

circumstances on their estates. Many of these labourers slept in barns to keep costs down and ate whatever food they received from the English farmers - which frequently was better than the staple diet at home. The typical emigrant would save about 8 Pounds in a season. Migrant workers who were unsuccessful at securing employment reported to the authorities who were obliged to feed them, allow them to sleep (often in the county jail) and give them pocket-money to move elsewhere. This was known as "passing-along".

It was regular for returning migrants to report to the Liverpool Poor Law Guardians or their counterparts in London, claiming they were penniless and thus securing a free passage back to Ireland at the end of the season. The Guardians having no alternative but to keep them over the winter or 'pass them along'. One contemporary account of migrant workers arriving in London reads "...hundreds of squalid creatures tramping into London... without shoes, stockings or shirts, with nothing on the head worthy of the name of hat, with rags hardly sufficient to hide the nakedness of their bodies". Many of these migrant workers, particularly those from the vast estate of Lord Dillon in East Mayo gave their money to an agent of their landowner who transferred a draft for them to Ireland. Small numbers of these migrant workers eventually settled on the outskirts of London. The Irish suburb of Kilburn, on one of London's main thoroughfares to the provinces, owes its origin to the settlement of Irish migrant workers.

The journey from Liverpool to Dublin took about 14 hours by steam and up to a week by sail with the passage from London being up to 3 weeks.

Rents for tenanted land were paid to the landlord's agent or middleman on 'gale days' in November and early May and this particularly suited the returning migrant worker. Failure to pay rent resulted in eviction. An evicted family, prior to 1838, were reduced to begging and slow starvation.

Despite the reduced economic circumstances of the 1820s and 1830s the birth rate continued to far outpace the combined rates of death and emigration. By the year 1841 73% of the population of Mayo lived on holdings of less than five acres and a further 22% held between five and fifteen acres.

There was, in 1836, just one medicine dispensary for all Mayo. The county was by then the poorest, most remote and most highly populated of rural Irish counties.

A period of famine followed by a cholera epidemic in the years 1829 to 1832 caused a further increase in the rate of emigration. Other partial failures of the potato crop took place in 1800, 1817, 1821, 1835, 1839 and 1842. From 1830 North America became to receive emigrants from Ireland. The outflow of people from Mayo had reached an estimated 7,000 per annum in the years immediately before the Great Famine. Those who emigrated to North America prior to the Great Famine did not include the very poor however. The very poor could not afford the cost of travel.

CULTURE AND POLITICS IN PRE-FAMINE MAYO

There was little or no education among the poorer peasantry. Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall in their book "Ireland, Its Scenery and Character" published following a visit to Co. Mayo in 1842 reported meeting people in the Erris peninsula who had no idea that a Queen reigned over them from London. Education was seen as