjectivity of the blog and its corresponding field notes were also discussed, exploring how it can be important to make this subjectivity visible whilst representing a particular history. From there the photobook was analysed, and its importance in disseminating information was also highlighted. Various decisions that were made during the creation of the photobook were analysed, such as its layout and design, as well as the explanations behind these decisions.

## Conclusion

In the introduction of this thesis, it was suggested that certain histories relating to the Famine were neglected due to the fact that those documenting the event at the time did not deem them noteworthy. Consequently certain perspectives were excluded from the greater historical narrative, particularly those belonging to the peasantry in Ireland. It has been suggested that this might be the reason why the constructions built as part of the Public Works Scheme were left visually unrepresented in contrast with the rest of the Famine. A lack of knowledge of how these constructions were built, as well as little knowledge of their whereabouts, contributed to this. By forgetting these 'unnoteworthy' histories, an important perspective from one of the most defining moments of Irish history is lost. This research, entitled *Landscape as Witness*, plays a key role in redressing this perspective.

The fragility of these histories was most evident in the interviews that took place during both field trips to North Clare. The general population had little to no information on the Famine or the Public Works Scheme constructions themselves. To paraphrase one particular local, the people who had knowledge of that time and subject matter had been "gone for about 20 years". This highlighted the urgency of documenting this narrative and underlined the importance of this research study. A small number of people were able to pass on valuable pieces of information regarding the Famine in their area, as well as the locations of specific Public Works Scheme constructions. This research has produced new evidence about these constructions that has now been documented, using a combination of ethnography, oral history, and photography. Another important finding from this research was the discovery of the often sporadic and patchy knowledge regarding the Famine. This underlined how such a significant event can be all but eradicated from social memory within recent generations.

The risks of representing dark, troubling events were outlined at the beginning of this study, i.e. that disgust or sympathy would be elicited rather than a highlighting of the injustices of the system. Aftermath Photography was shown to reduce these risks, as the resulting images allow the viewer to further engage with the subject that is being portrayed, and therefore allow a greater chance for action to be made in response to it. The photographs presented here, taken of the Public Works Scheme constructions during the field trips to North Clare, fill a gap in the visual representation of the Famine. The use of blogging was proved to be an efficient way of disseminating the information gathered throughout the course of the project, with over 1,000 visits to the site<sup>34</sup>. Crucially, it was shown that this enabled the project to be accessed by an audience who otherwise would have been unaware of its existence. By disseminating information regarding the Public Works Scheme constructions (as well as the injustice of the system that facilitated it) to as wide an audience as possible, this significant history can become part of the popular narrative of the Great Irish Famine for many generations to come.

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<sup>34</sup> As of October, 2019.

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## **Appendices**

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## **Appendix I: Field Notes**

### **A - Days 1-3**

*July 23, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp*

Back in January I undertook a 3-week field trip to North Clare as part of my ongoing Landscape as Witness project, documenting famine constructions through the use of oral history, aftermath photography, and ethnographic research. Although the field trip was a success, I quickly realised that 3 weeks was nowhere near enough time to collect all the data I needed. A few months later I received funding from the Thomas Dammann Junior Memorial Trust to undertake another field trip as part of this project. I have just begun this particular field trip, which will last from the 20th of July until the 31st of August, 2018.

As I have stated in a recent social media post, I struggle with writing blogs. I find it quite difficult to express my thoughts and feelings on various subjects, as I am hyper aware that it is going online for anyone to see. Hopefully this explains the lack of posts from March (when I first launched my blog) to now.

Despite my dislike for blogging, I felt I needed to post something (preferably daily) throughout the duration of this field trip. This would be beneficial to people following my project, but it would also be useful for me to look back on after this field trip has taken place.

For this reason I have decided to post 'extended updates'. I am often left a bit frustrated when posting on the likes of Twitter or Instagram, as information on those platforms tend to be quite compressed to avoid being overlooked. These 'extended updates' will hopefully provide more information for those who are interested, and will also provide an accessible route into blogging for me.



I decided to compress the first 3 days of my trip into one post, as individually they wouldn't make for very exciting content. Day 1 consisted of me arriving at the Carron Field Research Facility (where I am staying), unpacking, eating dinner, and falling asleep. Although the trip here was eventful enough, I didn't think it warranted a whole post to itself. Days 2 and 3 were quite similar in many ways. Over those two days I was attempting to figure out some sort of routine for myself for the next 6 weeks. The more of a routine I have, the more focused I can be on the project itself.

I also wanted to familiarise myself with two subjects that I was particularly out of practice with: cycling and photography. For this reason I decided to go on 'test runs' around the area, getting to know the landscape again, building up some fitness in preparation for all the cycling that I will be doing, and getting back into taking photographs. These cycles were both incredibly short (Day 2: 6km, Day 3: 8km), but they both proved to be incredibly beneficial.

While cycling, I made an effort to get off my bike and take a photograph whenever I came across something visually interesting. This 'spontaneous' style of photography is not something that I am particularly familiar with, as over the past few years I usually know exactly what I want to photograph before I set out. Although in certain cases this can be beneficial, it can also be incredibly restrictive. I think this is evident from my last field trip to North Clare. I arrived with the intention of photographing people and famine constructions, and hardly anything else came into the equation. This resulted in me

rushing around during my final week, desperately trying to photograph as many of these constructions as possible. Because of this, the images that I was left with were average to say the least. It was almost as if I had over-planned the project, not leaving any space for myself to manoeuvre in.

Already I feel as if this 'spontaneous' style of photography could be quite beneficial to my project. The images may appear slightly random and underwhelming at the moment, but they could become part of a bigger picture as the project progresses. Only time will tell.





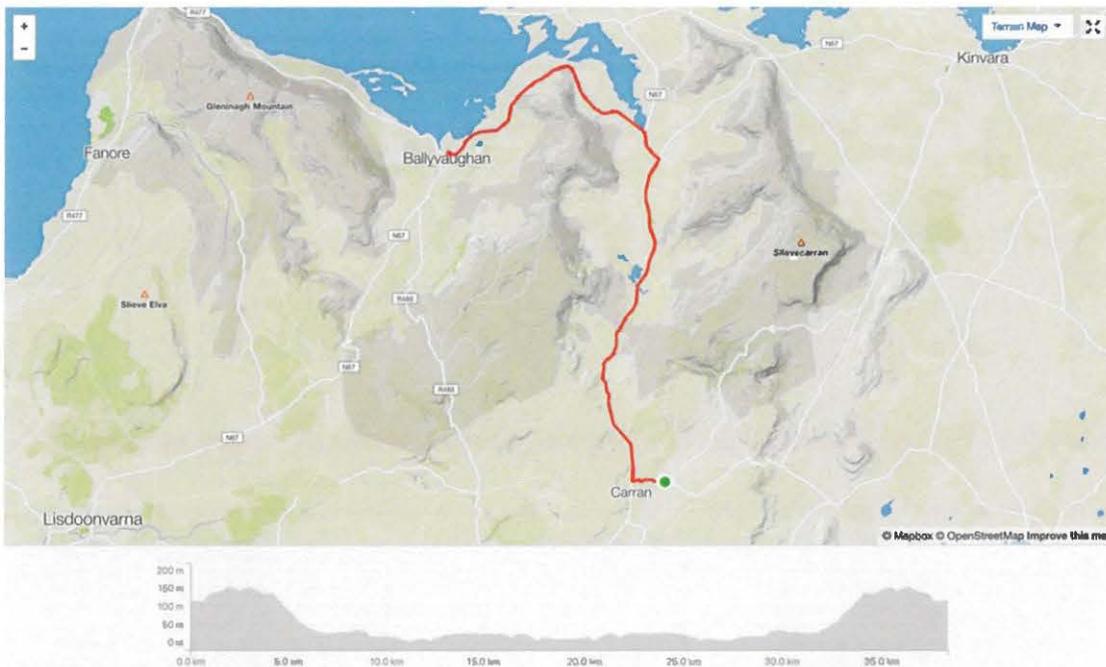


## B – Day 4

July 24, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

What stands out most from my last field trip to North Clare is the cycle from Carron to Ballyvaughan. Or rather, the cycle from Ballyvaughan to Carron. I would leave Ballyvaughan, head east along the coast to Bellharbour, and then head inland up to the village of Carron. After cycling around the Burren with heavy camera equipment, the climb from Bellharbour to the research facility in Carron was not the most enjoyable way to end the day. As can be seen from the map below, most of the route is relatively flat, with the only incline of note coming 5km before Carron. However, this short but steep section was enough to put a dampener on any day. The winter climate didn't help either, with hailstones and strong coastal winds being a common occurrence on many a cycle.

Thankfully North Clare's summer climate seems to have made all the difference, as today's cycle was surprisingly easy. The lack of wind made a huge difference, especially along the coastal route from Ballyvaughan to Bellharbour. A noticeable absence of hailstones was much appreciated as well. A combination of all this meant that I didn't expend anywhere near as much energy during the day, leaving me with plenty left in the tank for the final ascent to Carron.



While in Ballyvaughan I was able to drop into the local tourist office to ask some questions about my project. Although this is my 4th time visiting Ballyvaughan, this is the very first time I have been able to do this as the office closes for the winter months. The staff were very helpful, and were able to point me in the direction of a number of sources

that would aid me in my research. These sources included the likes of NUIG (who had led research into the famine around the area), the name of a researcher who undertook a project on famine villages in and around Ballyvaughan, and Clare County Council Library. They were also kind enough to give me a map and highlighted the various green roads around North Clare that could possibly have been built during the famine, as well as villages that may have been deserted around that time.

Afterwards I cycled to Bellharbour to drop into Daly's Pub to catch up with Nina (the pub's owner), whom I had been corresponding with during my last field trip. Nina was able to give me names of a couple of people that I could talk to regarding the famine, both of whom are located in New Quay (a mere 15 minute cycle from Bellharbour).

On my way back to Carron, I was quite aware of the amount of vehicles that drove by me. During the winter I would be able to count the number of vehicles on one hand, whereas today I had at least 20 pass me by. This change can also be seen (or rather heard) on the road that passes by the research facility that I am currently staying in. During the winter I would see/hear the odd car, usually a local farmer or somebody staying in the facility. However over the past few days hundreds of cars drive by daily, with the majority heading to the Burren Perfumery down the road. It is strange to feel isolated in the middle of the Burren, yet at the same time be surrounded by a multitude of tourists.





## C – Day 5

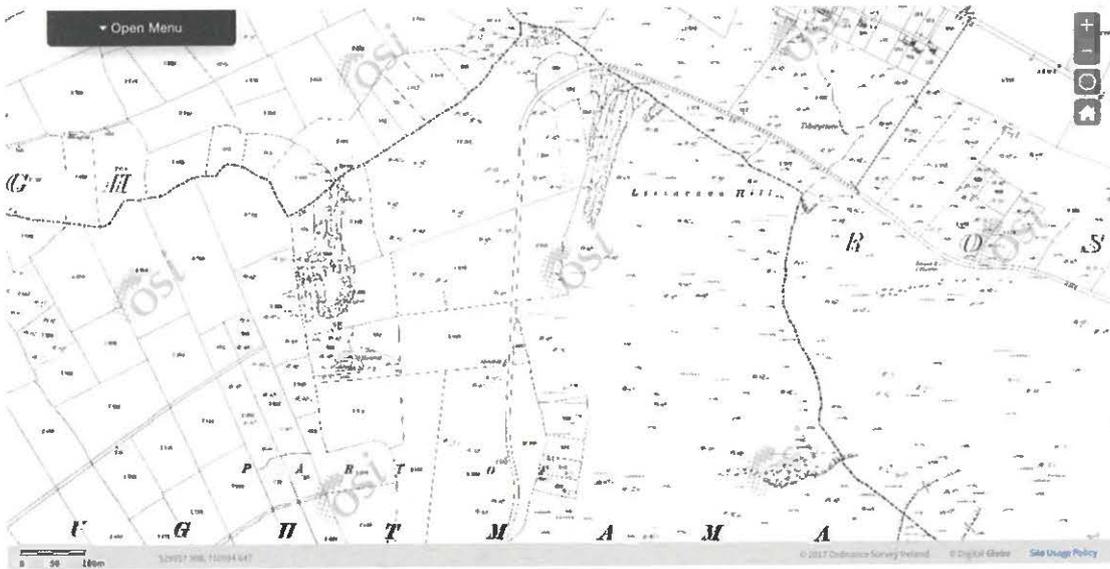
July 25, 2018 | *Seán Laoide-Kemp*

After acquiring a number of possible sources yesterday, I spent the morning following them up at the research facility. I contacted the researcher in NUI Galway, as their current project is focusing on the archaeology of the famine in North Clare, specifically the famine villages and workhouses around Ballyvaughan. I was also able to analyse the map of the area that I had been given and made an attempt to determine whether or not certain green roads were built during the famine, as the tourist office had suggested. To do this, I had a look at some old OSI maps. I have briefly touched on this subject in one of my posts earlier on in the year, but I can explain it in more detail here.

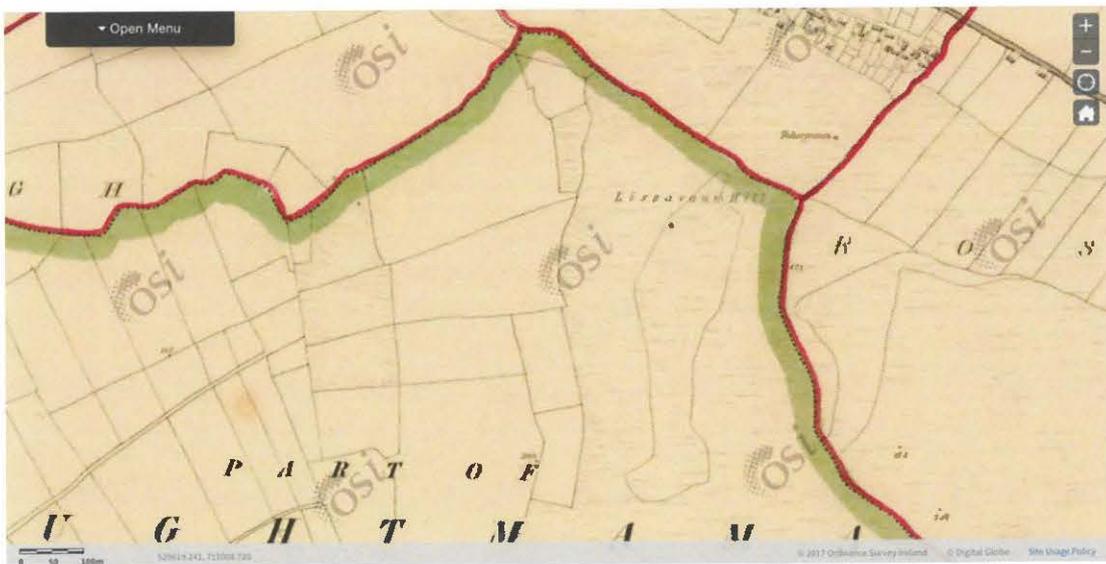
There is a 'Historical Mapping' section on the OSI website that contains various maps of Ireland from as early as 1829, up until 1913. For the purposes of my research, I analyse maps dated from 1829-41 (pre-famine) and 1897-1913 (post-famine). Firstly, I locate the road in question on a modern map:



From there, I attempt to find the same road on the 1897-1913 map:



Lastly, I look for the same road on the 1829-41 map:



If I find the road on the 1829-41 map, this proves that the road in question could not have been built during the Great Famine, which lasted from about 1845-52. However, if I am unable find the road on the 1829-41 map but I am able to find it on the 1897-1913 map, this means that the road must have been built sometime between 1842 and 1913. Therefore, there is a possibility that it was built during the famine years.

Of course this should not be applied to just any old road, as there were plenty of non-famine related roads built in Ireland between 1842 and 1913. However, if it is common knowledge that a certain road was built during the famine, then this method is a pretty good way of proving it.

After analysing the maps, I made my way down the road to a spot that I had photographed during my previous field trip, just after the turn-off to the Burren Perfumery. There had been intense rainfall in the area prior to my visit in January, so the turloughs around Carron had been completely flooded. Below are two images, the first taken in January and the second taken today. I will more than likely be returning to the spot to attempt a perfect recreation, but this will do for now.





The turloughs around Carron were of great significance to my project back in January/February, so much so that I documented them almost as much as the famine constructions themselves. I had actually filmed a 20-minute piece of this flooded road from a fixed point, and I had been contemplating using the same method today. However, due to the road no longer being flooded, as well as the fact that it is mid-summer, I was only be able to have my camera set up for about 5 minutes at most before a car drove down the road. I will be attempting to recreate some more images/video pieces over the coming weeks, to further capture this dramatic change in the landscape.





## D – Day 6

July 26, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

The goal for today was to explore the site of a village in Oughtmama, which supposedly could have been deserted during the time of the famine. Following the map that I had acquired from the tourist office in Ballyvaughan, I made my way down towards Bellharbour. According to the map, I needed to continue passed the Bellharbour turn-off, head on in the direction of Kinvara, and take a right up a marked trail after a kilometre or two. This right turn alluded me (as can be seen from the tracking map below), and eventually I had to call into a nearby house to ask for directions.

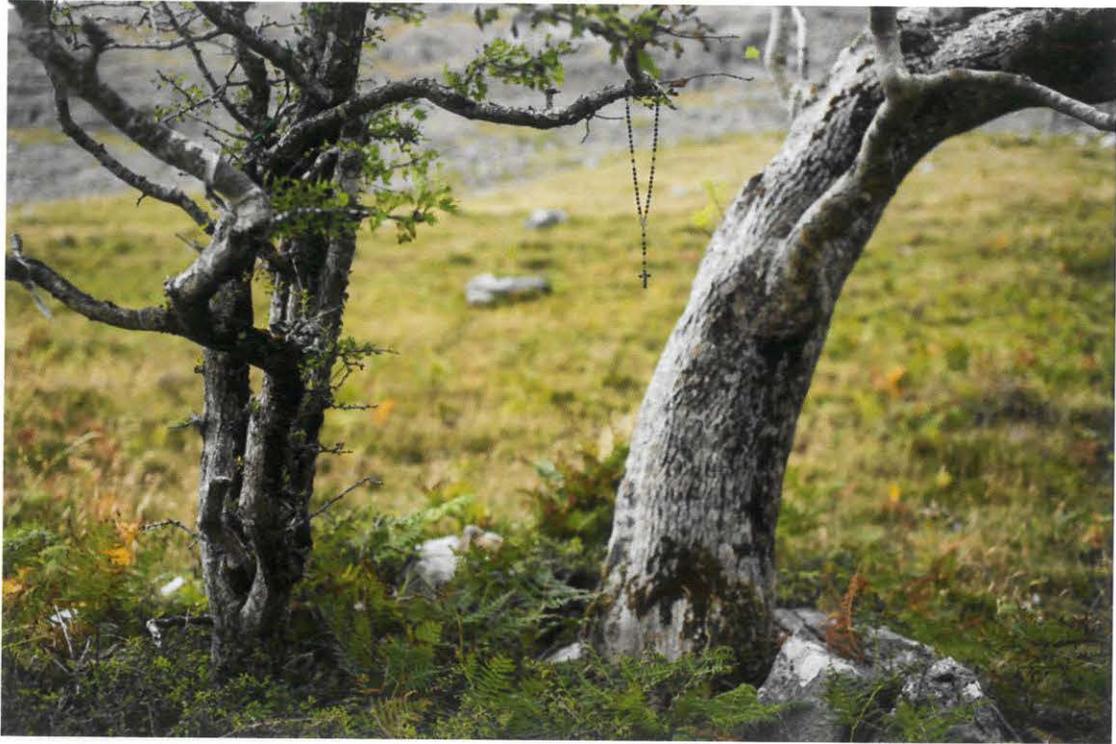


The owner of the house was very helpful, and pointed me in the right direction straight away. When I mentioned that I was searching for the site of an old village she seemed unsure, but confirmed that there certainly were ruins up that way. She was also able to give me the name of a local who should be able to aid in me in my research, an elderly man from New Quay who has great knowledge of the area and its history.

Upon finding the elusive right turn, I began cycling up towards the valley where the village was supposedly located. The trail is mainly used by tractors, so the terrain quickly became near impossible to cycle on. Eventually I arrived at the valley in question, locked my bike to a nearby tree, and consulted the map.

I was definitely in the right place, as clear walled boundaries could be seen up the side of the valley that corresponded with the boundaries shown on the map. The location of the site also fit in with the theory that it had been deserted during the famine. Many Irish peasants at the time lived up in the mountainous regions in harsh conditions surrounded by barren land, while the wealthy enjoyed the fertile soil down below. However, very little remains of the village itself. The boundary walls still stand firm, and even the foundations of an old mill can be seen, but these appear to be the sole remnants. Every other structure has seemingly been devoured by the karst landscape, taking the history of the village with it.





## **E - Day 7**

*July 27, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp*

As I have mentioned previously, oral history plays a huge role in my research. I partly converse with locals about their knowledge of the famine just so that I can locate the whereabouts of famine constructions that I am hoping to photograph. However, I also do this so I can observe their sometimes lack of knowledge on the subject. So far, the latter has been much more prevalent.

I began today with the names of three people who could possibly aid me with my research, two men from New Quay and another from Flaggy Shore. I didn't have any addresses, but I was equipped with detailed directions supplied by locals. Upon arriving in New Quay I discovered that there was a funeral taking place at the local church, which explained why nobody was home at the first house I called into. A neighbour noticed me and advised that I call back in a couple of hours, as the funeral had only just begun. I made my way further into New Quay and managed to catch the second man at his home before he left to attend the same funeral. Although he was going to be busy working on his house over the next week, he kindly agreed to talk to me about my project this day week, between 4-6pm.

After organising that meeting I cycled on to Flaggy Shore, where the weather took a turn for the worse. There had been a bit of a breeze on my way down to Bellharbour, but by this stage the wind had really picked up. As well as that the heavens had now opened, starting with a light shower before it really began pouring down. I called into a local café to seek shelter from the downpour, and asked for directions while I was there.

Unfortunately I was informed that the man I had been hoping to talk to had been recently diagnosed with Alzheimers, and would be unable to assist me. However, the owner of the café was able to give me the name of a man in Ballyvaughan who was also known to have great knowledge of the history of the area. She also informed me of the lobster pond in Flaggy Shore. This pond was once known to be crammed full of oysters and lobsters, and local lore says that during the famine times it was common to see people reaching into the pond in a desperate attempt to catch something to sustain themselves.



On my return to New Quay I discovered that I had called into the wrong house earlier, and was sent further up the road. Once I found the man in question, he informed me that he knew nothing about the famine, nor could he think of many people around the area who did. Furthermore, he said that the subject was never talked about, and that they were never taught about it in school. He claimed that the coastal areas weren't hit as badly as other areas of the country during the famine, and that this may explain the lack of memories that had been passed down to him. This could very well be true. A common theory is that those who were affected by the famine either emigrated or died, leaving the surviving population in Ireland with a sense of guilt and shame for having gained from the tragic event. The history was then suppressed in an attempt to forget and move on.



## **F – Day 8**

*July 28, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp*

To finish off the week, I thought I would try to find the remaining two people that I had been advised to talk to about my project. The first man was the owner of a B&B just outside Ballyvaughan, and the second lived in Kinvara, Co. Galway. I had always been meaning to go to Kinvara at some point anyway, as I had been informed by multiple people that it was easier to cycle there for my weekly shop than it was to cycle to Ballyvaughan.

I travelled to Ballyvaughan first, picked up a few items at the local Spar, and made my way to the B&B. I had already visited this man during my last field trip, with a local by the name of Micky Vaughan. Micky had been of great service to me, as his knowledge of the area had been seemingly limitless. Sadly, Mickey passed away just a couple of months after we had briefly crossed paths. I felt privileged to have met him, and was glad that I had managed to jot down his nuggets of information before they were gone forever.

The owner of the B&B remembered me from my previous visit, and was delighted to assist me again with my project. Although we only chatted for about 10 minutes before I had to leave, he was already able to tell me about multiple constructions around the area that were built during the famine. We arranged to meet again at 4pm next Tuesday to discuss the subject further, something that I am already anticipating. He is clearly incredibly passionate about the area and its history, and I'm sure I will acquire a wealth of information from him.

The weather then took a turn for the worse, a phrase that is all too common here in the Burren. Even as I write this, a glorious, sunny day has dramatically deteriorated into one that is dull, wet, and overcast. With rain pouring down I debated taking the right turn up to Carron as I passed through Bellharbour, but I decided that I might as well continue on to Kinvara as it was only 11km away. I had been expecting a flat enough cycle, as according to Google Maps there was only a 70m incline between Ballyvaughan and Kinvara, accompanied by a 70m decline. After all, the cycle from Ballyvaughan to Carron involves an incline in excess of 220m, so I presumed that anything less would be relatively easy. However, I hadn't even made it halfway before I was almost completely spent. This was mainly due to a 2km stretch in which the majority of the 70m incline occurred, as well as the weather worsening as the day went on. With sodden clothes and boots full of water, I began the slow descent to the village of Kinvara.



I had been told to pass by the first filling station as I entered the village, and to continue on to the second one located further up the road instead. Upon reaching it, I locked up my bike and went inside to ask for directions. Fortunately, the man I was searching for lived right next door to the station. Unfortunately, he wasn't currently at home, and his neighbour wasn't sure when he was going to return. As it was beginning to get late I decided it would be best to begin my journey back to Carran, and to return to Kinvara some other day.

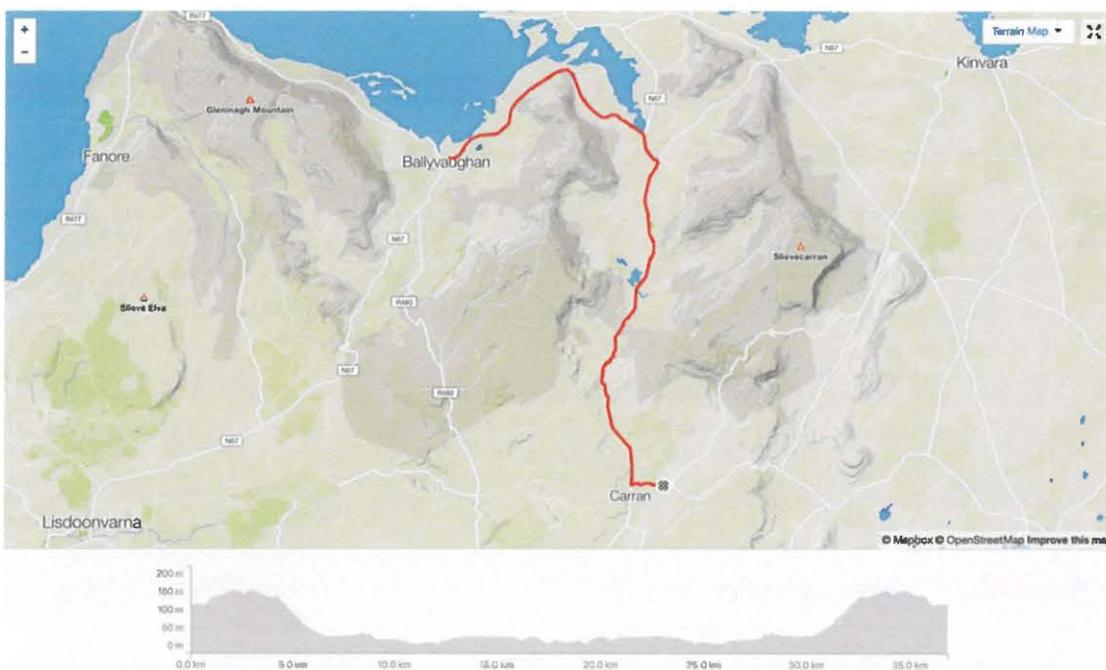


## G - Days 9-11

July 31, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

The last couple of days have been slightly mundane and focused more on rest and practical chores, so much so that I felt they didn't warrant a separate blog post each. As this will most likely be the case every weekend, I will only be posting blogs from Tuesday-Saturday for the remainder of this field trip.

Not for the first time since my arrival here, I have been thinking about how much easier this project would be if I were able to drive a car. What should be incredibly simple tasks, such as doing the weekly shop, turn into much more of an event when depending on a bike as your only mode of transport and having to squeeze every item into your camera bag. Another disadvantage is having to return to the facility while it is still bright out, something that was particularly challenging during the winter months. This is due to the fact that the roads around the area are quite hazardous for cyclists at night, something I wouldn't have to worry about if I were driving.



However, it also comes with its advantages. I find that cycling through the Burren landscape to be much more engaging than if I were to drive instead. Because of the slower travelling speed, I find that I am able to take in more of the landscape as I pass through it, observing the minute changes that occur from day to day. I am also more affected by the elements, and for better or worse, I almost become part of the landscape itself.

When I returned from doing the shop in Ballyvaughan, I decided to attempt another recreation of one of the images from my previous field trip. Again, the image I had taken was focused on the effect of the local turlough on the area, emphasising the flooding that had taken place. I struggled quite a bit with this particular recreation, as the change in landscape was even more dramatic than before. Because of this, I was unable to find as many landmarks to reference as they were almost completely covered with foliage that hadn't been there previously. Below are both images, the first taken in February and the second taken in July.





Unlike my previous recreation, it feels as though these two images were taken in completely different areas. The growth of the surrounding foliage has been so extreme over the past few months that I had great difficulty in positioning my tripod in the same location, as the ground beneath my feet looked completely unrecognisable. Interestingly, the only man-made structure in the scene (the stone wall) is actually more prominent in the image taken in February during the flooding. By eliminating various elements of the landscape, the flooding also emphasised certain landmarks that would otherwise have gone unnoticed.



## H - Day 12

August 1, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

Today I was able to conduct my first 'interview' of the trip, with the owner of a B&B just outside Ballyvaughan. I put 'interview' in apostrophes because the format is more like an informal conversation that just so happens to be recorded. I do my best to make this clear from the very beginning, just to put the other person at ease. People tend to act a certain way when they are being interviewed, they can become more rigid and their responses tend to very carefully thought out. The aim of these 'interviews' is for the person to forget that they are being recorded. This is also one of the reasons why I choose not to film these conversations. Although it would be beneficial to have a visual representation, I felt that the disadvantages far outweighed the advantages. As with the interview setting, a person is bound to act/speak differently when there is a camera pointing at them. Because of this, I felt that an authentic, relaxed conversation would be much more beneficial than a slightly more rigid, controlled one. Often people are a tad suspicious when a complete stranger approaches them to request an 'interview', and understandably so. It helped that I had already conversed with the owner of the B&B previously, so the atmosphere remained relaxed and open throughout our conversation.



To say that this person has helped with the furthering of my research would be an understatement. I had already known how much knowledge he had of the area and its history, so I had been relishing the idea of discussing my project with him. Straight away he was able to point out the locations of three Public Works Scheme constructions that were built around Ballyvaughan, which he marked out for me on the map that I had brought along with me.

He was also able to explain why Ballyvaughan wasn't really catered for during the famine years, in comparison to the various other towns and villages around North Clare. The building of these famine constructions largely depended on the landlord of the area. If the landlord was active and had an interest in looking after the people living on his land, more of these constructions would take place. However, the landlord of Ballyvaughan at the time was a gambler, with little to no interest for the wellbeing of his tenants. This could partly explain why there weren't many constructions built as part of the Public Works Scheme around the area.

I was also informed that not one, but two workhouses were built in Ballyvaughan during the famine (1851), something that was highly unusual at the time. It is theorised that they were mainly built to draw the diseased/starving peasants away from other areas, which highlights how the village of Ballyvaughan used to be regarded. One of these workhouses was eventually torn down, and the stone from it was used to build the local promenade. The other warehouse still remains standing to this day, located in the village on some private land.

After this incredibly successful and beneficial conversation, I began to make my way back up to the research facility in Carron. Unfortunately, with about 5km to go my bike chain jammed. Usually this can be rectified easily enough, but on this particular occasion one of the links in the chain had completely wedged itself between the cassette and the spoke protector, and no amount of force could dislodge it. Thankfully I didn't have too far a walk, and was even able to freewheel down the occasional decline on my way back. The weather also helped, as the majority of the showers had occurred earlier on in the day. On returning I was able to unjam the chain with help of a fellow researcher, who is also staying at the facility. It was yet another reminder of how dependant I am on my bike, with many of places that I am required to travel being unreachable by foot.



## I - Day 13

August 2, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

After yesterday's incident I was slightly cautious about taking my bike for a run, especially as I will require it to travel to New Quay tomorrow for another interview. Instead I decided to walk to the Glen of Clab, as I had been given the name of a person who lives around the area that might be able to help me further with my research. It was a short enough walk, just passed the Burren Perfumery en route to Slieve Carran. The glen itself has the appearance of a small oasis, surrounded by the bleak, desolate landscape of the Burren.



On arriving at the Glen of Clab, I dropped into a nearby house to ask for directions. The owner of the house just so happened to be the mother of the person I was looking for. After briefly explaining what my research was about she told me that her husband would have had a wealth of information on the subject, but had sadly passed away. She pointed me in the direction of her daughter's house, which was just across the road with a blue door and a thatched roof.

I had initially planned to just introduce myself and request to meet at some other date, as I didn't want to intrude. However, I was welcomed into the house and proceeded to chat with owner for at least a couple of hours. I was quite grateful for this as the weather outside was particularly miserable, even by the Burren's standards. The owner of the house had lived there her whole life, and now gave guided tours of the area. She informed me that I was about 20 years too late, and that the majority of the people who would have had great knowledge of the famine are now long gone. However, I was able to acquire plenty of names off her of people who could possibly help me, or at least that would know somebody who could. She claimed that the area wasn't very badly affected during the famine years, which might explain the lack of stories have been passed down from that time. She also theorised that the people around Carran might have been better off due to

their farming of goats, which were at one stage as popular as cattle in the area. She herself had grown up drinking goat's milk and eating goat's meat, something that has now ceased due to the area's dependency on cattle...a situation that she compared to the dependency on the Irish Lumper potato around the time of the famine.

I was also told about a famine village that was in Poulbaun, located close to the famine road in Poulaphuca that I had photographed during my last field trip to the area. She was also able to inform me of small constructions that were built nearby for the builders to take shelter in during bad weather. Lastly, she told me about the lazy beds, in which potatoes were grown around that time. Apparently their outlines can still be seen to this day, forever etched into the landscape.



## **J - Day 14**

*August 3, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp*

Before cycling down to New Quay for my second interview of the week, I decided to take the bike for a small ride around Carron. This was partly just to make sure that everything was running smoothly, but also so that I could call into another person that I had been recommended to talk to. Again, I wasn't certain of the exact address but I had been told that this person lived in a small cottage just outside of the village, and that if I came across the Michael Cusack Centre then I had gone too far.

Nobody was home at the first cottage that I called into, so I carried on further down the road. The next house I came across happened to be the neighbour of the man that I was looking for. She informed me that he wasn't usually home during the week, but that I should try calling back again either tomorrow (Friday) or at the weekend.

After grabbing some lunch back at the research facility, I made my way towards Bellharbour. I had a few items to get in Ballyvaughan, so I gave myself plenty of time to go there first. As I was cycling down the hill from Carron, I noticed the back brakes on my bike were almost none existent, and were barely applying any pressure on the wheel. Thankfully the front brakes were still operating normally, but I made sure to cycle cautiously whenever I came across a steep decline. On arriving in Ballyvaughan I had a look at the back brakes to tighten the brake cable, which was evidently slack. As I was loosening the bolt to do so, the cable came out. Unfortunately, due to the cap on the cable having been removed at some point and allowing the end to become slightly unravelled, I was unable to slide the cable through again to tighten it sufficiently. Since I wouldn't encounter any steep declines on my way to New Quay, I decided I would wait until I got back to the facility to examine it properly.



The rain was pouring down as I arrived into New Quay, and I made my way to the house that I had called into last week. I was invited inside and proceeded to have an engaging conversation with the owner. He began by saying that he wasn't sure if he'd be able to help me that much, but the more we conversed the more he was able to recover various memories and information relating to the famine. He had worked for FÁS and used to maintain various constructions that were built around the area, such as the famine road in Poulaphuca that I had photographed previously. He informed me that stone walls were built on the mountain behind his house to divide land between farmers during the famine, something that I had not been aware of before.

Like many people that I have spoken with, he claimed that the famine was rarely spoken about in his time. The odd story was mentioned occasionally, but more often than not it was a subject that was avoided. He was under the impression that this was due to the traumatic nature of the event, and compared it with his uncle being unable to speak of fighting during the war without being reduced to tears. He agreed that the area was not as badly affected during the famine as a result of being located on the coast, however this did not mean that it had not been devastated. He spoke in a positive tone of an Englishman who oversaw the exportation of fish during the famine years in New Quay, as the Englishman proceeded to set up a fishing business and provided employment for many in the area.

By the time I had begun to make my way back towards Carron the rain had ceased and the wind had died down, making the journey much more pleasant than it could have otherwise been. When I arrived at the facility I had a proper look at my bike, and was thankfully able to tighten the rear brake cable sufficiently. However, since my bike is insisting on being the star of the show, I feel that a visit to a repair shop long overdue.



## K – Day 15

*August 4, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp*

Today didn't get off to the start that I had been hoping for. I had originally planned to cycle around the area, calling into various people who had been recommended to me, as well as visiting the famine road in Poulaphuca for a second time. However, as I was leaving the research facility my bike began making strange noises every time I put pressure on the pedals. I presumed that this was due to the fact that I had overtightened the back brakes last night, so I brought the bike back to the facility to loosen the brake cable. After doing so I noticed to my dismay that the bike chain had slipped once more. On closer inspection I could see that the issue had to do with the rear derailleur, and it appeared that a screw had come loose. As a result of this, the chain was unable to stay on the derailleur while the bike was moving.

After multiple attempts with an Allen key I was still unable to tighten it, so I decided to call the bike hire service in Kilfenora to see if they had any suggestions. I wasn't too keen on bringing the bike to a repair shop as the nearest one is in Galway city, about a two-hour journey from here involving a taxi and a bus. The bike hire service in Kilfenora were extremely helpful, and asked me to send on some images of the problem so that they could suggest any further actions that I should take. I received a response soon after sending the requested images saying it appeared that the screw just needed to be tightened, however they would send the images onto their mechanic for a second opinion. I attempted to tighten the screw once more, and sure enough, after a couple of attempts it was as good as new.

As this had taken up so much time, and with the relationship with my bike deteriorating rapidly, I decided to set off by foot. I called into the man who lived just outside the village, as his house was only about a 3km walk away. He must have just arrived home, as I saw him exiting his car while I was approaching. I introduced myself, gave him a rundown of my project, and inquired whether or not he would be interested in participating. He seemed intrigued by the idea, and insisted that I come inside to have a cup of tea so that we could discuss it further.

As we began chatting, I brought up the possibility of recording our conversation. He dismissed this, and suggested that we could arrange that for another time. He also wasn't keen on me taking notes while we conversed, recommending that I simply listened and took notes for now. Originally from Limerick, he has been living in Carron for the past 50 years. Despite this, the locals still refer to the house as belonging to the previous owner, whose family had lived there for generations. As he is of poor health of late and requires

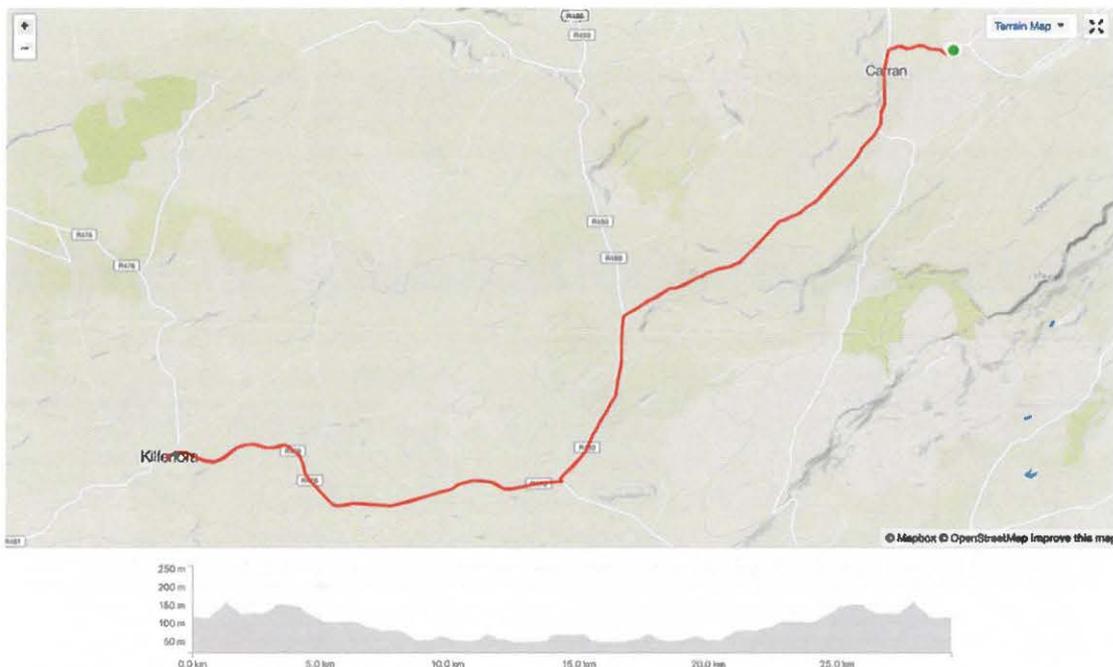
frequent visits to the hospital, he lives down in Limerick during the week and travels up to Carron on the weekends. The cottage he is living in is about 200 years old. Although many extensions have been added to it, most of the original building still remains. He was kind enough to give me a tour of the house, explaining in detail the history behind everything. A keen floral/nature photographer, the walls were decorated with his prints. He claimed that at one stage he could recite every plant in the Burren, however over the years a lot of that information has been forgotten. He claimed that the act of photographing had aided his memory retention. We proceeded to discuss multiple topics, including that of the famine, until the late hours of the evening. As I was leaving we arranged to have a recorded conversation on the 13th to discuss my project further, but I was welcome to drop in whenever I was passing by.



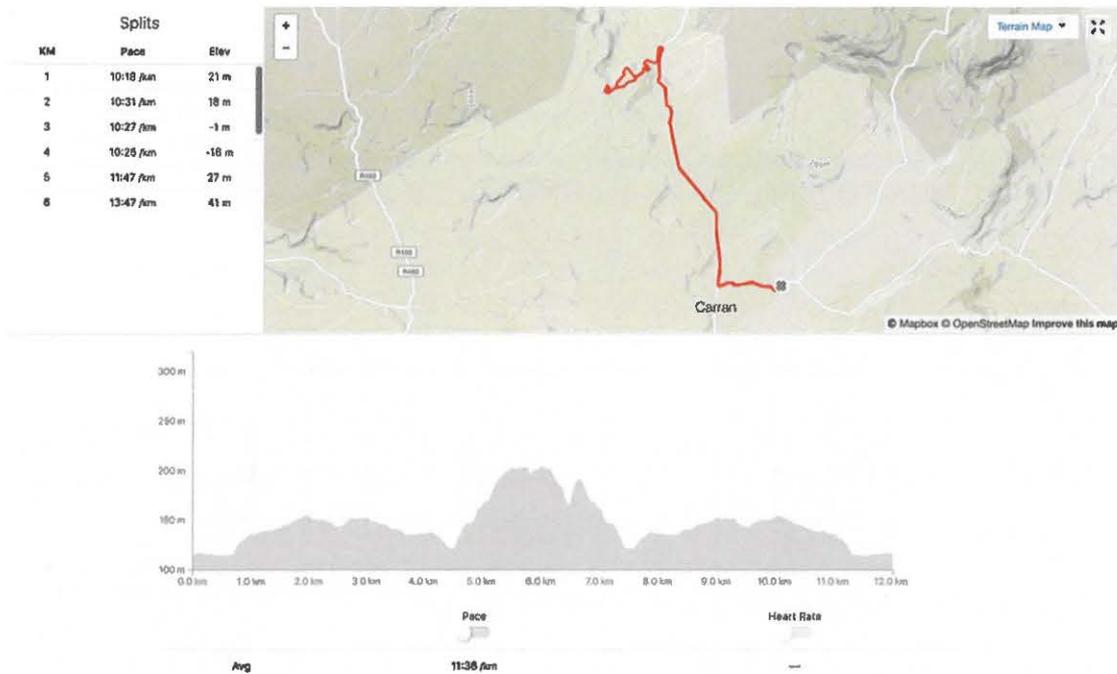
## L - Days 16-18

August 7, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

As I am planning on bringing my bike to Kilfenora on Thursday, I looked up how long it would take to cycle there from Carran. On doing so, I discovered that it was home to a mini-supermarket. As the distance to the Kilfenora is less than that to Ballyvaughan, as well as the journey being flatter overall, on Sunday I tested out doing the weekly shop there. The cycle was comparatively pleasant, introducing me to an even more expansive side of the Burren. As there are less hills around this area, the landscape stretches out as far as the eye can see. The lack of wind and rain enabled me to take in this surrounding scenery, something that one doesn't often have the luxury of doing along the coastal route to Ballyvaughan.



On Monday I walked to Poulaphuca in attempt to find the shelters that were used by the builders while they were constructing the local famine road. The day was dull, overcast, and it would have been the perfect weather for photographing bar the light drizzle that continued for most of the morning. Upon arriving at Poulaphuca I made my way along a windy track up the side of a hill, one that had the look of being rarely used. Although steep, it wasn't long before I had reached the summit.



I had been instructed to follow the track until I came across the shelters, presumably nearby to the famine road. However, the only construction I encountered that bared any resemblance to a shelter was a wedge tomb. I decided to traverse through some fields to get slightly closer to the famine road, hoping that I would spot a shelter along the way. As I passed from field to field, I saw the famine road from a height for the first time. Ever since my first encounter with it, I had been doubtful whether or not it had been the famine road that the locals had been talking about. Previously I had only observed it from below, or when I was actually walking along the road itself. From this initial perspective it almost had the appearance of being a natural phenomenon, and not man-made at all. However, from the slightly higher viewpoint there was no doubt that it was indeed the famine road of Poulaphuca.

What makes this road unique to the other famine roads that I have photographed is that it has remained completely untouched since its original construction. Many roads built during the famine have been upgraded and improved over the years, to the extent that it is almost impossible to recognise them as being built during the famine. However, this road provided no practical purpose at the time of construction as it was built into the side of a hill, starting and ending in the middle of nowhere. Because of this, the road has remained untouched since the famine years, its foundation stones yet to be paved over.



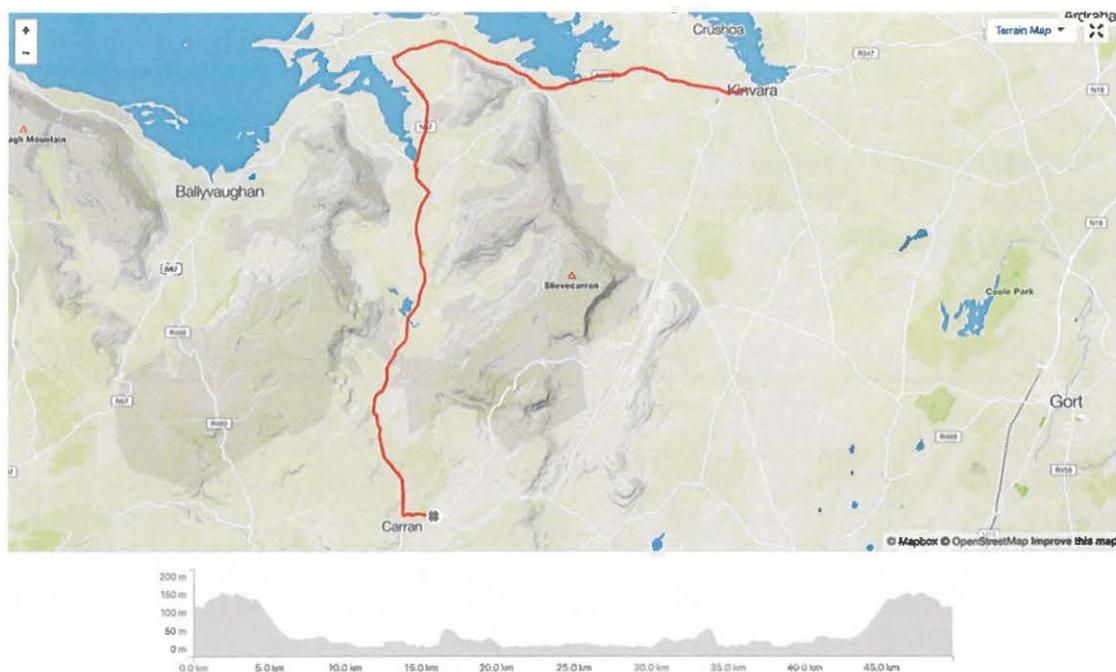
## **M – Day 19**

*August 8, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp*

Initially I had planned to head down to New Quay today and attempt to find walls around the area that were built during the famine to divide up the surrounding land. However, as I was passing through Bellharbour I remembered that I had been recommended to talk to somebody who lived next door to the local pub, Daly's. It appeared that nobody was home when I first called, but while I was in the area I thought I would take a look at my notebook to see if there was anybody else nearby that I could drop into. I had taken down the name of a man who lived in New Quay, so I dropped into Daly's to get some more directions to his house.

As I was just about to leave for New Quay I decided to call into the house one more time, as I could see that a couple of cars were parked just outside. Finally I gave up, and as I was walking towards the gate a car pulled up across the road. The driver turned out to be the owner of the house, and although he was heading elsewhere he kindly stopped to chat briefly about my project with me. Initially he seemed sceptical about the idea of documenting this particular subject, questioning why anyone would want to be reminded of all those people who died and emigrated the country during the famine years. However, he did concede that there was something to be learnt from it. Although he informed me that he didn't know much about the subject itself, he suggested that I call into him sometime next week when he was more likely to be available.

After this interaction I made my way to New Quay, and with the directions that I acquired from Daly's I was able to find the next man's house without any trouble at all. The door was answered by his brother, who told me that he was out at the moment but would have a good bit of knowledge on the famine as he had carried out his own research into the subject. I left my name and number with his brother, just in case he was interested in having a recorded conversation with me at some point over the next few weeks.



From there I decided to make my way to Kinvarra, taking full advantage of the good weather. I had originally been planning on searching for the famine house that was located just outside the town, but on arrival I thought I would call into the man that had eluded me during my last visit. Fortunately he was at home this time, and I proceeded to have a great chat with him. Although he didn't know much about the famine, he was able to give me a couple of names of people in the area that may be able to assist me in my research. As well as this he kindly invited me inside for a cup of tea and some toast, and we ended up having a fascinating conversation together. He had grown up in a small village at the foot of a nearby mountain, but had lived in Kinvarra for the last 40 years or so. Upon hearing about my interest in the famine house he informed me that it was located just passed Dunguaire Castle, however it was on private land. The owner of this land also owned one of the local pubs, so after our conversation I made my way down to the pub in question to request access.

The owner made it very clear that I would be entering the land at my own risk as there was a bull in the field, but said that I was free to do so. Although initially stating that he didn't know much about the famine, he was able to tell me a great deal about the history of the famine house itself. During the famine years the sick were brought there so as to keep them separate from the rest of the community. The famine house was a place where these people were just barely kept alive, however there were no injections available to cure them. It is said that the people staying there were buried half-alive at times, and that coffins were unable to be built fast enough due to the rate at which people were perishing. After the famine, a family moved into the building in an attempt to make it their home.

Tragically, they moved in too soon after the famine had taken place and both their children died from tuberculosis. The owner's granduncle had been keen on turning it into a functioning house once more, but that never came to pass. It now lies in ruins at the top of a hill, facing the nearby Dunguaire Castle and Kinvarra beyond.

I thanked him for his knowledge and his time, and made my way 10 minutes down the road to the location of the famine house. I was told that the best way to gain access to the field was to turn left at a stone cross and make my way up a short but steep slope. It was recommended to me that I should only enter the field if the bull was nowhere in sight and even then, it would be in my best interest not to hang around there for too long. It was clearly not a route that many people took, as the slope itself was covered in blackberry bushes, half of which seemed to attach themselves to my legs. When I made it to the top, I had a quick scan of the field before making my way towards the house. Sections of the building have been completely engulfed by nature, however other elements of the house looked remarkably well considering how long it had been neglected for. This initial visit was more a recon of the area, and although I took a few images I am hoping to return to the site at a later date with both my digital camera and my Mamiya 7.

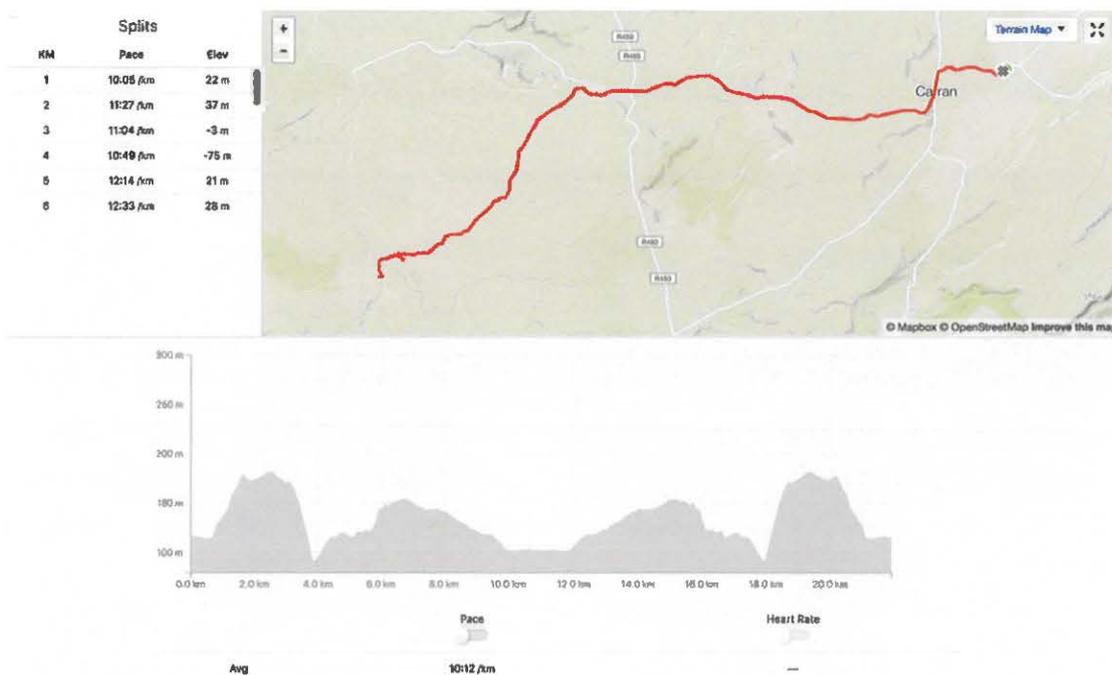
Before informing me of the history behind the famine house, the owner of the pub seemed cautious about telling me anything to do with the famine itself. He stated that "You never know what to believe", and that you could hear multiple contrasting stories about the same subject matter. This may explain why a lot of people are initially unwilling to talk about the famine, as they are unsure whether or not the stories they have been told are 100% factual. As I explained to the owner, I would much rather collect stories that only contain an element of truth and find a common link between them, rather than not collect any stories at all.



## N - Day 20

August 9, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

I had previously been recommended to talk with a person from Noughaval, whose late-husband was known to have a lot of knowledge relating to the famine around the area. As well as this, it had been suggested that the church in Noughaval may have been built around this time. Upon seeing the projection elevation gain of the journey, I made the decision to travel there by foot. Although this increased the journey time by around an hour and a half it turned out to be the best decision that I made all day, as the steep inclines along the route would not have been worth the shorter 35-minute cycle.



A combination of the weather and the scenery made this walk thoroughly enjoyable, with the scenery changing dramatically every few kilometres. The steep inclines resulted in stunning viewpoints upon reaching the various summits, and with the abundance of green fields it was easy to forget that you were still in the Burren. However this changed as I got closer to the parish of Noughaval, where the familiar karst landscape returned once more.

Noughaval itself consists of a church and a handful of dwellings surrounding it. Before the famine, the hamlet of Noughaval was home to around 64 people, whereas now that number is closer to 10. I called into a local to ask for directions, and was pointed in the direction of a house just down the road. Unfortunately, the person I was hoping to talk to wasn't at home at the time, so I left a note with my number and an explanation of the sort of research that I was doing.

Before heading back to Carron, I had a look around the ruin of an old church adjacent to its modern-day equivalent. Although parts of the church seem to date back to medieval times, its graveyard is still in use to this day. I came across one tomb in which people were buried during the famine years. One man died in 1848, aged 98 years, whereas another died in 1849, aged 34 years. The rest of the gravestones were either too old to be distinguishable anymore, or too modern to belong to anyone who had died during the famine. I noticed plenty of familiar surnames, whose families have obviously been living in the area for many generations.

I began to head back towards the facility, not looking forward to the 2-hour walk quite as much as I had been on my way there. As I reached the halfway point, a car pulled up next to me and the driver leaned out to ask if I wanted a lift back to Carron. He just so happened to be one of the very first people that I had conversed with during my previous field trip, and had recognised me as I was walking down the road. He had also been the first person to recommend that I talk with Micky Vaughan, who had sadly passed away a few months ago. We were able to have a brief catch up on the drive to the village of Carron, from where I made the relatively short journey back to the facility.



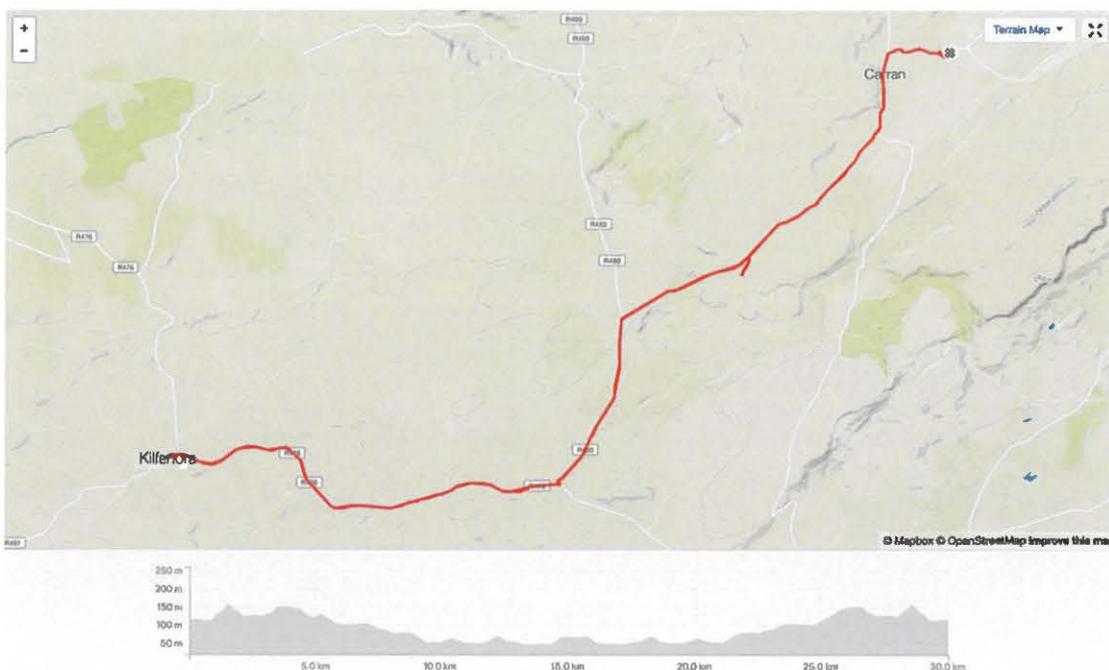
## 0 - Day 21

August 10, 2018 | *Seán Laoide-Kemp*

The primary goal for today was to get my bike serviced by a mechanic in Kilfenora. Although I had tinkered with it myself to ensure that it was functioning, I knew that these were just temporary solutions. Rather than wait for the next accident to happen, I thought it would be best to nip any potential problems in the bud.

On my way to Kilfenora I stopped off at a house just outside Carron to visit another person that I had been recommended to speak with. The man in question informed me that he wouldn't be much help regarding the famine, however his son suggested that some of the walls around the farmland may have been built around that time. The land had been divided into small sections, contrasting with the larger fields that can be seen around the area. This dividing of land occurred quite frequently during the famine years, so I made a mental note to have a look at the OSI maps later in the evening.

After this visit I continued on to Kilfenora, which was only about a 45 minute cycle away. As I reached the halfway mark I noticed a loud squeaking coming from my bike every time that I pedalled, although this time the noise appeared to be related to the front wheel as opposed to the back. Thankful that I was about to get it looked at, I continued towards the village. After dropping into a local shop to pick up a few items, I walked up to the building where the bike rental service was based. The mechanic there was very helpful, and after initially noticing a couple of issues with the bike he told me to come back in an hour or so.

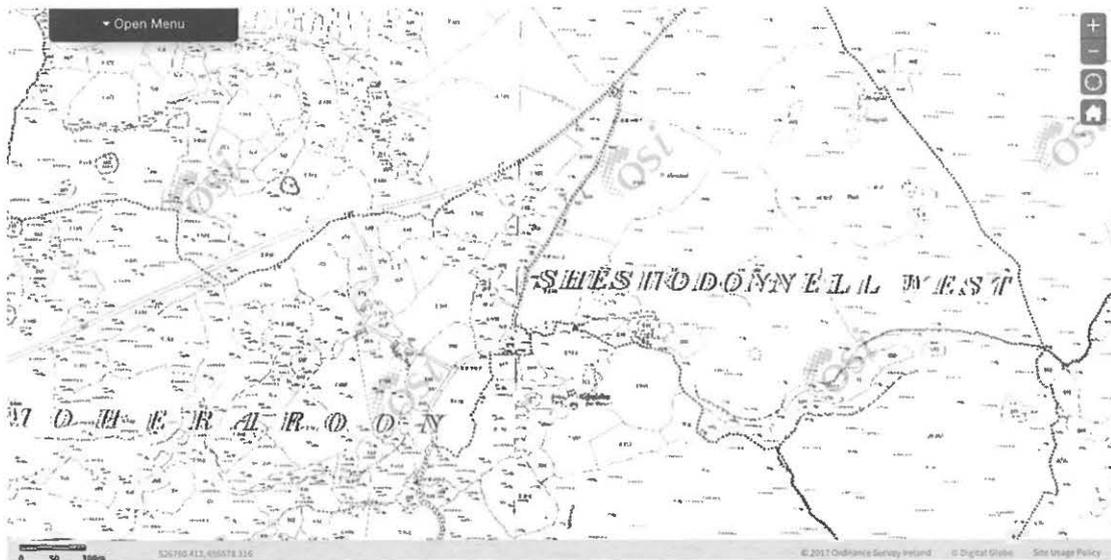


It was only when I returned that I realised how bad a state my bike was actually in. Probably the most significant issue was that the rear axel had snapped in half, meaning that the rear wheel would have eventually become severely damaged and may have even come off while I was cycling. The rear wheel itself was incredibly loose, which could have caused it to rub off the brakes while I was cycling, resulting in the loud squeaking noise that occurred every time that I pedalled. The bike chain was quite worn and in need of replacement. Fortunately, the mechanic had a spare one on hand. He also adjusted the rear derailleur to prevent the new chain from slipping off the gears, as the older one had been doing all too frequently.

The mechanic informed me that he had done enough to insure that the bike would last until the end of my field trip without any issue, however he recommended that I get it serviced soon afterwards. The cycle back to Carron was noticeably smoother, and I noticed that he had made some adjustments to the brakes resulting in them being a lot more responsive. All going well, this will be the last time the bike features in this blog.

When I arrived back at the facility in Carron, I had a look at the OSI maps to analyse the farmland around Carron in more detail. The farmhouse in question can be seen at the centre of the 2005 map (1st image), with much of the farmland located to the right-hand side. When comparing the 1888-1913 map (2nd image, post-famine) with the 1837-42 map (3rd image, pre-famine), it is clear that some of these constructions could very well have been built during the famine years. However, it is also evident from the maps that many of the walls around the area were built after 1913.





I'm intrigued in particular by a small track that runs from the house at the top of the map to the main road, built between 1843 and 1887. As I have stated previously, many constructions were built between 1843 and 1887 that had nothing to do with the famine. That being said, I think it would still be worth calling into that house to find out if the owner knows anything about the tracks' origin.

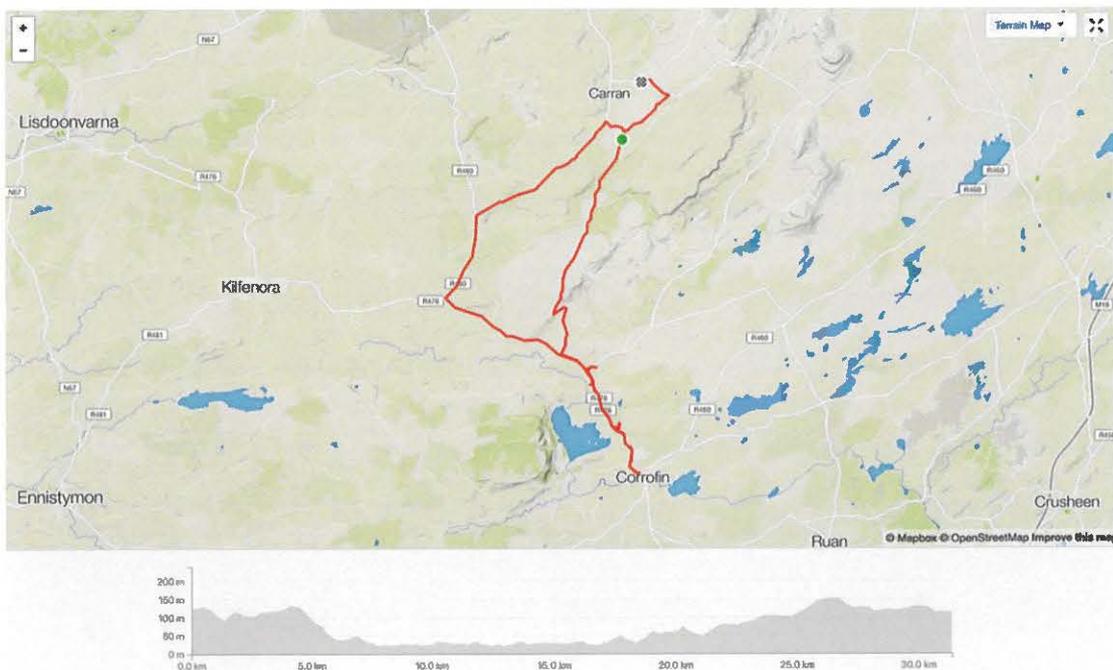


## P – Day 22

August 11, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

Taking advantage of the good weather, I decided to travel to Corofin to call into another person that I had been recommended to speak with. As it was on my way, I also made plans to stop into Kilnaboy to talk to somebody who was supposed to have great knowledge of the area. The route that I took passed through Creevagh, and led to an incredibly steep and windy track down to the main road. Although this was much faster than taking the road from Carron to Leamaneh, the steep decline wasn't ideal for the brakes on my bike that I am trying to preserve.

I didn't have an address for the man in Kilnaboy, so I proceeded to call into various houses around the village. Soon enough I was led to the brother of the man in question, and was pointed down the road to an old white cottage hidden amongst the undergrowth. The owner was indeed full of local knowledge, and was as equally fascinated with history as I was. The house he was living in was built during the 1700s, as was the forge built across the way. Both were in remarkable condition. He had been able to preserve the forge so that plenty of original tools were still on display inside, including a fully functioning bellows and two pike heads that were forged there for use in the 1798 rebellion. Although we arranged that I could drop in next week to record a conversation for my project, we ended up talking for over an hour about a variety of different topics, each one as engaging as the next.



I then continued on to Corofin, which was only a few kilometres down the road from the village of Kilnaboy. Again I hadn't been given a specific address, so I called into a local shop and was pointed in the right direction. Unfortunately the man that I had been hoping to talk to was currently of ill health, however his wife suggested that I leave my number and that they would ring me in order to organise a meeting at a later date. As I was about to leave she suggested that I visited the workhouse in Portumna, as it was still in excellent condition. She also mentioned that there was a talk on in Ballyvaughan on the 21st of August about the workhouses of the area, something that should be incredibly beneficial to my research.

As I made my way back to the research facility, I opted to stick to the main road rather than take on the hill up to Creevagh. As I was entering Carron once more, I remembered that I had been given the name of a farmer in the area to talk to about my project. Since I was passing by his house on my way back to the facility, I decided to call in. After explaining my research to him, he informed me that he wouldn't be able to assist me as that particular history was simply too far in the past for it to have been passed down to him.

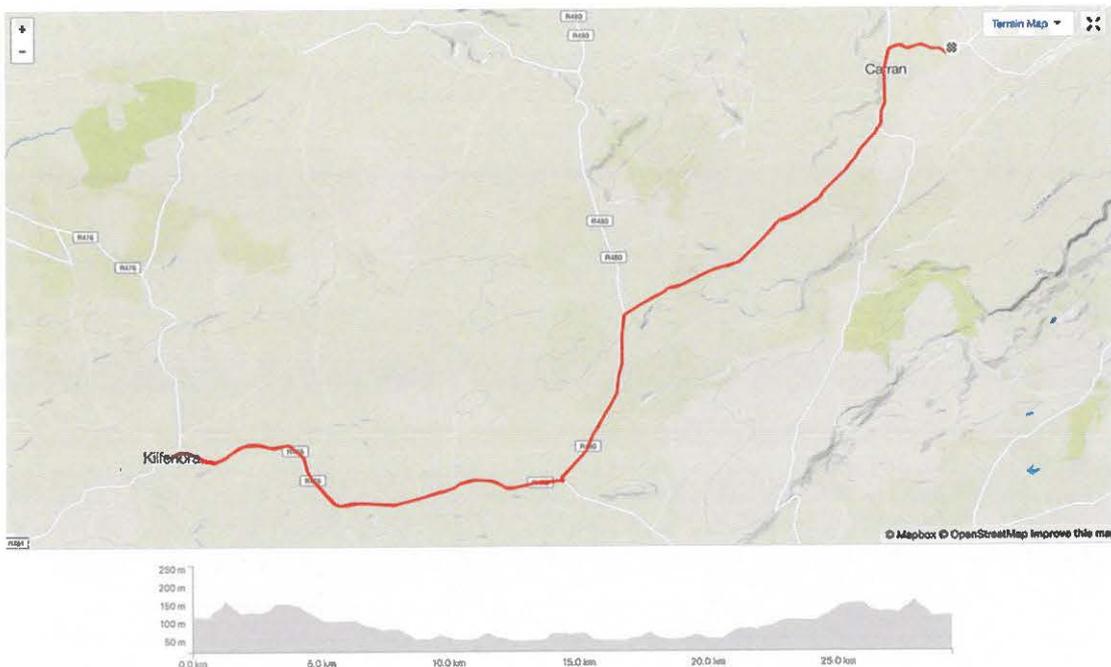
Considering I have reached the halfway stage of this field trip, I will now be focusing more on the photographic aspect of the project for the remainder of my time here. I have two more recorded conversations lined up next week, one on Monday just outside Carron, and the other on Tuesday in Kilnaboy. Afterwards I feel that I will have obtained the locations of a sufficient number of constructions to photograph, for now. This is not to say that the oral history aspect of the project will not continue until the 31st of August. At the same time I am wary of the mistakes that I made during the last field trip, leaving the photography until the final week and therefore producing images that I felt weren't of a high enough standard. Hopefully I will be able to benefit from that experience over the coming weeks, and do justice to the history that I am hoping to document.



## Q – Days 23-25

August 14, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

Originally I was meant to have another recorded interview today (Monday) with a man who lives just outside the village of Carran. However, I found out last-minute that the meeting would have to be delayed until tomorrow instead (Tuesday), at 19:00. I am due to conduct another interview in Kilnaboy earlier that day at around 13:00, so I should have no trouble in getting back to Carran on time. As a result of this rescheduling, I found myself with an unprecedented free afternoon following the weekly shop in Kilfenora that morning.



I decided that the best course of action would be to create a map, highlighting the locations of various constructions that I have discovered since arriving in Carran. As I will only be here for another 3 weeks, the remainder of this field trip will need to become increasingly structured to ensure that I am able to photograph as many of these constructions as possible.

I began by locating each construction that was confirmed to have been built during the famine years. Afterwards I began noting the locations of constructions that were not yet confirmed, or that their validity was up for debate. Finally, I also marked the locations of constructions that were not built during the famine, yet have some sort of connection to the event.

In total I documented the locations of 13 constructions that were built across the area of North Clare. Over the next few weeks I will be hoping to photograph each one, prioritising the constructions that are confirmed to have been built as part of the Public Works Scheme during the famine years. I would like the aesthetic of each photograph to be as consistent as possible, so that the focus will be solely on the constructions themselves. Therefore, an ideal situation would be to photograph each construction in the most consistent weather that the Burren has to offer: bleak, overcast, and with a strong probability of rain. However, I am aware that clear, sunny days are not too uncommon around this time of year, so I may need the few extra days to enable me to photograph each construction in as similar conditions as possible.

I have already photographed a number of these constructions before, notably the roads in Poulaphuca and New Quay, as well as the wall in Ballyvaughan. I have also photographed the road that runs behind the Burren College of Art, however I have since been informed that it may not have been built during the famine after all. Despite having documented these constructions already, I have previously expressed my dissatisfaction with the resultant images. The images depicting the road in Poulaphuca were also off in terms of consistency, with the clear, blue skies contrasting with the overcast nature of the other images. All going well, I should have enough time left to ensure that this type of situation does not happen again.



- - Confirmed Famine Construction
- - Possible Famine Construction
- - Construction Related to the Famine

### **Confirmed Famine Construction**

- 1) Poulaphuca - Road
- 2) New Quay - Road
- 3) Ballyvaughan - Workhouse
- 4) Ballyvaughan - Bridge
- 5) Ballyvaughan - Wall
- 6) Cloon - Road

### **Possible Famine Construction**

- 7) Ballyvaughan - Road
- 8) New Quay - Walls
- 9) Carron - Road
- 10) Carron - Walls
- 11) Ballyvaughan - Bridge

### **Construction Related to the Famine**

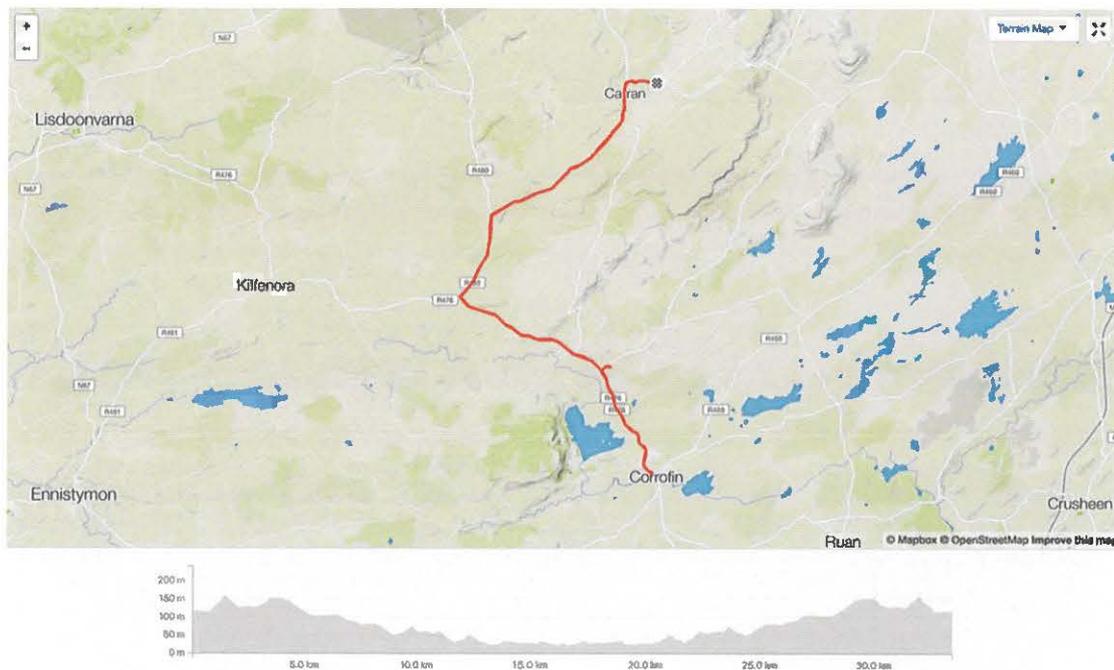
- 12) Kinvara - Fever Hospital
- 13) Kilnaboy - Famine Village



## R – Day 26

August 15, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

As I mentioned yesterday, I had arranged to have a recorded conversation at 13:00 with a man in Kilnaboy. I had spoken with this man previously, and his passion for history made me particularly keen to record what he had to say. He was on the phone when I arrived, but invited me in to make myself comfortable, as it had been pouring down for most of the morning. After he finished, I briefly explained what I was hoping to do with the various recordings and images that I was collecting over the course of my field trip, all of which he seemed very enthusiastic about.



We began by discussing the subject of famine in general. He mentioned that a man by the name of Frederick Douglass (a former slave from the US) had visited Ireland in 1845, at the beginning of the Great Famine. Apparently Douglass was shocked at the conditions in which the peasants in Ireland were living in, stating that they were worse off than the slaves in the US at the time.

As we continued talking, I mentioned the fever hospital outside Kinvara that I had visited last week. He had also come across this building, and was able to tell me about a similar construction that had since been turned into a functioning hospital on the road from Ennistimon to Lahinch. He also informed me of a famine memorial that was located just across the road from the hospital itself, something that I will hopefully get a chance to see over the coming weeks.

Regarding Kilnaboy, he was able to tell me about a burial ground that was locally known as Gort na Marbh. As the Kilnaboy cemetery was overflowing during the famine years, this small stretch of land was where a huge number of people were buried. He had been driving up the road a few years ago, and had spotted a local farmer bulldozing this land. Upon being notified of the significance of the area, the farmer stated that the history of it hadn't been passed down to him, even though his family had lived there for generations. I was also told about a smaller burial ground, this one located next to the old church in the area. During the famine the church refused to bury children who had not been baptised, so instead they were buried in this unmarked mass grave.

He also mentioned various myths and legends relating to the famine that he had heard growing up. One that stood out in particular was that of the Hungry Grass. His father had told him that if one stood on a patch of grass where a person had died during the famine, they would suddenly be overcome with hunger and be frozen to the spot. The only way that one could be released from this spell would be to eat something. For this reason, people were known to always keep an apple, some bread, or a bit of cheese in their pockets, just in case they ever stood upon a patch of Hungry Grass. This man's father chose to carry around oats in his coat pocket, and did so for his entire life. Years after he passed away, some of his old clothes were thrown out. His coat ending up lying at the foot of a wall, and soon the a plant appeared from the oats that were still inside its pocket.

After recording for about 40 minutes or so, we decided to have a look at the famine village that was just down the road from his house. When he was younger he had been able to play amongst them with his siblings and friends, however the area in which they were situated was now incredibly overgrown. Because of this, we were only able to access 2 of the 6 houses in the area. Even then, these houses were completely hidden from view. Trees now grew up from their foundations, with ivy and moss covering almost every inch of stone. This village was deserted during the famine years, although it may have only been built in the early 1800s. He told me that he had felt an overwhelming sense of sadness whenever he made his way towards two of the houses in particular, so much so that he had since stopped visiting them.

We discussed the poor conditions that these families had lived in, but also the strong sense of community that must have been there at the time. Back then there were 3 shops in the area, as well as a forge, and most people were self-sufficient when it came to food. The house where he grew up was also a place where people from all around the area would come to socialise, playing cards, sharing stories, and listening to music.

Nowadays there are no shops in Kilnaboy, with the majority of people doing their weekly shop down in Corofin. That sense of community has also been lost to some extent. The introduction of electricity, television, and cars has meant that the communal spaces around the area, of which his house had once been, no longer exist.

After driving around Kilnaboy and pointing out the locations of various houses that have since been knocked down and removed from the landscape, he drove us back to his house. On returning, he very kindly gifted me a signed copy of a book that he wrote on one of the local healers in the area, Mariah. While his father (and his father before him) was a healer of animals, Mariah healed the people of the area. Her practice was frowned upon by the church, who did their best to ostracise her from the community. She had written a book containing an entire collection of curious remedies, however the whereabouts of this book is unknown since she passed away. When she was born, legend has it that a tree in the area had been struck by lightning. Because of this, Mariah stated that she wished for her book to be buried beneath this tree before she died. Unfortunately this tree has long since been knocked down, leaving no trace of where this collection of ancient remedies could be buried.



## S – Day 27

August 16, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

Today I visited the site of a famine road that runs past Mullach Mór, starting in an area called Cooloora. I had first come across this road during an interview that I conducted a couple of weeks ago, but I hadn't been aware of just how close it was until I recently searched for it online. Coincidentally, over the following the number of days I was recommended by two more people to visit it. I managed to locate the road in question on a website that highlighted the various hiking trails around the area. It was suggested to take the famine road as a shortcut while hiking the loop around the Burren National Park, a distance of around 20km.

I set off towards the car park where the famine road began, and once again I was grateful for having the brakes of my bike looked at last week. As the village of Carron is quite high up, you are almost guaranteed to encounter a steep decline no matter where you're travelling to. I had been down a section of this hill once before, which is locally referred to as the area's own Corkscrew Hill due to its steep and windy nature. However, the rest of the journey was new to me, and I had to be cautious while cycling along backroads that had barely enough room for one car to pass by.



Compared to the other famine constructions that I have visited, this one was particularly easy to find. As it is the location of a popular hiking trail for tourists, a small collection of cars had gathered at the entrance to the park. Adjacent to the entrance was an information board, however I was shocked to find that there was no mention of the road being built during the famine. This made me wonder whether I was in the right place or not, but walking further along the road put that beyond all doubt.

The marked trail suggested turning off the road almost straight away, and to continue along a narrow track up over Mullach Mór. I stuck to the road and soon I was alone, surrounded by the bleak yet beautiful landscape that is becoming more and more familiar to me. As with many of the constructions built during the famine as part of the Public Works Scheme, this road had not been completed. This was clear from the fact that the foundation stones were still exposed, similar to the famine road in Poulaphuca. Although unfinished, it still stretched on for miles, merging seamlessly into the surrounding landscape. The sections where the road had to be raised were particularly impressive. Mounds upon mounds of stone were placed on top of each other, the majority being roughly cut yet fitting together perfectly. A few instances of well-carved stonework could be seen, but these were very much in the minority. Again, this is a clear indication that the road was far from being completed.

Along the side of the road there was an occasional boulder that seemed to stand out from the rest of the landscape. Given the unusual nature of the Burren, it can be difficult at times to tell whether a boulder/rock has been placed there by somebody or is simply a natural occurrence. In this instance, I imagined that these boulders were meant to bear the names of the area in which they were located, or else to display the distance to the nearest village. Of course, this is all speculative.

Speaking of which, it was very easy to let my imagination run wild given the history of the road that I was walking along. I found myself looking out for anything that stood out from the landscape, and seeing if I could figure out what its original function may have been. Various upright rocks became gravestones for the builders who had died during the construction of the road, a collection of loose stones hinted at something being buried underneath, white markings on a carved rock alluded a form of signage that had long since been eroded away.

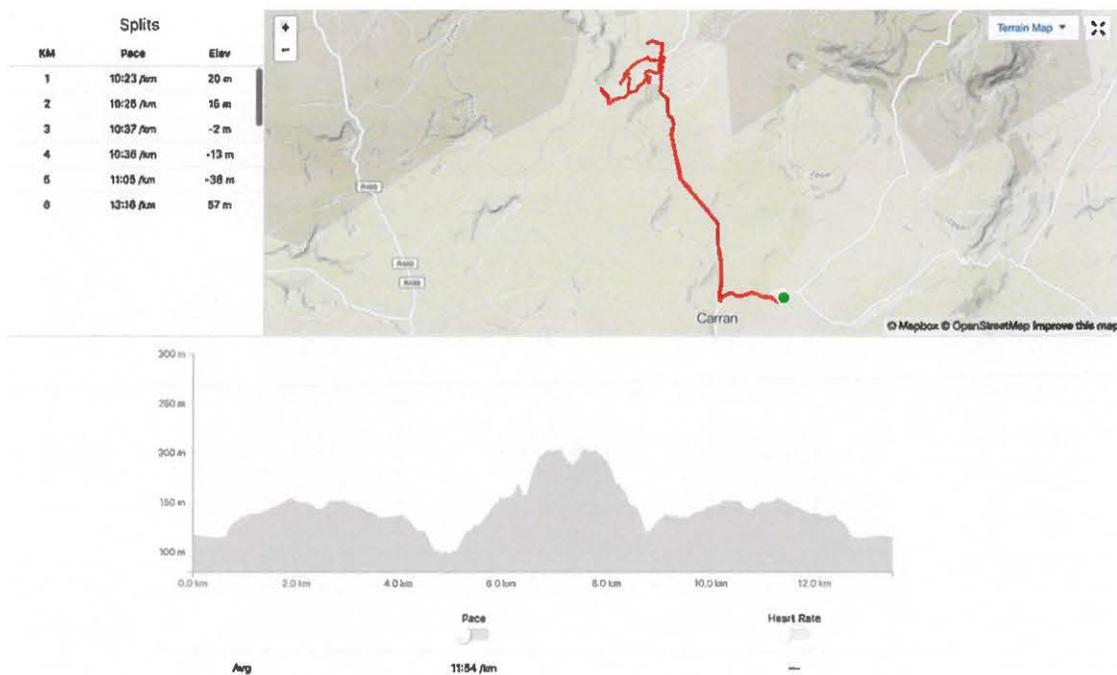
I continued down the road until I came across an area of farmland. Although the road continued through here, this section had clearly been improved by the local farmers, presumably to allow for tractors and cars to access the area. As the weather was beginning to take a turn for the worst, I started to make my way back towards the car park. What had previously been a glorious sunny day had now become dark and overcast, and a shower could be seen approaching in the distance. I knew that I would only have a short window of opportunity, so I took out both my cameras and began shooting. The first thing that struck me was the self-imposed pressure I felt while photographing the road and its surrounding area. I was already worrying about whether or not my images would do justice to its significant history, a mindset that is not recommended or beneficial in any way. I think this way of thinking was only exaggerated due to the fact that it was my first time visiting this particular area, and as a result I was almost shooting blind. In some instances this can actually be helpful, however for this project I think it is worth doing a recce of the area first to take everything in. It wasn't long before the heavens opened, and by that point I had almost returned at the entrance of the park. I shot just under 2 rolls of film, as well as taking multiple digital shots as backups, however I will definitely be returning to the site once more before the end of the field trip. Thankfully, this time I will have the opportunity to do so.



## T - Day 28

August 17, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

As I mentioned in a previous blog, I had already photographed the famine road in Poulaphuca during my initial field trip to the area. However, since I had been rushing to photograph all the famine constructions during my final week, I was left with no other option but to photograph the road on a rare, sunny day in February. Because of this, as well as not being entirely satisfied with the resultant images, I had been hoping to return to the location to photograph the road once more. As it is situated only a few kilometres away and built into the side of a steep hill, I decided to leave my bike at the facility and walk there instead.



On reaching the area of Poulaphuca, I called into the owner of the land that the road was on so I could ask for permission to access it. I had already requested access during my initial field trip, however I wanted to make sure that it was still ok for me to do so. Nobody appeared to be home, and I was about to leave when another local farmer came up the track. He informed me that the owner of the land in question no longer lived in that house and was now living next door, although he was currently out. When I mentioned my project to him, he informed me of a famine graveyard that was located on his land, and that I was welcome to access it whenever I pleased. He also suggested that I call into the Burren Programme main office (located in the old schoolhouse in Carran), saying that they might be able to help me further. I thanked him and decided to prioritise photographing the famine road, making my way across a number of fields to its location.

The weather was quite changeable due to the strong winds that occurred throughout the day. Although the sun was shining when I arrived at the site, I knew that it was only a matter of time before the clouds would start rolling in. On my way up to the construction itself, I came across the shelters that I had been searching for during my last visit to the area. Although their roofs had long since collapsed, the walls still stood strong, an impressive feat considering how exposed they are to the elements up there.

When I eventually found a way to climb up onto the road, I noticed that the foundation stones were far larger than those placed on the road in Mullach Mór. This road was also a lot shorter, and nowhere near as completed. I had been informed that the flat stones situated alongside the road were where the builders at the time would have sat to shape the rocks for its construction. Various unusually shaped rocks can be seen sitting on them to this day. Soon after my arrival the sun disappeared behind the clouds, and I was able to capture a few frames before it returned once more. On doing so, I made my way up the side of the hill to the next location. This is not recommended (or sensible), as the long grass is capable of hiding various grikes (or 'scalps' as they were originally known) that dominate the landscape, and as a result it is very easy for your foot to slip into them.

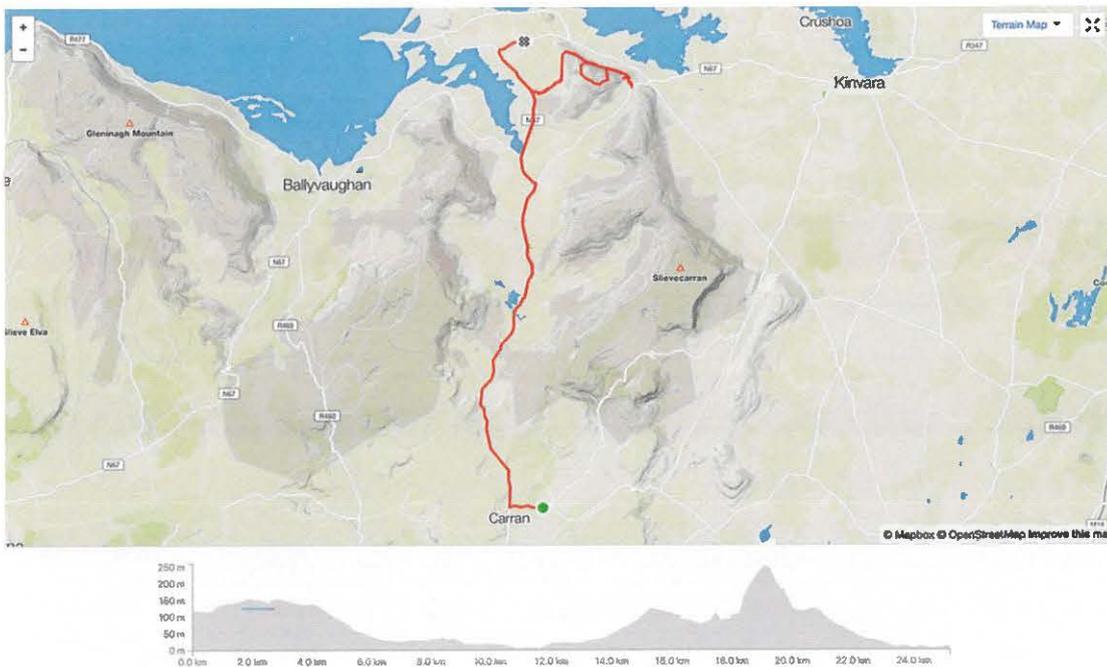
I had been wanting to capture an image of the road from a height so as to highlight its position in the landscape. I also felt that the images taken from the road itself didn't do the construction justice, as this perspective wasn't able to showcase its enormity. I had already chosen a vantage point during a recce of the area, and waited there until the sky became overcast once more. I was in luck, as an enormous rain shower soon engulfed the landscape as far as the eye could see. Holding a rain jacket over my cameras for protection, I was eventually able to get the shot that I was looking for. Due to strong winds the shower passed by in an instant, and I made my way over to a second viewpoint that I had previously picked out. Unfortunately, the next couple of hours didn't feature any further cloud cover. With the weather forecast predicting clear skies for the rest of the afternoon/evening, I made my way back to the facility. On returning to Carron, I called into the Burren Programme centre to see if they would be able to assist me with my research. As it was slightly late in the day there was only one person working there at the time, however she was able to give me an enormous amount of information regarding the famine constructions around the area. These included a wall in Sheshymore, a ditch at Castle Lough, and a road in Pullagh. She was also able to give me multiple contacts who would be able to help me further. I was incredibly grateful for her help, and only wish that I had called into the centre sooner.



## U - Day 29

August 18, 2018 | *Seán Laoide-Kemp*

The photographing of the famine road in New Quay was probably the most successful shoot of my previous field trip. However, due to the fact that I am now attempting to capture these constructions from above when possible, I thought I'd visit the location once more to see what sort of vantage point I could get. At the beginning of the day the weather for the shoot was ideal, bar the light rain that continued to fall as I made my way down the road from Carran towards Bellharbour.



This famine road runs along the side of Abbey Hill, joining up with the main road to Kinvara. Nowadays it is primarily used as a walking trail, with the surface of the road having been improved since its original construction. I had never actually walked the road in its entirety before, and kept an eye out for a route to the top of the hill as I made my way along the trail. I spotted a couple of new locations that looked promising, but decided to return to them after I had found a higher viewpoint. I came across a few tracks winding their way up the side of the hill, and made my way up one that looked like it could lead to a good view of the famine road running down towards the church in New Quay.

The terrain wasn't the easiest to traverse, with the constant rain making the rocks underfoot particularly difficult to stand on. The track I was following must not have been used frequently, and I kept on losing it before it would reappear about 100 metres away. Upon reaching the summit, the wind suddenly became a factor as well. On my cycle down from Carron it had been quite blustery, so much so that I had been pushed off balance on multiple occasions. The wind only increased at this height, resulting in me becoming extra cautious as I made my way across the limestone pavement. Unfortunately the rain also grew more intense here, and as I came across a suitable viewpoint a mixture of the rain and mist made the road barely visible below. I stayed up around that area for a while, but as weather was unrelenting I made my way down towards the road once more.

I went back to one of the locations that I had previously picked out and set up my tripod. After capturing a few images I decided to film the scene for about 20 minutes at a time, something that I had experimented with during my last field trip. Back in February the road had been almost completely deserted, but now I could only film for a maximum of 10 minutes before somebody walked into shot. As I was filming, I received a phonecall from one of the locals. Last week I had left my number with his brother after explaining the nature of my project to him, asking for him to call if he had any information regarding the famine in the area. We chatted on the phone for a few minutes before he invited me down to his house to have a look at some of the research he had conducted on the subject years ago. As I was in New Quay already I decided to take the short detour down to where he lived before returning to the facility in Carron.

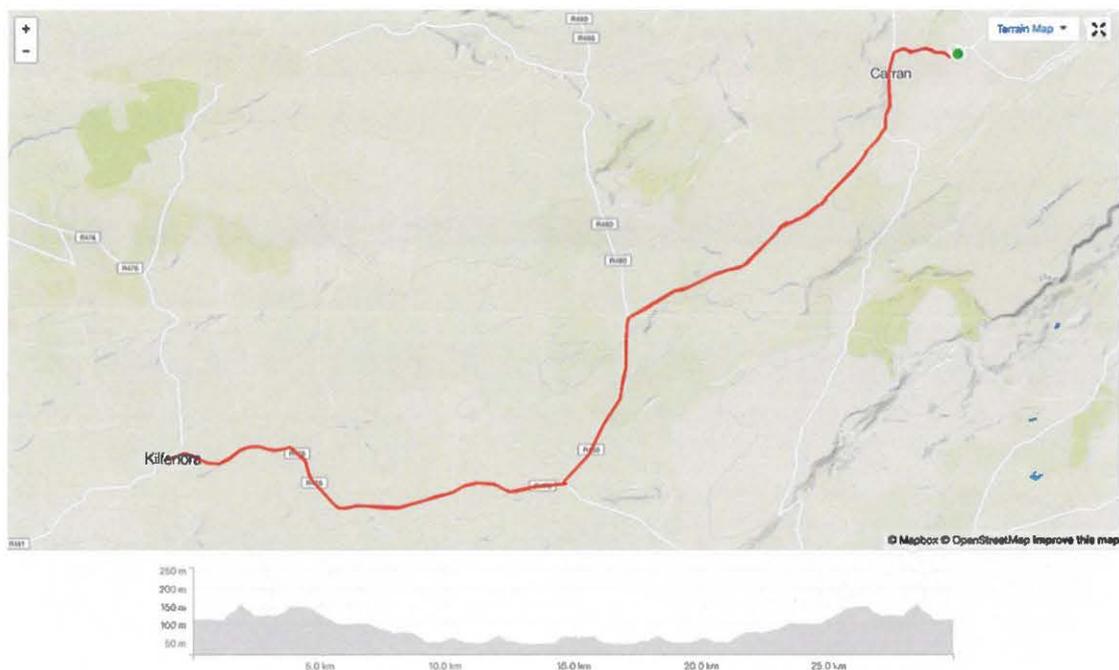
The man and his brother were there when I arrived, and invited me inside. They were kind enough to allow me to photograph the research documents in question, even offering them to me for the duration of my stay in the area. The house they were living in was their original family home, and had been built in the area almost 200 years ago. Although surviving the famine, their family had been evicted in the early 20th century. Thankfully their home wasn't knocked down as a result of this, and they were able to move back in shortly thereafter. As well as mentioning a couple famine constructions in the area, the brothers were also able to give me information on the famine that I wasn't previously aware of. Due to the dependency of the lower classes on the Lumper potato during the famine years, people were known to eat as much as 10 pounds of potatoes per day. They also mentioned that during the famine people were made to cook food that they were not familiar with, such as the variety of fish that became part of their diet at the time. Because of this, a large number ate food that wasn't properly cooked. Due to their immune systems being so weak, as well as the lack of basic medical care afforded to them, many people died as a result of this.



## V – Days 30-32

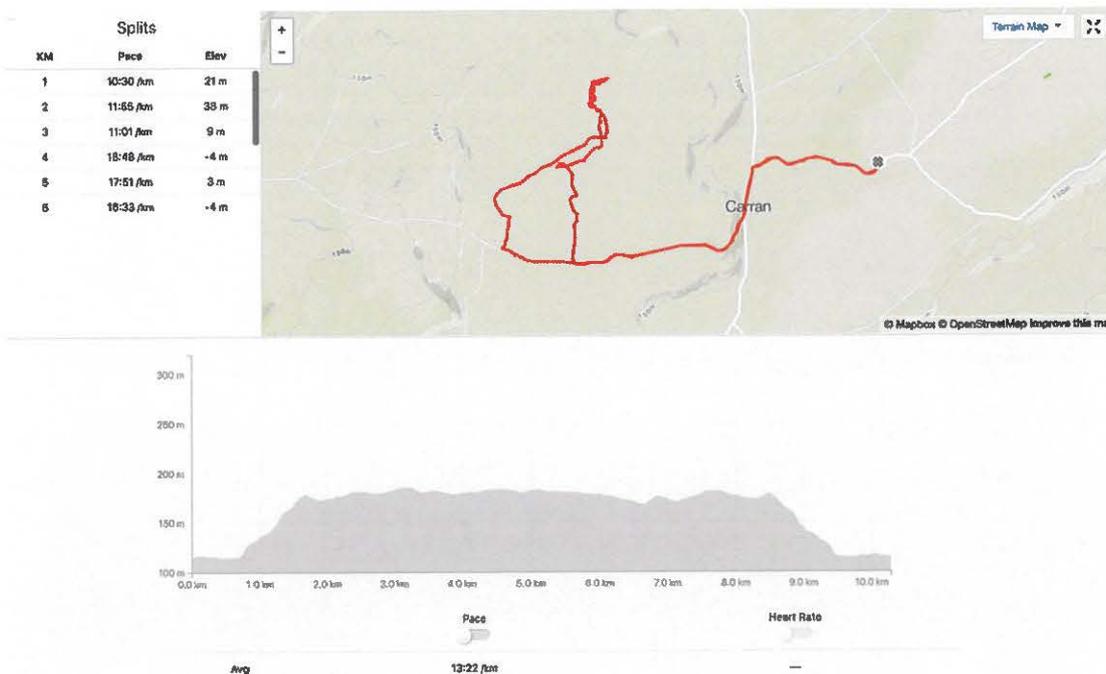
August 21, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

I was due to have another interview this evening, but once again it had to be postponed. Because of this, I had plenty of time to do the shop in Kilfenora and to document a famine wall in Carran soon afterwards. I had only been informed of this particular famine wall when I visited the Burren Life centre last week, as nobody else around the area had known of its existence. I had been able to talk to the landowner himself who said that although he wasn't 100% certain, he had always thought that the wall had been built during the famine because of its unusual 'zig-zag' construction. How the wall was built also contrasted with the walls of the surrounding area. The landowner kindly gave me permission to access it for my research, and I was given directions on where to turn off the main road.





I had already travelled along this road on my way to Noughaval a couple of weeks ago, and it wasn't long before I came across the cattle paddock that I had been instructed to turn off at. The landscape wasn't the easiest to traverse as many of the fields appeared to be used infrequently, resulting in them becoming completely overgrown in parts. Every few minutes I came across some sort of ruin that was now being engulfed by the undergrowth surrounding it, becoming one with the landscape. The route to the wall wasn't completely straightforward and I found myself having to zig-zag towards its location, climbing over multiple walls and gates in the process.



I eventually arrived at the wall in question, which wasn't too hard to spot. Standing at over 6-feet tall, it towered over the other walls that I had come across en route. Just to the south of the main construction was a smaller wall, built in exactly the same way and even had similar 90° turns as its larger counterpart. What made this wall particularly unusual was how short it was in length, almost ending before it had even begun. All signs pointed towards this also being a famine wall, with the OSI maps backing this up. It had been built in the middle of nowhere with no sign of any practical use, a characteristic that is quite common with these famine constructions. The zig-zag nature of the wall also made it highly unusual, as well as the fact that construction on it had obviously stopped abruptly. This used to happen when the funding for a Public Works Scheme construction had run out, resulting in many constructions being left incomplete.

After spending some time photographing and filming the area, I began to head back towards the village. As the route I had originally taken had lacked much direction, I soon became a bit disorientated (as can be seen from the map above). I ended up exiting the fields about a kilometre further down the main road, which I had found by making my way towards the pylons that ran alongside it. As I passed by the cattle paddock once more I noticed the construction of a new track taking place in the adjoining field, leaving yet another imprint on this peppered landscape.



## W - Day 33

August 22, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

I had been planning to attend a talk on Co. Clare's workhouses in the Ballyvaughan Community Centre this evening, a topic particularly relevant to my ongoing project. As it was due to finish quite late (at around 21:30), I had booked a taxi to bring me back up to the facility afterwards. The plan for today was to scout out the various famine constructions in and around Ballyvaughan, hopefully getting some useable images if the weather permitted it. I left my bike at the facility due to the fact that I would be getting a taxi later on that day. The walk from Carron to Ballyvaughan was due to take approximately 3.5 hours, but I thought that if I left early enough in the day I would still have plenty of time to explore before the talk began. I had only been walking for about 30 minutes when a car pulled up alongside me, and the couple inside very kindly offered me a lift to Ballyvaughan. They even stopped at the Burren Outdoor Education Centre to allow me to pick up some post, as well as bringing me to visit Corcomroe Abbey en route. The lift was much appreciated, giving me an unprecedented extra 3 hours in Ballyvaughan to scout the area.



At first I went about looking for the famine workhouse in the village that was still standing, one that I had visited during my previous trip with Micky Vaughan. I knew the general area that it was in, but I couldn't quite remember its exact location. I called into the house where the owner of the land lived. She told me to follow a track that passed by a number of old houses, and that the famine workhouse itself was right at the back of that communal area. As I made my way up the track I thought that everything would come

flooding back to me, but it took longer than I expected to orientate myself. This was probably due to the fact that the area looking completely transformed in the summer months. Eventually I decided that the shed at the back to the left was the building that I had visited previously. Seeing that the shed was in use, I decided to call into one of the local houses just to make sure that I was able to access it.

The man staying there informed me that he had always thought that the workhouse was located to the right of the shed, in what was now an orchard. He led me over to it, saying that he knew the owner of the land well and that he would have no problem with me having a look around. Upon seeing the construction for the first time, there seemed to be no doubt that this indeed was the famine workhouse. Its construction was very plain, and seemed unusually long. The building was split up into two sections, with a fireplace remaining intact in each of them. The man informed me that his landlord might know more about the subject, and brought me back to the house to see her.

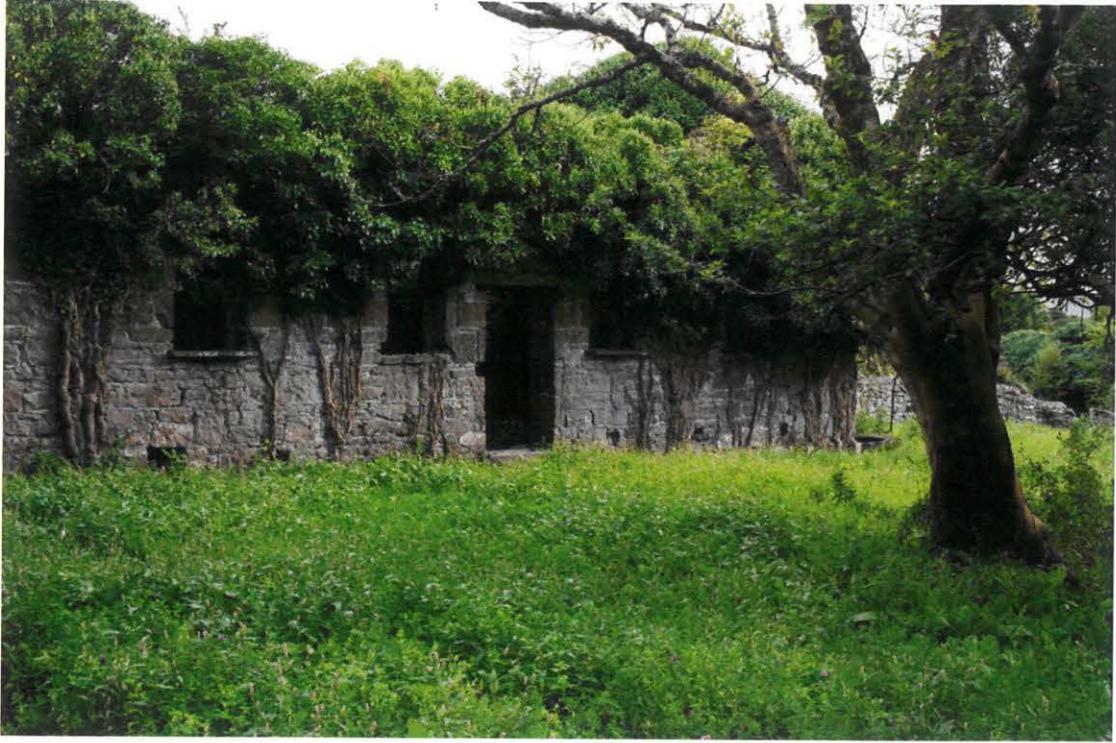
One of the buildings that the landlord owned used to be the soup kitchen during the time of the famine, and the adjoining building later became the priest's house. She kindly showed me around each building, highlighting how it still maintained the majority of its original construction. As well as this, she was able to recommend some people near Fanore that might be able to assist me. Although knowing the specifics of her own buildings, she admitted that the exact whereabouts of the famine workhouse was very much up for debate. She suggested visiting a woman across the road who might have a better idea, although warned me that it was difficult to separate fact and fiction while discussing an event that happened so long ago.

This person was able to tell me that what was now known as the 'Sheds' (the building that I had previously visited with Micky Vaughan) may have been some sort of community hall that was connected to the workhouse, and that the long building on the right would have been the workhouse itself. She said that she always felt incredibly uncomfortable whenever she visited it, stating that she could almost feel the spirits walking around her. With all signs pointing towards this long building, I decided to call back once the weather had deteriorated slightly, as the blue skies had been persisting for most of the day up until then.

I made my way the Burren College of Art as there was an exhibition showing there that I had been intending to visit at some point during my field trip, Early Marks by Keith Payne. It is "...a study of the beginnings of art and possible source of a prehistoric worldwide visual language through large-scale paintings and sculptures...", and I'd highly recommend dropping in to have a look at it if you're around the area (<https://www.burrencollege.ie/early-marks-keith-payne/>). On my way back to Ballyvaughan, the local taxi driver saw me and kindly gave me a lift back to the village free of charge.

That evening, the talk on the Clare workhouses was fascinating to say the least. Although I had previously known some basic information relating to them, I acquired an enormous amount of knowledge over that hour and a half. The man giving the talk (Steve Dolan) was the manager of the Irish Workhouse Centre in Portumna, and was able to go into great detail regarding the constructions. Only those who were poor enough were admitted into the workhouses. Upon arrival, their clothes were tossed into a fire and they were given plain uniforms to wear. This did little to prevent any sickness spreading, as disease was rife due to the constructions' poor ventilation systems. The inmates had to live within the confines of the workhouse, with separate sections for men, women, boys, and girls. Women were allowed to stay with their children up until the age of 3, but after that they were only allowed to visit them briefly in the morning and in the evening. During the day, the children that were too young to work were looked after by the matriarch. One particularly horrifying fact I discovered was that the majority of the people who died at workhouses were buried on site in a mass grave. I could go on, but I think it would be best to create a separate post on the talk itself to discuss the subject further.

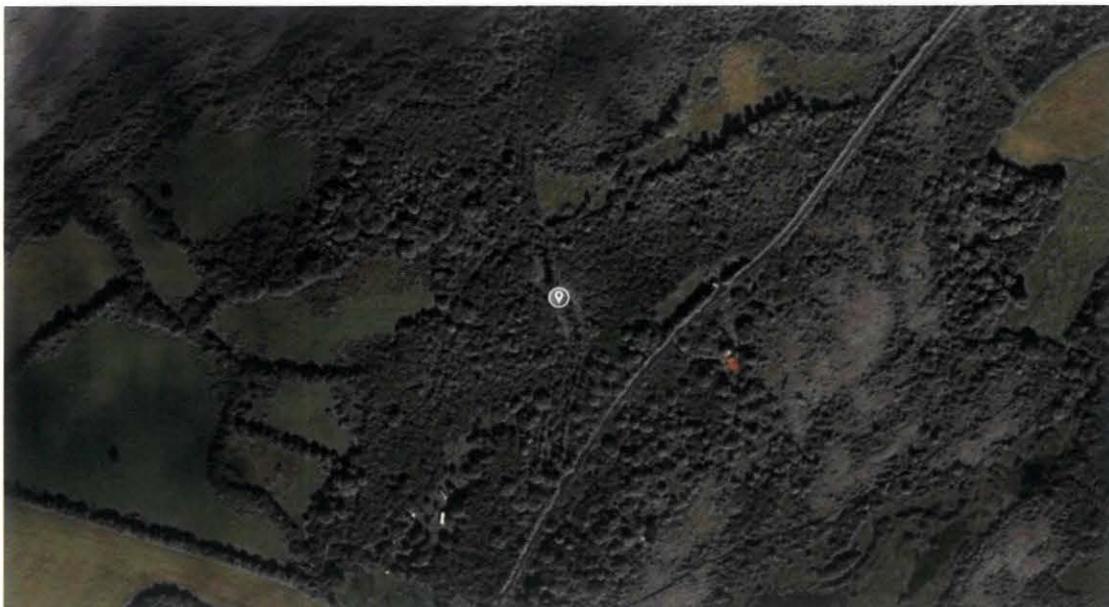
Before attending the talk I had gone back to the site of the workhouse to photograph it, as the day had now become grey and overcast. On my way to the orchard, I bumped into the landlord once more. Upon hearing that I was planning on photographing the construction, she proceeded to tell me various stories relating to it that she had heard during her time in the area. The previous owner of her house was a medium and a friend of hers. Once she was awoken in the middle of night by the sound of a woman wailing and a baby crying. She woke up her husband, who hadn't heard anything at all. They both got up and searched the area, but nothing was found. She also informed me that a healer had once visited the site of the workhouse in an attempt to take away the sadness and darkness from the area. While doing so she had seen a small child sitting at one of the windows, staring out at her.



## X - Day 34

August 23, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

During my visit to the Burren Programme centre in Carron last week, I had been told of a ditch that was built as part of the Public Works Scheme during the famine years. This ditch originated at Castle Lough, a lake that was only a couple of kilometres from the famine road that passed alongside Mullach Mór. Part of the ditch was not yet completely overgrown, and there appeared to be a clearing next to the road that ran alongside it (as shown on the satellite map below). As it was due to be clear and sunny throughout the day, I thought it would be a good opportunity to do a recce of the area.



Due to the extent of the undergrowth, it was near impossible to access the ditch directly from the road. Because of this I had to enter a field further along, locking my bike to a rusted gate before making my way across to the clearing. At first I didn't find too much, with a large pile of roughly cut rocks being the only evidence of the construction that had taken place around 170 years ago. After checking my exact location, I realised that I was still slightly north of the clearing in question. I made my way through some thorny bushes and was greeted by an impressive sight when I reached the other side. The ditch was clearly visible through the foliage, as was an enormous embankment that had been built from the rocks that I had passed by on my way. At a guess, it stood at well over 12-foot tall in parts. A countless number of rocks were piled alongside the ditch, sitting on top of the embankment that towered above it. It appeared that work on the ditch may have stopped abruptly, leaving the leftover rocks to merge into the landscape surrounding it. I couldn't go much further than the clearing itself due to how overgrown the area had now become.

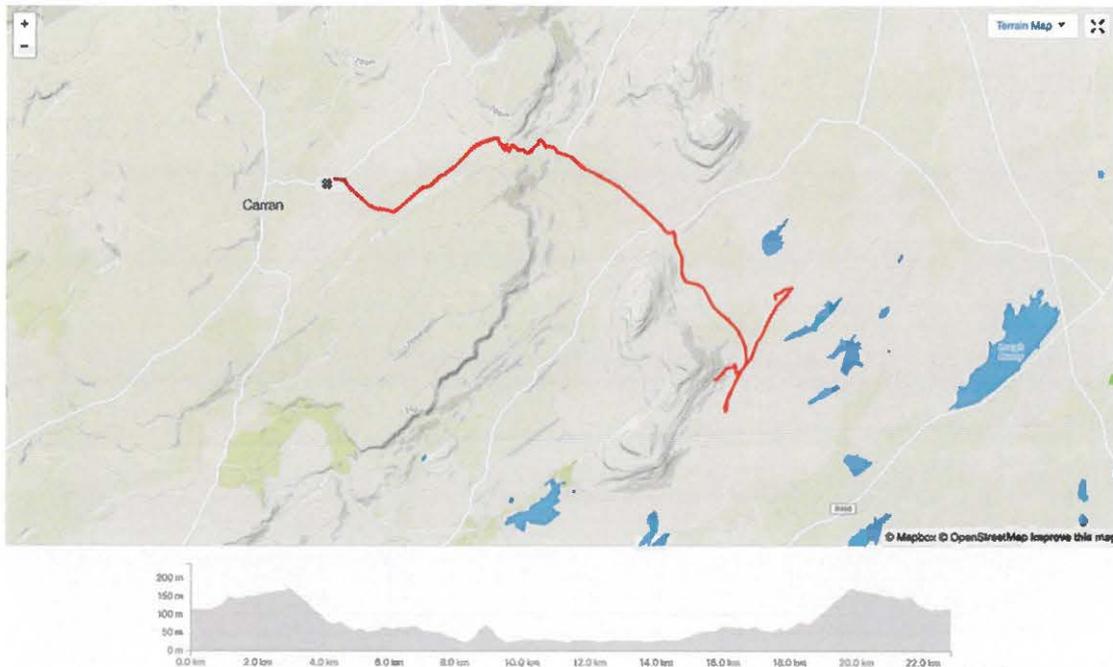
Afterwards I made my way down towards Mullach Mór again, hoping to find a good view of the famine road from above. As I mentioned previously, there are multiple walking trails that pass through the Burren National Park, some of which travel over Mullach Mór itself. I made my way up one of these trails and it wasn't long before I reached the sort of viewpoint that I had been looking for. I took some images just in case, but the sunny weather that persisted throughout the day was far from ideal. However this recce was more than beneficial, as I can now spend more of my time photographing these constructions and less time getting to know the area and finding suitable viewpoints.



## Y - Day 35

August 24, 2018 | *Seán Laoide-Kemp*

The weather looked slightly more promising today so I made my way down to Mullach Mór once more to see what sort of images I could get of both constructions. I decided to go to the famine road first, as I had scouted out a couple of different viewpoints there yesterday. Strong winds occurred throughout most of the day, resulting in the sunny spells being interrupted quite frequently by short showers and overcast skies. Because of this a lot of time was spent finding a location and then waiting for the clouds to roll in, giving me a short window of opportunity to get the shot that I was hoping for.



Firstly I went to the viewpoint above the road that I had picked out yesterday, and set up my camera to record about 20 minutes of footage. The weather was ever-changing throughout the recording, with the clouds casting shadows that swept across the landscape at speed. Afterwards I made my way down the side of the hill to the road itself, attempting to capture images that highlighted the scale of construction that had taken place.

After spending a few hours photographing the road (or more accurately, waiting for the sun to be obscured by clouds), I thought it would be best to spend the rest of the day photographing the area around the ditch, of which I had no usable images as of yet. I left my bike locked up at the entrance to the Burren National Park near the famine road, rather than locking it to the landowner's gate like I had done before.

As I walked towards Castle Lough, I noticed an area where the ditch passed under the road that I was currently on. I attempted to make my way through some undergrowth to see if I could follow it up to the clearing, but it wasn't long before the route became impassable.

Upon eventually arriving at the site, I knew that I needed to climb down into the ditch itself to get a decent shot. The area around the ditch was so overgrown that I wouldn't have been able to get an image that highlighted the scale of the embankments effectively. Luckily I spotted a relatively easy route down, and I set up my camera so that both sides of the embankment were in shot. Before doing so, I was surprised to see a swing attached to one of the overhanging branches. I had noticed that there was a small community living down the road, so I guess that this was used as a play area during the summer months.

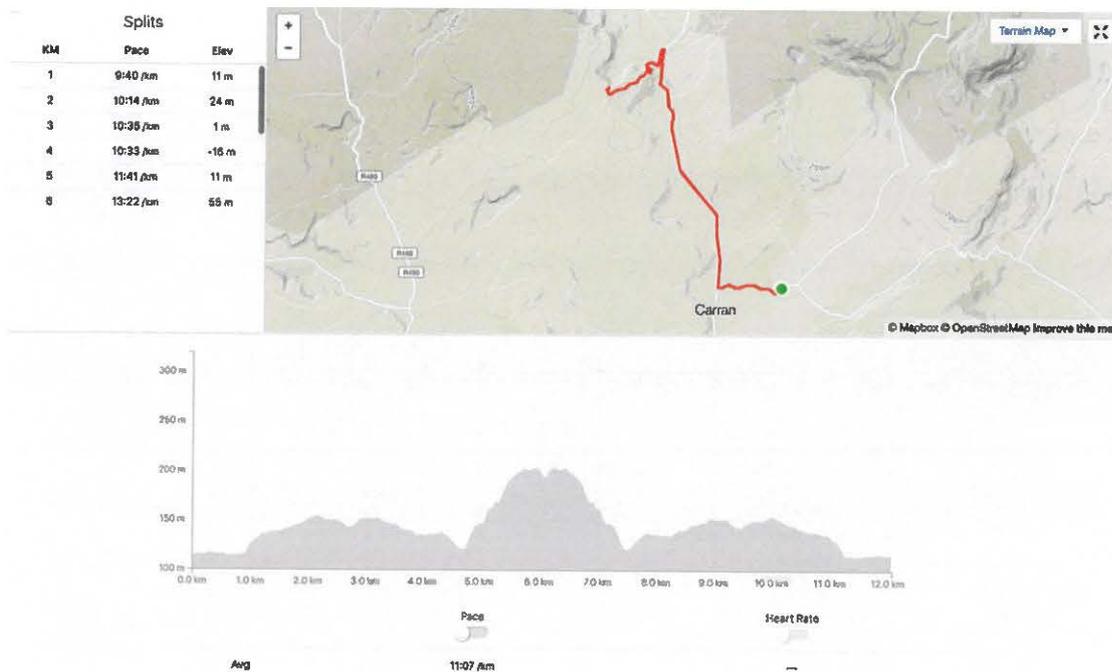
After filming another 20 minutes of footage, I made my way up on top of the other side of the embankment to see what I could find. I came across the remnants of some sort of shelter that had presumably been built for the workers, similar to the constructions that I had found alongside the famine road in Poulaphuca.



## Z - Day 36

August 25, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

There was due to be quite a lot of cloud cover around the area for most of the morning, so I took advantage of this by walking down the road to document the famine road in Poulaphuca once more. Although I had already gotten various images of the road itself, I was still eager to capture an image from another slightly higher viewpoint. As well as this, I was still yet to film any footage of the road during my time here. I certainly got the weather that I was hoping for as I left Carran, with the overcast skies persistent even between the frequent showers.



Upon arriving at the viewpoint in question, I set up my equipment and began to get everything ready to record. I had been banking on a break in the showers to allow me to film, but if anything the rain began to pour down harder than ever before. I had previously bought a waterproof case for my camera specifically for situations like this, however my recorder still remained exposed to the elements. Although slightly unconventional, I was able to place the recorder inside an empty sandwich bag that seemed to keep the rain off effectively. After eventually managing to record a 20-minute take, the skies began to clear. Satisfied with the footage I had acquired, I began to make my way back to Carran.

With cloud cover around the area due to decrease rapidly throughout the afternoon, I thought it would be best to cycle to Kilfenora to do the last shop of the field trip. Usually I do this shop every Monday, buying enough food to last me the week. As next Friday will be my last day here, it made sense to get the shop out of the way today. As a result of this, I am now left with next week to concentrate solely on documenting the remaining famine constructions.



## Aa – Days 37-39

August 28, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

During a recorded interview a few weeks ago I had been told of two bridges around Ballyvaughan that had been built during the famine years, or else they had undergone upgrades around that time. Originally I had thought that the bridges in question were actually the flood preventions built just south of the local church. However, upon emailing the interviewee to confirm this he informed me that one of the bridges was built next to the pier, with the other being built about 2km up the Lismactaghdh valley. I took advantage of the overcast weather and made my way down to Ballyvaughan to see if I could document both constructions.



I found the bridge next to the pier easily enough, and was able to position myself so that I was looking at its side profile. From this angle I was able to capture the countless number of tourists and buses crossing the bridge over the short space of time that I was filming. After photographing and filming the construction from a couple of different viewpoints, I decided to search for the site of the 2nd workhouse in Ballyvaughan that had been situated next to the local GAA pitch.

On arriving at the pitch, I asked one of the locals whether he knew of the exact location of this workhouse. I had been under the impression that the building was long gone, however he informed me that a nearby overgrown wall had been part of the original construction, or at least that was what he had always been told.

I had passed by this wall multiple times before, never noticing its existence as it was so engulfed by the surrounding undergrowth. I captured a few images of it before heading towards my next destination, the 2nd bridge in Lismactagdh.

En route I bumped into the local taxi driver, and I filled him in on the constructions that I had discovered since we last spoke. He told me that the bridge next to the pier was in need of upgrading once again, as it wasn't built to handle the amount of traffic that passed over it each day. Upon hearing about the bridge in Lismactagdh, he informed me that it was more than likely the first bridge that I would encounter along that road, and proceeded to tell me the best route to take.

It was only as I was got closer to the Lismactagdh valley that I realised I had actually been there a few times before. Micky Vaughan had lived in the valley itself, and I had travelled along this road multiple times while visiting him. The first bridge I encountered looked promising, as its construction was similar to that of the bridge at the pier in Ballyvaughan. I made my way further up the road just in case, as I wasn't sure if I had travelled 2km along it yet as instructed. Only a few hundred metres away was another bridge, which didn't look too dissimilar either. However, I remembered visiting this particular bridge with Micky earlier on in the year. We had stopped and he had pointed out the size of the stones that were used to build it, marvelling at how the builders had been able to transport them to the site all those years ago. I had been keeping notes throughout the tour that he had been giving me, and upon looking over them I noticed that I hadn't written anything down about the bridge. This confirmed to me that it hadn't been built during the famine, as I would have noted that down immediately if Micky had mentioned it. Because of this I made my way back to the first bridge that I had encountered and proceeded to document it, filming and photographing the construction from multiple angles before making my way back to the facility.



## Ab - Day 40

August 29, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

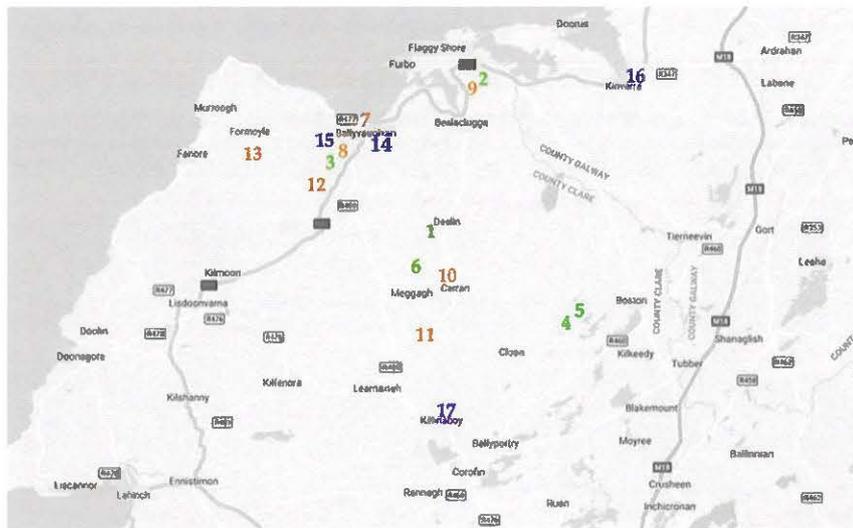
As heavy rain was forecast for most of the afternoon, I thought it would be best to work locally today rather than only being able to work for a couple of hours elsewhere. This meant that I had much more time to document the area around the Carron turlough than I had originally anticipated, something that I had been neglecting over the last couple of weeks. As well as photographing the area I also shot some video footage overlooking the turlough itself, managing to find a similar viewpoint to that of which I had found for the various Public Works Scheme constructions that I have already documented.



On returning to the research facility I decided to update the map that I had created a couple of weeks ago, which contained the locations of constructions I had so far discovered over the course of the field trip. In terms of finding Public Works Scheme constructions, it has been a case of two steps forward, one step back. The Burren Programme centre were able to point me in the direction of a couple of constructions built as part of the Public Works Scheme that I previously hadn't been aware of, such as the ditch at Castle Lough and the walls just outside the village of Carron. However they also raised doubts over some of the constructions that I had already discovered, namely the road behind the Burren College of Art and the road that runs along the side of Abbey Hill in New Quay. I already had my doubts about the road behind the Burren College of Art as one of my interviewees had previously questioned its validity, however I was more confident that the road in New Quay was indeed a Public Works Scheme construction due to multiple locals testifying to this.

The updated map can be seen below. As it shows, I have now found 6 'confirmed' Public Works Scheme constructions, 7 more constructions that are currently unconfirmed, and a further 4 constructions that are connected to the famine in some way. Of the constructions that are yet to be confirmed, the two bridges in Ballyvaughan seem the most likely to be validated. This should hopefully bring the total number of confirmed Public Works Scheme constructions up to 8 at some stage. I should point out that on my previous map I had mistakenly included one of the Ballyvaughan workhouses as a Public Works Scheme construction, due to the fact that it was built during the famine years.

So far I have documented all of the 'confirmed' constructions, as well as a number of the unconfirmed/famine-related constructions around the area. Over the next few days I will be revisiting a number of the confirmed constructions to ensure that I have the necessary images/footage of them, as well as documenting some of the unconfirmed constructions just in case I am able to prove their validity once the field trip has ended.



- - Confirmed Public Works Scheme Construction
- - Unconfirmed Public Works Scheme Construction
- - Famine-Related Construction

### **Confirmed Public Works Scheme Construction**

- 1) Poulaphuca - Road
- 2) New Quay - Road
- 3) Ballyvaughan - Road
- 4) Mullach Mór - Road
- 5) Castle Lough - Ditch
- 6) Carron - Walls

### **Unconfirmed Public Works Scheme Construction**

- 7) Ballyvaughan - Bridge
- 8) Ballyvaughan - Road
- 9) New Quay - Walls
- 10) Carron - Road
- 11) Carron - Walls
- 12) Ballyvaughan - Bridge
- 13) Formoyle - Road

### **Famine-Related Construction**

- 14) Ballyvaughan - Workhouse
- 15) Ballyvaughan - Workhouse
- 16) Kinvara - Fever Hospital
- 17) Kilnaboy - Famine Village



## Ac - Day 41

August 30, 2018 | *Seán Laoide-Kemp*

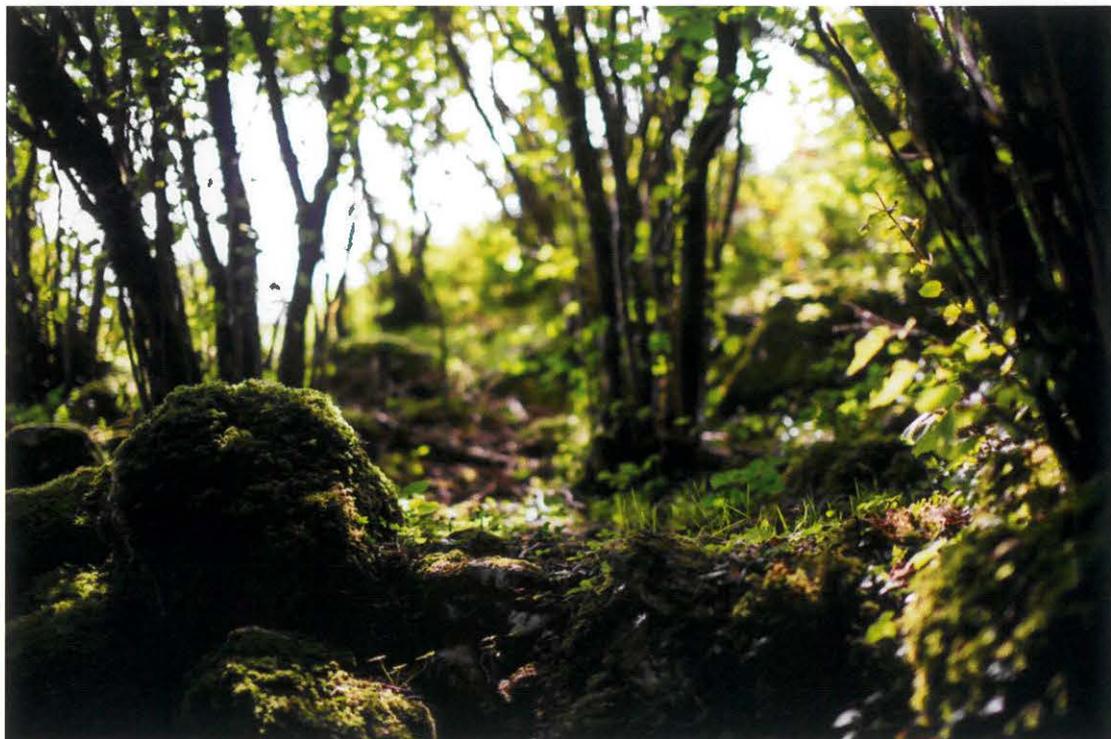
Although I have documented all of the confirmed Public Works Scheme constructions that I have discovered so far around the area, I hadn't yet photographed the famine wall in Ballyvaughan during this field trip. The only images I have of the wall were taken back at the start of 2017 as part of my undergraduate degree, meaning that the resultant images look quite different to the images I've been taking over the last number of weeks. Furthermore, I had not yet taken any video footage of this particular construction. With all this in mind, I decided to head down to Ballyvaughan today to visit the site of the wall once more.



Upon arriving in Ballyvaughan I locked my bike outside the local shop and made my way to Newtown by foot, as it was only about a 30-minute walk away. This is where the landowner lived, whose permission I required to access the wall. Thankfully he remembered me from my previous visit, and kindly gave me permission to explore the area. He also informed me of another wall that one of his ancestors had helped to build during the famine, located next to the famine village (Lios na Ru) not far from his house. I took down his name and number (something that I had forgotten to do during my last visit), and made my way across a couple of fields to the abandoned village.

The village itself was buried in a small group of trees that stood out from the surrounding fields. Although completely overgrown, the constructions were relatively easy to access in comparison to the famine village in Kilnaboy. Out of all the famine-related sites that I have visited so far, this one affected me the most. Although the sun was beaming down, hardly any light made it through the thicket that I found myself in. Only foundation stones remained of the houses that once existed here, the walls and roofs of which were long gone. With that being said, it was clear to see where each building had once been, and I was amazed at how close together they all appeared to be. It was easy to imagine how close the community must have been that previously lived here. Walking around the site was an eerie experience, as it was impossible not to think of the unimaginable hardships that the residents here must have gone through only 170 years ago.

Unfortunately the clear skies persisted for the entire day, so I made do with shooting some footage inside the famine village with the hopes of returning to photograph the adjoining wall at some other point. When I arrived back in Ballyvaughan I noticed that my front wheel had gone completely flat. Thankfully it seemed to only be a slow puncture, and I was able to cycle back to the facility without any issue. I did have to stop and pump up the tyre a couple of times en route, but as I only have one more day of cycling this shouldn't be too much of a problem.



## Ad - Day 42

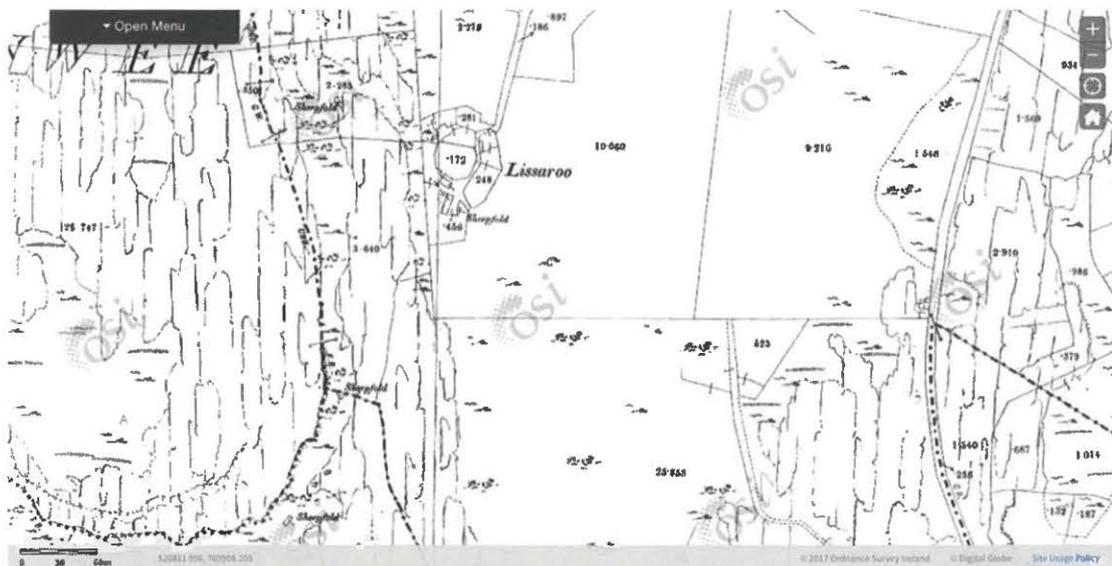
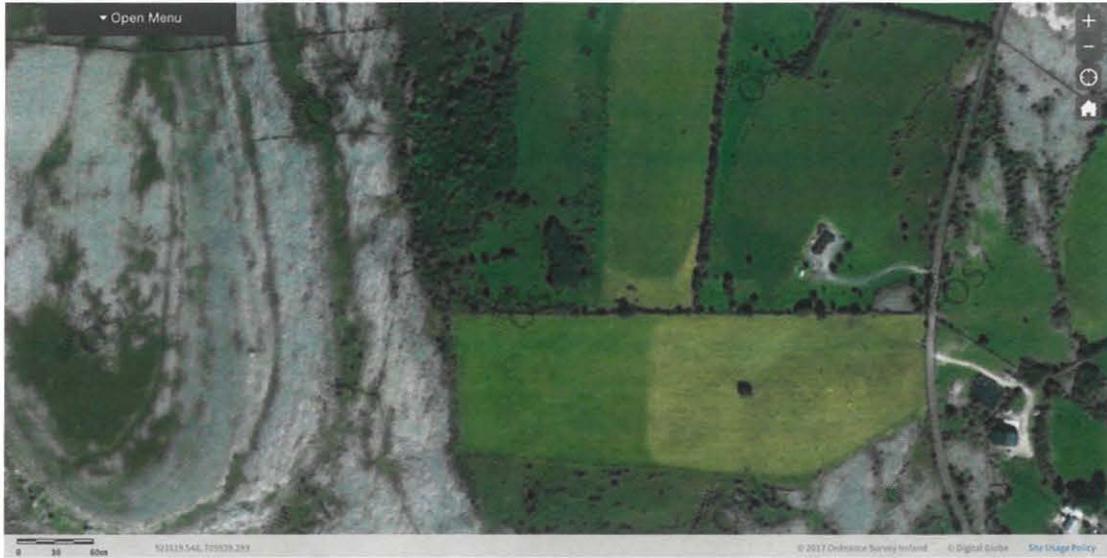
August 31, 2018 | Seán Laoide-Kemp

For the final day of the field trip I cycled down to Ballyvaughan once more to document the famine wall there. The weather was due to be considerably more overcast than the previous day, so I thought I would have a better chance at getting the shot that I had envisioned. Although having prepared to stop en route to pump up my front tire, I was happily surprised to find that I didn't end up having the need to do so. I locked up my bike up in the same place as before, and made my way towards Newtown.



When I arrived at the site the sun was beaming down, with hardly a cloud in the sky. I feared the worst but decided to find a suitable viewpoint anyway, just in case the weather took a turn. Sure enough, the clouds soon started rolling in and I was soon able to get the shot. The weather also became ideal for the video footage that I had been planning on capturing, with the clouds moving slowly across the landscape and casting the wall in shadow from time to time.

The wall itself was unassuming, and blended into the landscape quite well. On closer inspection, the fact that it is a double wall made it stand out slightly from the various other walls that scale up the side of the mountain, as well as its unusually straight nature. The landowner suggested that many of these double walls were built around the area during the time of the famine, something that I will have to look into further. As can be seen below, the OSI maps confirm that this wall was indeed built between 1843 and 1887. It is located just south of the Lios na Ru (or Lissaroo), the nearby famine village.



As I was looking at the OSI maps on location, I searched for the road behind the Burren College of Art once more. As I have mentioned previously, I have met a couple of different people who have expressed their doubts over whether or not it was built as part of the Public Works Scheme during the famine. However, I have since recalled a conversation with a local historian who was the first person to tell me that it was indeed a famine road. In fact, this was the first construction that he pointed out to me upon hearing about my project. As Micky Vaughan was similarly emphatic about its validity, and as the OSI maps back up both their claims, I decided to document the road once more.

I had already photographed the road during my previous field trip, however I hadn't acquired any video footage of it as of yet. After finding a suitable location, I set up my tripod and proceeded to film. In the end I managed to get about 10-minutes of uninterrupted footage, as I was required to move all my equipment every time a car came along due to the narrow nature of the road. After multiple attempts I was eventually satisfied with what I had acquired, and began to make my way back to the research facility for the last time...until I inevitably return, of course.



## Appendix II: Interview Transcripts

### A - Interview with Chris Droney

(30/01/18)

SLK: I suppose eventually, what I was saying is I'd like to get around to these constructions that were built, like the famine roads and walls and ditches...are you familiar with the term 'famine follies'?

CD: Yes.

SLK: Similarly there were buildings that were built as part of the Public Work Schemes, but they had no practical purpose other than having work to do for...most of the time, they were only [built] so that the Irish would have work to do, to get food or money.

CD: Ah yeah, sure we can...what can we talk about, I mean the buildings and the walls and...the years that they were built and all...

SLK: Yeah yeah, stuff like that. So it was between 1845-52.

CD: Oh. This was built before that.

SLK: Oh, so you're thinking of different [buildings]?

CD: 1796.

SLK: Oh ok, right.

CD: Does that make a difference?

SLK: No, any bit of information is [useful].

CD: Well that's when this was built, and it was belonging to some landlord, now I don't know what his name was. I think we're about the 5<sup>th</sup> generation to be here. I know two of them, the last landlord that was here, his name was Joyce. Walter Joyce. And the landlord that was here before him, his name was Moran; I don't know what his first name was. And before them there was two or three landlords way back, do you know, that I don't know nothing about. But my father was only a herdsman for the last landlord that was here, which was Walter Joyce. And my father, he was only a herdsman for him. And Joyce, he owned three hundred...he was a bachelor...and he owned 365 acres, an acre for every day of the year...around here. He owned all that. And down in a place called Culgary...'tis down near Ballinasloe which is down in Co. Galway. He had another farm down there, another big house like the house that was

here...and my father used to walk cattle from here down to Calgary...used to take 2 or 3 days to go down with them. And when he'd ride below, he might have to start off the day after and maybe walk back smaller ones back to here, do you know? [It would] take 2 or 3 days. But my father...that's how he started off. Ah this Joyce, the landlord, he was no good. He was terrible. Both to the people around here and the people down in Calgary. But on New Year's Day, 1921...he was a Catholic...and when he opened the hall door to come out to go to mass...and he was shot...at the hall door...in Calgary, down there. So that finished him, he was a bachelor here, he had no one belonging to him...and the Land Commission took up the farm down there...and they also took up the farm here...and they leased it...I don't know who they leased it to down there, people leased it by the year...and they leased it here to a man from, he lived right beside the racecourse in Galway, by the name of John Kine. And he had it from 1922-1936. The Land Commission had it all that length of time. And 1936 they divided the land down there and they divided the land here. And 8 people got the land here. I don't know how many got it down there. And they built 2 or 3 Land Commission houses and that's how it was divided. So, my father then, he got the old buildings here, this was the old yard. He had a choice to take the old house and the old buildings. But 'twas wrecked, **wrecked** now. Or, get a new Land Commission house built over on the land. So he decided on account of that, stone buildings and all this, that he'd take this. Now, the house inside was a complete wreck. All there was in the windows was corrugated iron. There was no windows, corrugated iron. And the rooms inside were filled with corn for the cattle...you know, barley, oats, and all that. Mice and rats and oh jeez, you name it, 'twas all in it, but...that was in 1936 so...I was the eldest then of 5 and I was kept at home. And you could say, since I was 5 until last year, I've tried to improve it. All my life. I'm just starting my 94<sup>th</sup> year now. So I'm all my life doing bits and pieces...and now, my son out there Joseph, he's carrying on now and building sheds and everything but...you could say it nearly took 100 years to do it. Do you know? I mean, if you go back to the 1950s and 60s...there was no money. No grants, no nothing. So what could you do but...I mean since then now times have improved. Where we're sitting now here...this little square here...that's only an extension from the door to door. The rest of it, where you came in, it was the coach house, for the coach for the landlord. And right across the way was the horses. And there were the stairs up outside there...and overhead there was the room for the men to drive the coach and drive the landlord, and all that kind of thing. And that's the story about it. So then, we were married then and we had 7 kids...and we were all living in the big house inside and this was only a store. Out where you came in there now there used to be potatoes, and fodder beet, and do you know...everything out there. And in the sitting room there used to be pigs in it. My mother, God rest her, [would] be feeding the pigs out there and...do you know? Trying to keep going, but...then my son got married and he was going to build a house over on the land. I told him, I said "Where's the point in going away from the yard?". I said "Wouldn't this one be done up?" So we started out

there and we stripped that one outside...just where you came in! And all that was there was the four walls. No roof, no nothing.

SLK: Just the bare foundations?

CD: Yeah, so he got a contractor then to price it...and I think...I'm not really sure but I think he said he'd do it for 21/22 thousand. And he was a man from Gort. So he did it and that's what happened. They were living out here then and then Joseph got married. And they had two or three kids...three kids. And the house here was getting a bit small for them, the rooms upstairs are small. And he didn't know he was going to be putting on an extension out here, out this way here. And he priced the extension and he was told that 'twould cost 50 grand...here! Just outside the window here. 50 grand, so I said to him...I said to him that kind of money around here now is outrageous. So he said "Why don't we swap houses?" There are 6 rooms in the house inside, and there are only 2 small rooms here. And myself and Margaret, we were moving on and we said for the length we'd be around, wouldn't the two little rooms in this little house here be alright for us? So they went in, and they have 6 bedrooms inside there...they have the house. It's only last year, believe it or not, he slated...all new slates on the big house inside. The storm came and it blew a lot of the slates off it and...but here it's all re-slatted now. So we're here...and we're alright. We aren't able to do much but...we're alright. Keep the fire down and...

SLK: No, it's beautiful!

CD: Sure 'tis alright.

SLK: No really, definitely.

CD: So that's the story now about Joyce and the...

SLK: So, you were saying [that] your father was a herdsman for Joyce, so...before your father, so your grandfather...was your grandfather from the area as well?

CD: No, my grandfather was living over between here and Ballyvaughan.

SLK: Ah, ok.

CD: He was living over there, and that's where my father was born. My father, just between here and Ballyvaughan, over in a place called Muckinish over there...about 2 miles over the road. When my father...when he became herdsman he was only...I don't know, what would he be...maybe 16 or 18 years. And he got to be herdsman and then stayed with Joyce all the time...and that's what happened.

SLK: When I mentioned the constructions earlier you were talking about these high walls?

CD: Yeah. See that high wall along there? Well, believe it or not, 'twas all the full height but we knocked it. Do you see, it was all that height.

SLK: Oh ok, yeah.

CD: Do you see, if you look over here. It started there, and that wall joined up with that, you see?

SLK: Ah yeah.

CD: So in order to get a bit of a view here, we took that piece off it, do you know?

SLK: And do you know when that was built?

CD: 1796.

SLK: Ah, ok.

CD: Ah yeah, sure as I told you we're all our life improving out there, do you know? That stone building across there, that you can see there now...see the one across there? That stone building? Just there?

SLK: This one here?

CD: Yeah. That was for the landlord here, his horses. Two horses. What he used to have in the other one, the other end of it, was cows. Cows and calves and all that. I remember my father then, he used to have horses and cows and all, he kept up the thing. So after that then, when Joseph got married, he got married to a hairdresser. And she had a business in Gort. Hairdressing saloon. So, when they got married they'd run up the one out here, where the horses were...so 'tis now a hairdressing saloon. So she does...just handy in the yard like, you know. So all the people that come here make appointments and all that...

SLK: Yeah, I'm sure you get people from Ballyvaughan...

CD: Ballyvaughan, they all come out from Ballyvaughan.

SLK: New Quay, and all that...

CD: Yeah, about 3 or 4 days a week she's out there but...

SLK: Ah brilliant!

CD: The three kids are in college, there's Killian...he's in Galway, secondary school, he's in Galway College...Ciara is in college in Galway as well...and Joey is in college in Kinvara. So they're moving on!

SLK: Yeah, yeah, exactly! So I suppose, in terms of the Great Famine, the one that I'm hoping to document from 1845-52, do you know anything about what happened in this area during the famine?

CD: I wouldn't, no. No, I wouldn't know anything [that happened] in them years.

SLK: Yeah, yeah...because I found that...

CD: What did you say, 18-what?

SLK: 45-52

CD: Oh yeah. No, I wouldn't. Sure I was...I was born in 1924. Sure I couldn't know anything....I wouldn't know anything about it, no, no...

SLK: Oh yeah, even stories...there were no stories passed down or anything...?

CD: No, no...

SLK: Because I found that with...what made me want to document these constructions was because I thought that it was quite an important part of the history, whereas I found that the famine in general is very well documented but these constructions themselves aren't, really, in particular. So that's what I've been trying to do really on this trip, is to actually first of all find out where these constructions would be to document them, to make sure that they aren't just forgotten about.

CD: The only thing that I'd know about the famine is...when we were young now...when I was about 12 or 14 years of age which would be only 1930, early 1930s...we reclaimed a lot of land around there, and we reclaimed around the house...and do you know what we found? There was little hills out there along outside, little hills of shells of mussels...mussel shells and cockle shells and all that, do you know? Which meant like that they lived in the sea. The sea's only just there like. But 'twas all seafood they had that time...the mussels are still down there! And the cockles and all this...and I'd say that's what they mostly lived on...do you know? But several places now when we were reconstructing...you'd come across a big heap of shells, do you know?

SLK: Are they still there? The shells? Or did you [reclaim it]?

CD: We reclaimed it, yeah. But I remember my father saying that...that it wasn't the time, that his father and all that, grandfather...they used to collect the mussels and have the mussels...of course the mussels were a very...they were for nothing! Only pick them up down there. If you [walked] into a restaurant now you'd pay for them! So that's the story, so far.

SLK: I have found that during my trip, just...it is...well, I'm not sure if 'pity' is the right word...but just how little there is...little information there is on the famine itself...like local histories, it seems to be very much [have] been pushed away and just forgotten about in general.

CD: There aren't too many people around here now that'd know about the famine...no one, there's no one.

SLK: Why do you think that is?

CD: Ah sure they've died away sure...

SLK: But sure I would've thought that the stories would've been passed down through generations. That was my impression anyway, before coming here but...

CD: They might be handed down before my time but we never had much about the famine.

SLK: Really?

CD: No, never.

SLK: Yeah, that's what I find very interesting, that such a historic event...and that it wasn't really...I don't know...I would've thought that if let's say something happened like that nowadays, I suppose [that] a lot more people are documenting events so that it would be remembered for a long time, but...

CD: I dunno whether there'd be too many around...I'm the oldest person in this parish now. There's only one more, and he's in Dublin...one that I went to school with. And he's 94, and to be honest about it, it was only last week I heard that he's gone downhill, so...which means that I'm nearly the only person left that age like, you know? So anyone younger than me [now]...they wouldn't know nothin'! They wouldn't even know about what I'm after telling you, they wouldn't know about nothin' like that, they would not. Because and awful lot of the people...when I was going to school up there, there was 72 going to school.

SLK: And there are about 20 now I think, are there?

CD: Well, what happened was...do you know the educational place, you passed it coming down, do you know that place? The old school is there [in] the far up end of it. That's where it is. And there was 72 kids going to school there. And there was another school then at the other end of the parish down here...and there was about 65 going to school down here.

SLK: Was that New Quay?

CD: New Quay. That'd be about a hundred and thirty somethin'. Now, the two schools amalgamated, so there's a new school built down here. And the total, so the two schools now, is 17. 17. There were 72 up there, 65 or 68 down here, and there's 17 in the parish. Now, when we were growing up there were...it was only there lately I was thinking of it...there was 10 houses in the village of Bellharbour...over here, 10 houses. And now there's 64. And there's only 3 kids, from the village of Bellharbour, going to school. 'Tis amazing!

SLK: Is it because those houses...are they holiday homes?

CD: The most of them are holiday homes.

## **B - Interview with Martín Fahy**

(02/08/18)

**MF:** Well all I know is at the time they were doing that road, there from the church, it was all hard labour. They had no machinery or nothing around that time to quarry out the stone. They just had what they used to call crowbars, a big long bar that levered out the stones. They'd break them up with hand-bars and sledgehammers and the like to make the road. And you could see if drive along there today, the foundation of the old stone is still there on the road and it's kind of bumpy. It was never tarred and it was left that way.

**SLK:** I noticed that it's similar in Poulaphuca, there's a famine road behind Tom Burke's field. I was visiting there and that's a great example.

**MF:** I worked in FÁS myself for some years and we went to all them roads. Cutting the bushes and keeping them clear.

**SLK:** Would you know of any other roads or walls or anything that was built during the famine?

**MF:** During the time of the famine there, you can see that mountain there in front of you...all that mountain, it was divided for the farmers around that time and there were walls built on it. Each farmer got different divisions.

**SLK:** Which mountain is that now?

**MF:** It's right straight across there from Bellharbour.

**SLK:** What's the name of it, do you know?

**MF:** It's the Ballyvaughan Mountain, it's well known. If you start here and you go up and you can come down the far side and you're in Ballyvaughan.

**SLK:** So those walls that were built to divide the land, they would have been built during the famine?

**MF:** Yes. During the time of the famine, food was hard to be got that time, you know? They used to sow the little plots of potatoes anywhere there'd be greenery like...and anywhere there'd be a little soil. There was an awful lot living off of the shore.

**SLK:** I did hear that actually, I heard that people came from the likes of Carron because their potatoes were gone. I was chatting to Mary O'Dea, and she had a theory that they farmed goats more inland at the time. She was saying that a lot of people around the Carron area weren't particularly affected by the famine.

**MF:** Not as much as elsewhere, yes.

**SLK:** Do you know if anywhere around New Quay was badly affected? Or because it was next to the coast, do you think that helped?

**MF:** Well I wouldn't say that they were badly affected, but definitely affected by it. Because a lot of them, being so near the sea...there was no one hungry anyway. They were able to get enough food from the shores.

**SLK:** I remember, I was up in...the ice-cream café?

**MF:** Oh yes, Fahy's. He's a brother to the fella in Ballyvaughan.

**SLK:** Yes, that's the one. I was up there and they have a little museum or history of the area, and they were showing how the population fell dramatically along Finvara and New Quay and the likes.

**MF:** Oh yes, anyone that could go, went. An awful lot immigrated to England even after the famine. Nearly full families went.

**SLK:** Yes, just because there was nothing left for them here.

**MF:** And the father might go out to work for a while first, and when he came back he would see maybe was it better living there. They would move away, the whole lot of them. Sometimes they would bring most of the family with them.

**SLK:** And in terms of what you were told and taught growing up...because what I've found...I've chatted to quite a few people, I did a field trip up around the area for 3 weeks in January and I'm here now for another 4 weeks...so the people I've chatted to in the meantime, the majority of them have said that the famine was never spoken about.

**MF:** Not that much. Now and again you'd hear about it...older people...at that time they'd went through the famine and they'd come out now and again and tell you about it. That things were so bad, and it was hard to realise that people were so poor, and that there was a lot going hungry.

**SLK:** When I was chatting to Mary she said that I missed the generation that probably would have all the information...I probably missed them by about 20 years or so.

**MF:** I just met a few in my time...and I'm gone 80 years of age. I just met a few that would ever talk about it. It was never handed down to us anyway, what happened really.

**SLK:** Do you know why it wasn't really talked about?

**MF:** Haven't a clue! It wasn't spoken about, like a lot of other things. Maybe they didn't even want to tell their sons and daughters the way they suffered or something, I was thinking.

**SLK:** I was chatting with Mary and she compared it to the likes of 1916 and the civil war, she was saying that families wouldn't want to pass on too much of that information.

**MF:** Oh no, they never did. I had an uncle and he fought through the war. He was for years and years fighting. He immigrated very young to England. He was conscripted in England and he had to go fight, that's what he did anyway for years. After the war being over, he didn't come home for years. Then out of the blue he came here for a holiday for 3 weeks and he'd become very quiet. When you'd speak about the war to him, I often seen him to cry at the table. He said, "The reason I get so upset about it was the best friends I had in the war, they were killed by my side. I was saying 'I could be next'." And he was thinking back like of all the good friends he had and the way they were mowed down. He was feeling the pinch, like, when he came home here when he was speaking about it, that's when it became a reality for him.

**SLK:** Unimaginable.

**MF:** Yes. It took years for him even to come out; he came home a few years and then he'd never speak about it. He'd just walk away. The last time he was around, and I think it was the last time...he died a good few years ago...he spoke about it and my father, I remember, he was an old man at the time too, he was kind of asking him questions about it. I was a lot younger at the time. But I've seen him to cry. Like I was saying, it was hitting him.

**SLK:** That's when it all sunk in. The trauma of the event as well, that could be related to the famine also...not being spoken about.

**MF:** I think, myself, that's why. Much the same way about the famine. They just speak about it for a short while. They just talked about how a lot of the potatoes in them years and the blight coming. There was no way of keeping the blight off at the time, all the blight stuck to the potatoes and they were rotting in the ground.

**SLK:** Yes, it was the poorer population that were dependent on the Lumper potato.

MF: Oh yes, what[ever] came out of the soil.

SLK: And once that went they were left without anything.

MF: I'm sure if you went around Kinvara...like in Aughtnas now there was a few old boys there that could tell you a lot but they have passed away now. There was one bloke there and he had great memories.

SLK: It's such a pity that it all goes with them.

MF: Yes, and it was never recorded like or nothing. That's the sad part of it.

SLK: Exactly. Which is why I hope I'm not too late, that's why I'm trying to document these stories.

MF: Whatever is left you might pick it up a bit.

SLK: That was going to be my other question actually, would you know of anyone left who would have any information?

MF: Not around here I'd say now, because they'd be pretty much my age.

SLK: Actually I was interested in that, because the people who I've managed to get a lot of information about the famine [from] have been the slightly younger generation, so maybe 50s...like Conor Fahy.

MF: What happened there you see, they probably came across some books going to school...that [information] wouldn't have been passed down in the latter years, I'd say. I think that's how they know so much about it; they read so much about it. But at my time going to school, we never read too much about it. We heard about it and that was it.

SLK: It was the same for myself in school. It was almost a bookmark. "Yes, this happened, moving on..."

MF: They'd just spend so much [little] time at it, you'd learn nothing anyway from it. It was only just passed over.

SLK: But in terms of information being passed down, you think that that generation's gone?

MF: There weren't enough of it that were passed down anyway. It's a pity.

SLK: Well I suppose it makes sense when people don't want to talk about it, that information is just going to go away from generation to generation.

**MF:** A lot of the people that are growing up now and it's not taught, they'd know nothing at all. Unless it's taught in schools or something like that.

**SLK:** Exactly. Which is awful, considering how significant it was. Hopefully it's not too late, but there seems to be a bit of interest in it now at the moment. I'm not sure if you heard, there was an art exhibition that came over from America and it came to Dublin Castle and I think it's in Cork now. It's the largest collection of famine related art in the world, and that got great numbers and lots of different talks and events came about because of it. And there seemed to be great interest in it. Hopefully that will help preserve whatever information is left.

**MF:** Well they'll collect a lot, and what they'll collect they'll have, like.

**SLK:** Exactly.

**MF:** They'll be there...

**SLK:** Which is what I'm hoping to do with my project, to cement it...cement that information.

**MF:** Well Rina's husband Tom, did he give you any [information]?

**SLK:** I did chat with him. He was able to give me a couple of stories on the famine.

**MF:** Yes, he would.

**SLK:** He was able to tell me about that road from the church...he was able to tell me that was built during the famine. But even he said himself he wouldn't know too much about it.

**MF:** He wouldn't and I wouldn't either.

**SLK:** A lot of people did mention his name when they were suggesting [people to talk to].

**MF:** Yes, you'd [he'd] know a few things and that would be it like.

**SLK:** Yes, well that seems to be the case for a lot of people. It's a matter of piecing it all together.

**MF:** All we heard anyway like, the people...an awful lot of them would have starved only for the shore. All the fishing...shellfish and that, they were picking that up and [eating] half of it.

**SLK:** You know the Lobster Pond? Apparently that was thriving during the famine.

**MF:** Oh that was thriving, yes, the pond.

**SLK:** You'd have plenty of people coming from the inland trying to get something from it.

**MF:** You had an Englishman there around that time. He was buying up the fish that time and sending it off out to England.

**SLK:** Whilst the Irish people starved.

**MF:** Yes. Well he was good in ways to the Irish too like because later on after the famine he built up a big business, buying fish and selling it. He was buying fish off the periwinkles and all that stuff. He'd buy off the locals.

**SLK:** So good came out of it.

**MF:** It was a nice income for them when they had nothing.

**SLK:** Actually speaking of which, I was chatting to Conor...he was saying about the landlords in the different areas...and he was talking about the Public Works Scheme constructions....and that if the landlord was, first of all, there...on his land, not over in England...and if he actually had an interest in helping his people, then you'd find a lot of these constructions. But then he said in Ballyvaughan, the landlord there wasn't a great one. He was a gambler, I'm pretty sure.

**MF:** There was a lot of them that way, the landlords. They were more for themselves anyway and their own tribe.

## C - Interview with P. J. Curtis

(14/08/18)

**PJC:** The famine hit here with as much devastating results as it did anywhere else. At the edge of the Burren, people talk about 'ground' that they own, rather than 'land'. You could have 10 acres of 'ground' and only half an acre of actual 'land' that you could plant anything in. As far as I can know from what my father says and from Mariah...who was an elder that was born in 1857, and I used to go to here as a kid...as far as they would say, that there was a high death rate here. So much so that the graveyard (the local graveyard, Kilnaboy graveyard), overflowed and they buried them in a roadway over there, which we can have a look at later, which my father used to call Gort na Marbh, 'The Garden of the Dead'. I was appalled about 20 years ago driving by, to see somebody bulldozing it inside. Their people owned that land, so that was an indication that already that information had not been passed on to this generation, that was now bulldozing the land. I became acutely aware then of the information that was held by the old folks that wasn't being passed on, or if it was being passed on it wasn't much listened to, just like me as a kid growing up. I was more interested in listening to the radio than what my father and the old elders, who gathered in this house...this was a house where a lot of people would gather to play cards, to talk...my mother had a shop, my father was a blacksmith...and so the stories that were told here...oh my gosh, I wish they had the memory and the tape recorder. My father didn't talk about the famine, in that why would he be talking about the famine? Except if we came back as kids, and we would be exploring...there is a famine village just over to the east of us here...and we'd come back and say "Who owns all these houses, and what are they?" There was one house in particular, it's just literally across the little stream there, quite close...that still had some items of furniture in it. We used to play in there, and so they were places to play in. There was a little school actually, that was a school in the famine village, and we used to...myself and John Keane, who's another man I think I mentioned to you up in Kilfenora...as kids, he was staying with his grandfather at the time, Keatings that lived over there...we used to play school there...and in fact, in life he became a school teacher and even then he was the school master while we were the kids. We were all like 6, 7, 8...and so, when we'd ask the question, my father would say well so and so lived in that house, Nestors lived in that house, MacDonalds lived in that house (the nearest ruin, which hopefully we'll visit)...and the he said that there was a Murty (Marty) Curtis that lived over the way. Murty Curtis became Mortimer Curtis...we knew of him...and little did I think that many, many, many years later his descendants would turn up at my door. An amazing thing it was to be able to bring them back...you've seen the photograph of me with Tony outside the ruins. So it was very moving for them, 4 generations later to come back from New Zealand.

**SLK:** Incredible. You were saying that he immigrated in 1857 over to New Zealand?

**PJC:** Yes. I think, to have survived the famine, and then he married around that time...and I think his father would have been left behind. So they hadn't died as much as...those who didn't die, the young left. The generations left behind the people that did die, say in the next 5, 10 years after the famine. Unlike the McDonnells, that were found dead by my great grandfather...I'll take you to that ruin. The story was that my great grandfather had found them, and their last meal had been...on the fire was a little pot, and in the stew was leaves and grass. That's all they were living on. And they were found dead...and I think they might have been actually left in the house because when they died in their houses, they left them there. They let the house fall in on top of them. In some cases, they were taken away. If they were another generation of course they would have been taken out and buried...but where would you bury them? The graveyard was overflowing, so they might have buried them in this overflow field down the road here, Gort na Marbh. But these people didn't have children so...I never did learn, whether they were left there or not...but I suspected they probably were left in there...and the house would have just collapsed into them.

**SLK:** This is the house that is still there to this day?

**PJC:** That's right. And then I suppose there was the other stories of Mariah then...her stories also talked about Gort na Marbh. She was a healer, she was a wise woman...she could see people. She said that she could see the "grey people", she called them. She could see the ghosts of people. Now, take that aboard, you know...They walked the roads, she would say. Then there was a lot of displaced people that were coming in...I think the O'Sullivan family, there are O'Sullivans here, they came in. They had come from Cork. They were wandering the roads. They had left the devastation of their own areas and they wander in here, and they stay. And they live in pretty desperate conditions, you know, little huts and whatever...and they make their little world here, they make their lives here. They eventually build a little cottage, and whatever. There was a lot of ground over there that was commonage, so it was owned by (I think) 7 families. There would have been houses built there at the time.

**SLK:** For the likes of these people who had been coming on in?

**PJC:** Yes. Because even the McDonnells now, they would have come in...McDonnell wouldn't be a local name. So the McDonnells would have come in with....I think, and my friend John who more knowledgeable than me on this...that when O'Neill was coming back after the battle of Kinsale, having lost the battle of Kinsale, they came through here. I think a lot of people dropped away from the armies. The armies were beaten, they were starving, it was a terrible winter, and they dropped off and

stayed. So the McDonnells would have been a northern name that stayed here. There was probably a couple of other names that wouldn't have been localised names like, because the local names would be O'Brien, McMahan, O'Connor, O'Loughlin, and so on.

**SLK:** Curtis?

**PJC:** Even Curtis wouldn't be considered to be. We only came in with the Normans so...

**SLK:** Oh really, does it go back that far? Would you still not be known as a [local]?

**PJC:** Well, I think I mentioned it to you before, I was one of the Burren Action Group 7 that fought the Mullach Mór case. We were accused by the other side of being blow-ins. And I was really pissed off about this like. How dare they accuse me of being a blow-in, my family have been here, in this house that you're sitting in, since 1770. And the house that we came from is on that hill there, Cloon Hill.

**SLK:** Do you know how long [your family were living there for]?

**PJC:** 1500s. And we think we came in to East Clare first of all with Richard Éclair. Richard Éclair's house...it's not a house, it's a fortress...is here, they're just now beginning to clean it...and I'm delighted to see it being cleaned, because now you can see it.

**SLK:** Is that up on the mound?

**PJC:** No, you can see it as you come up the road, it's over by the river. We used to play over there as kids, and it's a fascinating fortress. General Arton and his troops inhabited it when they were laying siege to the castle of Leamaneh in 1652. And so...where was I...yeah, talking about being called a blow-in. So, I was really cheesed about this like, to be accused of such...the thing was that they tried to kind of alienate us as people, that we weren't really from the locality, we were blow-ins.

**SLK:** Yes, "So why would you have a say?"

**PJC:** Why would I have a say? The thing was that James Howard and Patrick McCormack, who are over near Mullach Mór, they are natives as well, and have been. I think the Curtis' are the oldest family, that is accepted...in this area. They have survived...I mean, others have **not** survived...principally because of the famine.

**SLK:** Actually, just on that briefly...I think we discussed the last time we met...we touched on that subject about the whole idea of the families who did survive against the families who didn't....basically, one of the theories

is that because that information hasn't been handed down [through?] the generations is because of the fact that the families who actually gained from the famine were the ones who survived and lived on, whereas the ones who actually suffered greatly had either emigrated or died during the famine.

**PJC:** Right, and one of the questions that has fascinated me since I began to be interested in my own family here is how **did** we survive? How did the Curtis' next door survive? How did Mariah and her family survive?

**SLK:** You mentioned something about having a healer in the family?

**PJC:** A long line of healers, and my father was a blacksmith. So, you know, everything that was made, was made by hand from digging implements, to wheels, to carts, to hoops for barrels...you name it.

**SLK:** So you think your family's important role in the community...you were saying that people may have, in return for healing, maybe just brought some food ,perhaps?

**PJC:** I think so, because there was no fee for healing, but something would be given. **Something** would be given, it could be fruit, it could be fish, it could be poitín if there was...depending, you know. And so, I mean it's horrible to think that maybe people who were on their last legs were giving our family, his grandfather, great grandfather...something for something that they had given. It's upsetting to think that maybe that...that we **did** survive because of that. Because we didn't have any more land than anybody else. Absolutely no more land. And the land that we had wasn't any better or any worse...and we too lived off potatoes. I don't think there was any fishermen in our family so there was no...I don't know how that diet would have been supplemented by anything else...not a lot. If there was a cow...yeah, I think most people had a cow. I don't think we ever had goats...like the people over there **had** goats. [There] was a chance of surviving with goats because either they went wild or at least they could be snared and killed or if the goats were domesticized, they could have goats' milk and cheese and all that. I know that if they were coming back from the sea, perhaps they would have been...a lot of the fields around here were made from seaweed. They would go back to the sea, to the coast, get seaweed, and lay the seaweed over the rock...do you know that?

**SLK:** No, I haven't come across those.

**PJC:** You would have say a rocky patch of land, maybe the size of this orchard, and they would lay seaweed...they'd lay farmland manure on top of that...the following year they'd go back to the sea again and lay **more** seaweed. **More**. And over two centuries or a century, you would have enough natural soil, of very **good** soil...because you know [that] seaweed

is the best element that you can put on your garden, even today. If I got a bag of seaweed for my apple trees or whatever like, it enriches the soil. And so, there's a little garden up there, I can show it to you as we go up the lane, that was made from seaweed and 200 years of soil. You get a good rich soil and you sow your potatoes, or your carrots, or your onions, and when the potatoes failed...that's it. And so, going back to the thing, how did they survive? Well, that's the only answer that I can come up with, is through the little donations that they were being given for services rendered.

**SLK:** And perhaps that explains why you were saying when you were growing up you would hear the elders, as you said, talking about the famine, like various stories from the famine, whereas the majority of people I've talked to around the area...so I've been up to Kinvara, Bellharbour, Ballyvaughan, and Carron...and nearly everyone I've talked to just said that the subject was never brought up at all, it just wasn't talked about. And if it was, it was very occasionally, just the odd word about it, which would fit in with the idea that, as I was saying, the people who were affected [emigrated or died]...but yours might be an example of a family who actually were badly affected by the famine, yet they actually managed to survive

**PJC:** But going back to what you said, it's not as if they would have been bring[ing] it up as a subject to talk about...it would be like...it would come around through...they'd talk about a family say...a lot of the discussions here, and I remember talking about it to somebody else, would be tracing. The tracing, it went on almost on a nightly basis, a very Irish thing. So and so was married to so and so, and it was like as if they were knitting a tapestry of the local knowledge where everybody fitted in through one way or the other...even the passers through had a role to play in this magnificent tapestry that was all stitched together by conversations around the fire. And so if they talked about somebody that was there, that somebody remembers, and they'd say "Oh yeah, their father would've come through the famine, yeah", and there might be a story attached. But they didn't bring it up as a topic to be discussed. It was like a by the way in the course of a conversation. Of course now I regret not paying more attention...as a kid, you don't...

**SLK:** Other things to think about.

**PJC:** Yeah, well...I had a radio to keep me occupied and I was a ferocious reader, so that kept me...and they were adult things anyway that they were talking about and they didn't really...I was more interested in maybe hearing about the more legendary things, the ghosts that existed in the hole over there, the headless horseman that couldn't pass the stream down there, the ghosts that were seen around the graveyard, you know...At around Halloween we'd be scared shitless.

**SLK:** Naturally.

**PJC:** Because it was a time before electricity, and it was scary! You know, the nights were scary. Men would be here, including my father who swears that he heard the banshee. Of course, it could have been a....down by that well, we had a little well down there. But of course, that was just a way of keeping us away from the well. Smart thinking because there was no place we wouldn't get to...we were constantly...we'd swim in the stream down there in [the] summer and...So, I can't say that there was much talked about the famine. It was just understood that a lot of the families that would be vaguely remembered, were gone. And I do remember hearing that between the cross of Kilnaboy and a mile over the road where the road swings (we call it Finn's Cross), there was a hundred families. Now they weren't lined up on either side of the road, they were left and right like our village in there. I think there's 9 houses, 7 in our land...or 5 or 6 in our land, and the rest in Collins' land. When I think back to that, a hundred dwelling houses, with couples and their families and maybe some solo people because there were people that lived alone. When you think gosh, wouldn't it be interesting now to go back to that and see where they lived, you know, and **how** they lived...and then the coming of the famine, the devastation.

**SLK:** [And] what that did to the rest of the population of the area...

**PJC:** Yeah, I think now there's only what...in 1842 there was a hundred dwellings...and in 1900 or even 1995 or 2005, what, 6 houses?

**SLK:** Incredible...and Ireland, in general, just hasn't recovered at all since then, population-wise...even though it looks like the population has been growing quite a bit in recent years, and it's still nowhere near what it was pre-famine.

**PJC:** And the other things then that I can remember...the 'féar gortach' of course which was...do you know the 'féar gortach', the hungry grass? Whether it was a superstition...well it was a superstition really...if you stepped on an area of ground that was the hungry grass, the 'féar gortach', that was where somebody had died from the famine...and if you stepped on that ground, you were overcome with a terrible hunger...and you had to have something in your pocket to eat, a piece of bread, a piece of cheese, an apple...anything. And to the day he died, my father always had oats in his pocket...that if he stepped on the 'féar gortach', the hungry grass, he could eat something, and that got you out of the...you were held enthral in this patch. So we used to be frightened of stepping in one of these places as kids...of course we never did, but I mean...that was the tradition...and that was believed. A little addition to that story, when my father died...well, when I finally came back to the house after my mother dying and inhabited the house in the early 90s...I was throwing out a lot of old clothes and I threw out my father's jacket. I threw it out by the wall. A

year later there was oats growing...the wheat was still in his pocket and it had become absorbed into the soil...and it was growing. And I thought, "My God, isn't life amazing". After all the years of being in the pocket...because that was 10 years after he had died...and yet this oats was still able to grow. So there was that, what else was there? Yeah, I've lost the thread...

SLK: No, it's grand. So...I suppose that would lead us on then to whether or not you had any knowledge of the constructions that were built during the famine [themselves], these were the constructions like the roads and the walls that were built as part of the Public Works Scheme[s]...I actually created a map yesterday, and so far I've found approximately 6 constructions around the area that are 100%, you know, constructions built as part of [the] Public Works Scheme...and then I've got a few possible ones...

PJC: And the ghost roads you're talking about, are you?

SLK: Oh, you said they were referred to as ghost roads, weren't they? These are the roads that, you know, [are] leading to nowhere and often because they stopped when they were only halfway done. Yeah, roads like that.

PJC: Other than that, the walls were being continuously built anyway, I think...as in farmers, you know...because the land had been kind of sliced up, everybody had their 5 acres or whatever the heck it was...and they were building walls and walls and walls...my father and I, as kids like when he had an afternoon where he had the time, we'd be over...rising walls he would call [it] because the walls had fallen with goat activity and all the rest of it. But was there new walls built...possibly there would have been, say, up in the high Burren or across the...'cause lands, you know, once people died, that land was appropriated and then divided or whatever...a lot of it went back to the church, no doubt. And of course the church became...the church owned half the Burren, didn't they...was it the...those monks from Glenstall? No, perhaps not. Anyway, they did own a sizeable stretch of Burren land. And a lot of it had been appropriated from...what my father used to say, from people dying and either leaving it to the church before they died or having it being taken over by the church afterwards.

SLK: Which is why people talk about how a lot of families did prosper after the famine, because as you were saying, this land which was left there from the families who had died was then actually divided up for the people, remaining population.

PJC: We got meadowland, not my generation but in my father's generation probably...up in Leamaneh on the way to the castle. We got 8 acres of land...[and] they were all slices in perfect 8 acres so...we [say?]

that every year. And that was the land furthest away from us. All the other land would have been just, you know, around...and even around here then, there was the little, you know...we had this field, the next Curtis family had that field, and the next Curtis family had that field...you know, tiny little...And some of them quite complicated, you know, some of them quite complicated...

**SLK:** So those are the walls, but in terms of those ghost roads that you were talking about, would you know of any that were built around...by the way, when I say "around the area", this initially began as a project centred really around Ballyvaughan and Carron, but since then I've actually spread it to North Clare in general.

**PJC:** Well there's one that you can see on the way up to...on the road to Ballyvaughan, it's just after...

**SLK:** After Carron?

**PJC:** No, not through Carron. As if you're going up to Caherconnell...go past Caherconnell, on the way to...maybe even past Poll na Brón...and to the left you can see the shape of the road winding its way through the stones with the stone wall[s?] either side of it...kind of going nowhere really, unless it was a...it's there, you can see it.

**SLK:** Ok, well actually...do I have my map with me...aw I don't, of course I forgot to bring the map with me! Do you have a map by any chance?

**PJC:** A map of the Burren?

**SLK:** It's ok if not! It's just that often I find with directions...can only get you so far...and it's quite easy to get lost in a place like the Burren.

**PJC:** I know I have...I've got no immediate map.

**SLK:** I might be able to get it up on...on my phone here, perhaps.

**PJC:** And there's the ghost road that runs along...looking down on Bellharbour and all those places.

**SLK:** Yes, that's the one...

**PJC:** That's the famous one.

**SLK:** Yeah...I have been up there, it's sort of like...it's a loop that goes around and up the mountain.

**PJC:** It's now an official walk.

SLK: Yes, I've been to that one.

PJC: Now there may have been some roads cut into the Burren over near McCanns...oh, I shouldn't be eating and I'm talking at the same time...But I'm not aware of any roads around here. The roads around here would be well...they would have been well marked, I mean there was the road that went past this house, back to the village...There was little pathways that connected places like Liannagh. Now Liannagh is tucked away directly north of us here. You had to wind your way in to get to it...we used to go in to the village in the 50s and it was like going back in time. Really going back in time, I mean they had no electricity, thatched houses...When I think of it now, it was like some place that had been dropped from the last century and maintained...of course things change very quickly and whatever. The connecting little pathway was from there to here, for people to come to mass, to come to the shop here that my mother had, and to come to school!

SLK: And I suppose...I was chatting with a man down in Ballyvaughan, he was telling me that a lot of these constructions depended on the landowner at the time. So for example, I think the landowner in New Quay was a...was it a McNamara by any chance? Possibly? Anyway, he was quite an active landowner so therefore there are quite a lot of those...constructions were built around that time. Whereas the landowner in Ballyvaughan at the time was a gambler and didn't actually care about the people living on his land too much, and therefore these schemes weren't implemented...So I'm just wondering do you know who the landowner would have been around that time, or where they would have resided, perhaps? Because I'm guessing that the landowner for Kilnaboy would also have been the landowner for various other places around the area.

PJC: When my father was paying ground rents to the Earl of Inchiquin. Lord Inchiquin, until the 60s for heaven's sake. And he was living in London. I don't know when that all came to an end but I remember he'd always been...and then the big landowners in the Burren, say north of here, would be Glins...the Glins had a lot of land there...that family, who else...and then over the years, you know, other landowners would have appropriated...there was the Marylands [they] had a lot of land back just to the green road and turn left...there's a café up there right now where the last of the Marylands lived, they lived...it was really isolated. They had a lot of ground, you see, rather than...

SLK: And actually, that was the other theory that I came across, whereas...a lot of the people who suffered during the famine were obviously the poor people, who would've lived in the likes of this ground that you speak of, the rocky land of the Burren or up in the mountains for example, whereas the people who would have prospered more would have been people on the flatlands.

**PJC:** And a lot of post-famine people, you know, the owners of the majority of the land in the Burren...because the cattle **thrived** up there...they would have been herdsman. They would have been hired as herdsman and they lived in pretty basic conditions, and you can see the results of these places still. And then they became...two generations of herdsman, you become almost like a...well, you **do** become a native. And then you appropriate a little bit of ground and you add to that, and you add to that, [and] suddenly you've got enough to hang in there. So, a lot of the families that would've come in during that period, **post-famine**...

**SLK:** Briefly, I know I'm not good with the directions, but that ghost road that you were talking about...so you said if you're going **from** Ballyvaughan...?

**PJC:** No, if you're going from Leamaneh Castle to Ballyvaughan, past Cathair Chomáin...you know the commercial fort now, there on the left...and then Poll na Brón to your right...and you'll see it, you'll see the...I think after Poll na Brón you're kind of winding your way down and around a few bends, you know what the road is like there...and then if you look into the left you'll see the pathway of the two walls winding its way away and up into the Burren.

**SLK:** Perfect, I might have a look on a map when I get back to the facility, just to see if I can find it.

**PJC:** But as I say, there was...I'm not aware of any ghost roads being made **here**, because the place was a honeycomb of...even over in Gora Clún, which is where our land, where the village is now...that's a honeycomb of...they would've...not just roads, they're almost like...their pathways that maybe they...

**SLK:** Tracks.

**PJC:** **Tracks.** But they're **wall** tracks. And they're maybe for...you might get an ass down there, ass and baskets, or sheep, or something like that...but they wouldn't have been made for anything bigger.

**SLK:** And you were saying they were just built over time, they weren't specifically built during those years at all.

**PJC:** Yeah, they would have been built **pre-famine**. Because they would have been at their height at the famine...in the famine days, so...and I don't think so now because I never heard of any other, you know...and they're all covered over now, I mean they're all...I'll be able to maybe show you the remains of one of them...