

# **The Great Famine in Attymass**

## Introduction:

There had been famine before in Ireland earlier in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century but nothing on the scale of the Great Famine of 1845-1849. A contemporary comment was that "*God sent the blight, but the English made the famine*" because the successive British governments of both Peel and Russell [from June 1846], though ruling Ireland, did little to help the Irish population. Peel's government imported £1000 worth of Maize from America in the winter of 1845-1846 which was to be SOLD to the destitute and eventually implemented a series of short lived relief schemes such as road and wall building so that the government could justify cash payments. Russell's government rejected State intervention believing that "*Irish wealth should relieve Irish poverty*" though neither the landlords nor the Poor Law Unions set up under the 1837 Poor Relief Act to provide "More effectual Relief of the Destitute Poor in Ireland" were able cope with the burden of a starving population.

The Russell administration revised its policy in January 1847 and provided funds in the form of loans for relief, though by September it had suspended the scheme demanding that local Poor Law Rates be collected before any more money was made available. The crop was not a complete failure in that year, but yields were very low. Epidemics of Typhoid, Cholera and Dysentery broke out claiming more lives than the hunger itself.

The tragedy is that there was no actual shortage of food. During the Famine years plenty of wheat, meat and dairy produce were exported to England but most Irish people simply couldn't afford to pay for them.



DESTITUTION IN IRELAND. — FAILURE OF THE POTATO CROP.

## The Famine in Attymass

Records show a massive decrease in population in Attymass as a result of the Famine due to death and emigration. In 1841 there were 651 houses and a population of 3,435; this had decreased to 464 houses, population 2,431 by 1851.

The sections below deal with the effects of the Famine in Attymass drawing on the writings of parish historian Patrick Flannelly<sup>1</sup> among other sources. Flannelly writes by subject rather than chronologically so this technique is followed below. Quotations are from Flannelly unless otherwise stated. Flannelly, writing in 1946:

*"I have pleasure in enclosing my effort to record what is left of Famine traditions in this district. I got much of this material from Thomas O'Flynn, nephew of the P.P. of Attymass in the Famine years, about six years ago when I was collecting material for a history of the Parish... The same applies to John Melody, now about 80..."*

The parish was the first in Ireland to report deaths directly due to the famine when, on the 19th November 1846, PP Fr. Michael O'Flynn wrote to the local Justice of the Peace, George Vaughan Jackson, informing him of the deaths from hunger of four persons in Attymass.

*"Local tradition says that there was a population at least four times the present [1946] one... Tradition says that whole villages existed where there is not a trace of a homestead now..."*

### **Social conditions in the 1840's:**

Land was in short supply. A system of land rental was in place whereby landlords let to farmers who then sub-let to cottiers who were provided with a cabin and sufficient land to grow potatoes and perhaps graze a cow. Labourers with insufficient land to sustain themselves were let small plots on a short term, unsecured basis to enable them to feed themselves under a system known as conacre, often taking the plot in lieu of wages.



The potato was the only crop that could support a population vastly greater than that of today as it provided a much greater yield per acre than any grain or other crop. Consequently, the majority of the parish relied almost entirely on the potato for sustenance. The income from any other crops that could be grown and any surplus of potatoes went to pay rent to the [mostly] absentee landlords and to pay taxes.

The Topographical Dictionary of Ireland 1837 states:

*"This parish [Attymass] is bounded on the south by the river Moy and on the east by the Ox mountains ... containing 3276 inhabitants ... The lands are chiefly under tillage, but the system of agriculture is not in a very improved state; there are large tracts of waste land, which are chiefly irreclaimable bog and mountain."*

And Flannelly:

*"The people were not too badly off. They tilled about 3/4 of the land which of course was not a lot in a very congested area, but they managed to live and had the reputation of being big strong men..."*

*As many as could possibly manage it also, kept a couple of sheep in addition to the cow and calf ... The land supported the household for they lived on potatoes and now and again had oatmeal cakes and butter and milk ... rabbits and hares were caught, wild fowl trapped and the rivers and lakes supplied some fish. Poaching was rife.*

*Flax was sown, a few quarts by each farmer, out of which they made their linens, and wool provided the heavier clothing which was also made locally. "*

Many tenants were forced by rising rents and congestion [plots had been divided and sub-divided amongst family members] to try and make a living from the outlying “chiefly irreclaimable bog and mountain” areas of the parish that landlords let to them at discount rates.

Credit:

Extensive use was made of the "Gombeens" men; unofficial money lenders who would charge extortionate interest "4/- for the loan of £1.00 for a year". There were twenty shillings [20/-] to the pound.



*"The loans were taken out when the seed was sown as there were then scarcely any potatoes left, and repayment was made in November."*

Shopkeepers also gave credit and repayment was made in November or before Christmas.

*"Wages were small 6d. to 10d. per day and long hours were worked."* There were 240 pence [d] in the pound so these amounts were truly small.

### **The coming of the blight, autumn 1845.**

*"Tradition says it came from France in a thick fog and fell for three nights - some say one night. The year was extremely wet, so much so that there was little turf. In spite of this there was a fine crop of stalks and prospects were good. Following the fog black spots appeared on the leaves of the stalks which gave out an unwholesome peculiar smell and in a short time the stems were also affected and the fields had a blackened appearance."*

We now know the blight is a fungal disease [Phytophthora infestans] spread by spores but at the time it was unknown in Ireland and not understood. It is thought to have spread to Europe via ships coming from the Americas. The spread of the disease is encouraged by wet, muggy weather conditions like those described in the autumn of 1845 and the favoured high-yielding potato variety of the time, Aran Banner, was particularly susceptible.



Potato tubers were commonly stored in pits in the ground, covered with straw and earth. Infected potatoes quickly spread the disease.

*"The crop was dug and what was considered safe was put in pits but when the pits were opened again the potatoes had either rotted entirely or were running water. In some cases the pits were seen to sag as the potatoes inside rotted. No attempts were made to counteract the blight as people did not even know what it was. Its effect on the crop was the same for each of the famine years."*

At least in the first year of the blight [1845] the early crop had escaped unharmed. In following seasons infection came earlier.

### **Conditions during the Famine:**

The appalling tragedy of the Great Famine hit Attymass particularly badly, it being an entirely rural parish whose population was comprised largely of subsistence farmers who depended on the potato for survival.

*"Conditions were terrible as few had any money. In one case a man drowned himself rather than suffer the hunger pains any longer. It is related of one family that someone called on them to find the children dead and the parents lying on the floor, nibbling grain from a sheaf of oats which lay between them and both unable to rise when the visitor entered."*

*...a man was reputed to have fallen dead at the door of his cabin with a parcel of meal in his hand for which he had travelled five miles. A woman and child were found on the roadside. The woman was dead and had the trace of grass or green food about her mouth. The child was alive."*

In an entry in the "Distress Papers" dated 30<sup>th</sup> January 1847, G.V. Jackson, chairman of the Foxford Relief Committee, sums up the desperate situation in his addresses the Lord Lieutenant:

*"[There are no] resident proprietors, nor merchants, nor others of the independent classes, to assist the poor; the rocky and mountainous character of the country in most places, forbids employment as to reproductive work ... the soil is poor, the quantity of produce small, the quality is bad. The population is dense ... This day we arrive with pain and alarm at a conviction that in the parishes of Toomore, Attymass, Kilgarvan and Killasser there are about 3,000 families who are in danger of perishing from starvation if other agencies are not suddenly brought to their relief. In many parts the supply of food is already gone, the relief works are run out and we can see no prospect before the unhappy people but death by masses ... The poorhouses at Ballina and Swinford are both full to overflowing and numbers in each case are refused admission for want of room. Surrounded by a fearful array of human suffering and wretchedness, we feel our position to be one of no ordinary responsibility."*

The hunger was followed by the appearance of the "Black Fever". People already weakened had little resistance and there were epidemics of typhoid fever, cholera and dysentery.

*"...there seems to be no tradition that anyone contracting the disease [typhoid fever] survived. It was dreaded more than the actual hunger and when persons were found dead in the fields or along the roads, their own kith and kin often denied knowing them."*

### **Landlords & Evictions:**

Only two of the thirteen landlords of estates held in Attymass parish resided locally during famine times and only one, John Irwin of Currower, was actually resident in the parish. The other, Perry Knox Gore, is remembered for his ruthless treatment in evicting families unable to pay rent or fend for themselves during these tragic times, whilst Irwin did what he could to alleviate the suffering and is not believed to be responsible for any evictions. The land agents and bailiffs representing the non-residents are believed to have behaved just as ruthlessly, pulling down the cabins of the starving and compounding their misery.

*"Evictions during the famine were many. In one townland, Kilgellia, 14 of the 24 families were evicted the same day..."*

*There were thirteen estates in the parish but eleven were administered by Agents who did not even reside in the parish ... their subagents, bailiffs etc were cruel, though Catholic .... One bailiff took the roof off his brother's house....*

*The Knox Gores and McGloins ... were the only resident landlords. The Knox Gores laid waste a large tract of the parish along the Moy ... [however] The McGloins (Irwins in famine times) were charitable, carried out no evictions and fed and clothed the poor as far as their own slender means allowed."*

## **The Workhouse**

Attymass was part of the Ballina Poor Union, an institution set up in July 1840 to provide assistance to those with no other means of support. The Workhouses the Union set up were under funded, partly due to local resistance to the paying of the poor rate and soon became overcrowded. As conditions worsened many were turned away.

*"The local 'poor houses' were in Ballina - the workhouse and an auxiliary which was opened in Ardnaree. The latter served this part of the country and conditions there were terrible ... The sick were taken to this 'poorhouse' and few it seems returned".*

The Auxiliary Workhouse in Ardnaree is believed to have been located where the Londis store now stands. The main Ballina workhouse buildings which stood between the Crossmolina Road and Old Crossmolina Road were demolished in the 1930s; only the dispensary remains. It bears a commemorative plaque for the workhouse and two nearby mass burial graves.

The prevailing attitude of the "ruling classes" is illustrated by the following extract from the Ballina Poor Union Board of Guardians minutes dated 4<sup>th</sup> January 1847:

*"From the bankrupt state of the Union (contractors are owed £2,000), further accommodation is impossible and unless government funds are given we must immediately close the workhouse ... The dearness of food would consume all the means of persons hitherto independent."*



WOMAN BEGGING AT CLONAKILITY.

Observations of C. G. Otway on the above:

*"A Union comprising so rich a portion of Co Mayo, of so large an extent and of so great an annual value, should be able to support the workhouse ... The rich Barony of Tyrawley, with so many resident gentry as any barony in Ireland, ought and is able to support its workhouse and its indoor poor. I will attend the Board of Guardians next Monday and do all I can to get the [Poor Law] rate collected."*

Flannelly gives an account of a contract issued by the Auxiliary Workhouse in Ardnaree to:

*"... a local who had the only horse and cart in the immediate neighbourhood. He was paid at so much per head to convey the sick to the workhouse. The patient was put in a sack, feet first, and the sack was tied closely around the neck and labelled. Up to seven or eight patients were laid out in the body of the cart which then set off on its cogglesome journey to the workhouse. Few ever returned.*

*The contractor received the nickname of 'Sack-em-up' from the fact of putting the patients in the sacks."*

## Local food supply during the famine:

The following is taken directly from the Flannelly manuscript.

*"1. Potatoes: Good portions of the potatoes were boiled and made into 'cally' or eaten whole. Partly rotten ones were scraped on a scraper so as to make pulp and this was converted into boxty. The pulp was placed in a cloth and squeezed as dry as possible. This was then flattened out and baked on a tongs on the red coals or placed on the warm hearthstone. When one side was baked, the cake was turned.*

*The making of "boxty" continued down to, say, 40 years ago [c1900] and was generally made of the partly rotten or frosted potatoes about the time of lifting the crop in October and November. The scraper was a necessary utensil in every house and took its place on a frame or a nail in the kitchen wall with saucepans, pans etc.*

*2. Grain: Wheat was not grown in large quantities in this parish and when grown, the grain was sold and the straw used for thatch. ... It was said that wheat made the soil poor.*

*Oats was the main grain crop and it provided food for man and beast and of course paid the rent, taxes and the gombeen man.*

*Oatmeal cakes were made in this way. A leaf of cabbage was placed on coals of fire, the oatmeal cake consisting of oatmeal and milk or oatmeal and water, was placed on the leaf. Then another cabbage leaf was placed on top and coals were laid over this. The juice of the cabbage leaf penetrated the cake and made it more palatable. Cabbage was grown especially for this purpose ...*

*Oatmeal cakes were the mainstay of the population here in the years following the famine ... The hearth oaten cake was called caca ceallaig.*

*Rye: some rye was grown on light soils unfit to grow any other grain. It was used for bread and the straw was considered better than oat straw as thatch.*

*Barley: I could not find out anything about this but since "poteen" [home made whiskey] was made there must have been barley as it was from this it was manufactured.*

*3. Animal products: rabbits, hares and wild fowl were caught by those having rights to hunt. The flesh was used and their soup, mixed with Indian meal, was considered excellent.*

*Blood was drawn from cattle and boiled and used for food. Cattle became weak owing to this operation which was performed too frequently, and finally many of them died.*

*Bull calves sold at a half a crown and were not kept. They were slaughtered for food. Sheep provided most of the meat used .... Pigs were reared on a small scale and disappeared altogether when the*



BOY AND GIRL AT CAHERA.



SEARCHING FOR POTATOES IN A STUBBLE FIELD.

potatoes failed. Goats were plentiful on the mountains and were practically wiped out for food during the famine.

4. *Vegetables: Cabbage was the principal vegetable ... Cabbage juice was regarded as an excellent food and provided a substitute for milk when used with potatoes, oatmeal cakes and boxty. Cabbage and fat were boiled in a pot and the juice got in this way...*

*Onions were boiled with grass, capógs, [docks] fuarán and other weeds, even leaves of trees. Watercress was much used.*

*Turnips were grown and used as a vegetable and for juice in the same way as cabbage. "Boxty" was also made of grated turnips and they were used raw.*

*Capógs and nettles were boiled and mixed with Indian meal while boiling and provided food. "Bráiste" (bráisg) grew plentifully in the corn and even the poor from the towns used to raid the corn fields to pull it for boiling with Indian meal for food. Other weeds were also used and grass was boiled and mixed with Indian meal and used like the nettles etc. Down to recent times, all those, except bráisg, were used in the same way as pig-feeding in the summer months when potatoes were scarce. There is a weed locally called "Fuarán" which was also used in the same way.*

*Mangels were used in the same way as turnips... Mangels were used raw or boiled, and mangel juice was also used to mix with oatmeal in making cakes.*

5. *Products of lakes and rivers: salmon was poached and pike and trout were also used. All this was done stealthily to avoid trouble with the agents of the landlords who claimed these products as their own. Carrageen and seaweed (shlowh) delisk and cockles were also used. These were boiled in milk."*

Indian meal [yellow meal] was a type of flour made from maize that was imported cheaply from the United States. Previously used as an animal feed, it was made to serve as human food, usually by boiling into a type of porridge called "stirabout". Unfortunately, though not fully realised at the time, it had little nutritional value to humans as it needed to be ground much more finely than other grains in order to make it digestible. Charles Edward Trevelyan, who had been appointed by the British government to oversee relief operations, was of the opinion that *"We must not aim at giving more than wholesome food..."* by grinding it twice. It was, however, preferable to nothing.

*"Indian meal was used for the first time in 1847 as human food and was made available to the [Ballina Relief] Committee from Government Sources."*

### **Relief Committee:**

A Relief Committee to distribute Indian meal was set up in Ballina composed of members of the Ascendancy and chaired by a Mr. Fenton. The Parish Priests of Attymass and Bonniconlon appealed to the Committee on behalf of their parishioners:

*"The P.P. of Bonniconlon was Fr. Egan, who soon lost patience with the committee and the chairman referred to him as "Bully Egan from the Gap". The Gap is that through which the main road passes over the Ox Mountains between Mayo and Sligo ... and by the nick name "Bully Egan" he was afterwards called ... Mr Fenton ... Chairman of the Relief Committee ... received the retort from Fr. Egan - Aren't you 'Soap the Rope' for he used to hang people in his own yard".*

In an aside Flannelly reports of chairman Fenton *"A few years before he died, he became so violent that he was locked up in his own cellar and food was thrown to him through iron bars. He ate his own shoulders before he died."*

Luckily for Attymass:

*“Fr. O’Flynn, more diplomatic than his fellow churchman from Bonniconlon, bided his time in patience until he found an opportunity for his question, ‘Gentlemen what are you going to do for poor Attymass’. He struck such an appealing note that he secured a generous weekly allowance of Indian meal for the parish. This was put up in three hundred-weight sacks and conveyed weekly by the contractor Melody [The Sack-em-up referred to under Workhouse above] in his cart to Fr. O’Flynn’s home in Carrick ... [where] the recipients would assemble to receive their allowance from the Priest.*

*Here the parishioners gathered on the appointed day for the distribution of the meal and took with them bags or vessels for their weekly allowance. Very often all the members of the same household arrived each to claim his or her own share for one would not trust the other, so great was the temptation to steal even the brother’s or sister’s share or even the child’s. Fr. O’Flynn assisted at the distribution while other members of his household served porridge from a large pot always kept boiling, to feed the multitude awaiting their allowance of meal.”*

### **Public Works Relief Schemes:**

By the autumn of 1846 the workhouses were full. The price of foodstuffs had rocketed due to scarcity.

A new system of public works had been devised in August 1846 to try to alleviate the worsening situation but did not begin to operate until the end of October. It was to be funded entirely from local taxation and administered by the Office of Public Works with little input from local committees. Labourers were paid on a "piece work" basis and as the effects of under nourishment took hold they became increasingly unequal to the task and many died on the job. There were often delays in the payment of wages.

Office of Public Works, 24th July 1846 recommends *"Making a road from chapel of Attymass to the public road at Roosky. £300."*

3rd October 1846. The OPW recommends 73 works including in Attymass: *"Making 320 perches new road in continuation of the line now in progress from the chapel of Attymass to Franveebie? £320. Finishing 300 perches new road Attymass to Rooskey. £350.10s."*

It appears only nine of the 73 applications in October were successful and did not include those in the parish.

12th January 1847. OPW recommends 41 works including: *"New road from Binniafinglas [Bonnifinglas] to Derryvicknell. £100."*

16th February 1847. OPW recommends 21 works including: *"Improve and alter the road from Mullaghawney to Bunnacurry and Bunnafinglas. £150."*

It is unclear from the records if these all these works were approved but it is certain some schemes were implemented in the parish.

Flanelly:

*"New roads were begun. The principal one was to connect Foxford with Bonniconlon, running at the foot of the Ox Mountains. Several hundred men were employed here in gruelling labour as the ground was covered with huge boulders. They received from 2d. to 4d. per day or a quart of Indian meal. They usually took the latter as food was not available in any large quantity for cash. The road was started about midway and was never finished and never used for the purpose for which it was intended..."*

*Another road was constructed along Ballymore Lake and would have proved a useful one ... These roads came to be called 'The Male [meal-from Indian meal] Roads'.*

*... Many died on the job and on the journey to and from the work. The gangers are spoken of for their harsh methods only. "*

The schemes were clearly short lived as illustrated by an entry from the Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers dated 30th Oct 1847 and signed by Bernard Egan PP of neighbouring Bonniconlon where he pleads for reinstatement of the Public Works Scheme:

*"These two parishes [Attymass & Kilgarvin] are situated at the foot of the Ox Mountains ... The two successive failures of the potato crop have reduced a large number of the inhabitants to an awful state of destitution ... It has been ... admitted ... that this district is with scarcely an exception the most impoverished and destitute in the entire county of Mayo.*

*They are most desirous to obtain employment to enable them to purchase food but unfortunately there is no employment in either public or private to be had ... There are ... a number of unfinished public works, and some of them in a dangerous condition, which if put into operation would afford considerable employment and at the same time confer much benefit on this district and the public at large."*

A reply on the 10th November held out "little hope that public works will be resumed".



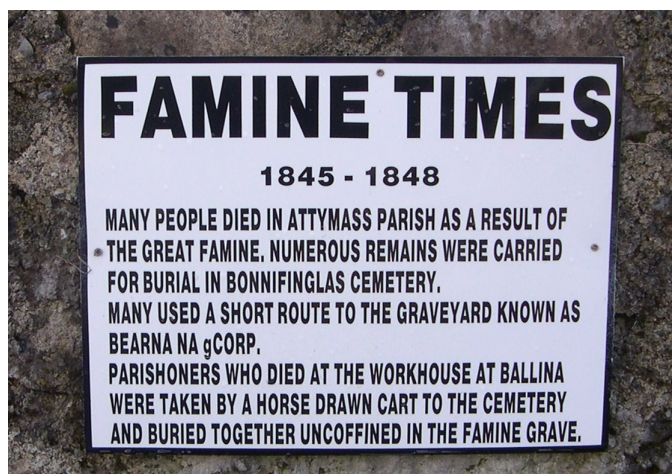
### **Burials:**

*"Bodies actually lay unburied by hedges ... There is one instance of a family, being found dead, with their skeletons only remaining and the efforts of the neighbours failed to frighten away the rats which were feeding on the flesh.*

*Most of the dead were buried in the fields or along the roads ... The difficulty was to get men to carry the corpse to a graveyard but many were buried in the two local graveyards situated about twelve miles apart."*

These graveyards would have been at Bonnifinglas and Kilgarvan [Bonniconlon] – the graveyard in Killeen did not come into general use before 1872. There is a roped off section towards the rear of Bonnifinglas cemetery enclosing the site of the famine graves and marked by a wall plaque.

*“The distance then was long, there were few carts and roads were few and terribly bad. But there was a near way to Bonnifinglas graveyard from Attymass and tradition says that every few yards of the way contain a grave, for the corpse was buried along the way when the bearers became too weak to travel farther. There is a gap on the way leading from the main road, called ‘Cearna na gCorp’ from the fact that the bearer or bearers rested there with their burdens before taking the near way which was rugged and forbidding.*



*“In some cases when the relatives were a little better off than the majority, they aimed at burying their dead ‘decently’ and hired the local cart which was on contract to the auxiliary workhouse in Ardnaree to carry the sick there, and they got or hired a coffin with a hinged bottom and used this to convey the corpse to the graveyard. The same coffin served a similar purpose again and again ... the driver proceeded to the graveyard at Bonnifinglas and the corpses were deposited in the same grave ... The corpse was sewn in white cloth when a coffin was not used.”*

The cart was driven by the “Sack-em-up” Melody mentioned above. Sometimes, when the dead were removed from the workhouse, *“The relatives were not even notified of the deaths ... it is said that a woman was placed in the dead house in Ballina workhouse but was found alive after five days there”*.

*“Tombstones were not erected as it was difficult to find men with sufficient strength to make the graves. Sometimes a large stone or flag was placed at the head and foot of the grave to mark it out”*.

### **The “Better off”:**

*“Some local families were unaffected by the famine or at least they managed to live. These mostly composed the agents of the landlords - bailiffs, bog-rangers, wood rangers, gamekeepers, herds, etc. Not only did they manage to live but they got large tracts of land adjoining their own, when holdings were forsaken by those who emigrated.*

*Millers were supposed to be best off in the period ... There were five grinding mills in the parish, four in one town land [believed to be Ballycong] which has yet the reputation of being best off in '46, 47. The upper class had one ambition in those days viz. to marry the miller’s daughter, as she had a good fortune ... They held for distribution to beggars, ¼ of the grain brought to them for grinding.*

*Gombeen men also held their ground in the bad times - as well they could ... Only quite recently [1946] a direct descendant of the most notorious gombeen man in the district died and left a fortune of over £30,000”*.

### **Crime:**

Unsurprisingly during these times of great distress crimes such as theft were commonplace. Apart from the poaching mentioned above:

*“People from the towns raided the corn fields ... and they also pulled up potato stalks and took away the potatoes adhering to the same ... Others went into potato fields in the spring when the crop was [just] set and with sticks in which a long nail was driven, they picked up the ‘slits’ or sets and carried them off for food. Cabbage was stolen - also turnips. The stealing of corn was quite common.*

*Sheep stealing prevailed and continued long after the worst famine years. Farmers on the mountain-sides suffered most. Robbers frequented caves and lived there on plunder...*

*Darby Dempsey (Diarmuid Mór of Coolcarney) was the most notorious robber of famine times. He was born in Ballycong and was so strong that he used carry six hundred weight of 'slits' (potato sets) out of the field together with a bucket and scíbin (the stick for making the holes to receive the sets). He went to reside with relations in Byhalla near the Ox Mountains and got into the habit of sheep stealing. He was joined by a man called Mulderrig who later gave up his evil ways as the revenue men were on their track. Darby stole, not only for himself and his friends, but to assist the very poor.*

*A cattle stealing was rare for the reason that they were so few here and perhaps not worth stealing.*

*Man traps were set in potato fields etc. A hole about 8 feet deep and two feet wide was dug, filled with water and concealed with brambles and grass etc. People lay in wait and when the robber fell into the trap, he was pounced upon and beaten to death with sticks. In some cases, the trap held the water and the robber drowned.*

*There is no account of any local agitation, riots or the use of military or police except in tracking down robbers ... "*

### **Emigration:**

*"In some townlands about half the families emigrated or at least what was left of them ... Many families sailed from Killlala on the Famine Ships to the U.S.A. and settled principally in Scranton, a coalmining city in Pens." [Pennsylvania]*

Conditions on board the so called "Coffin Ships" were appalling, encouraging the spread of disease. Many didn't survive the voyage.

In 1848 a compulsory emigration scheme was introduced in the Ballina Workhouses whereby female orphans age between fourteen and eighteen years were sent to Australia. It is thought a total of eighty nine were sent, though how many from Attymass will never be known.

*"Orphans of the famine were taken to the workhouses. There is no tradition of their being taken care of by relatives for the reason that these had nothing to give them."*

### **The Clergy:**

*"The local clergy ... made every effort to obtain generous allowances of Indian meal, each for his own parish. They assisted in the distribution ... [and] also travelled through the parish, tending the sick, administering the Sacraments and endeavouring to raise the spirit of the people.*

*Many farmers continued to sow potatoes, year after year ... The local clergy urged the people to discontinue the growing of the crop, still, many kept up the experiment and finally met with success ... In one case it is said that one man, not heeding the advice of the clergy, yet not wishing to gamble a great deal, set a bucketful of 'slits' and poreens and had a wonderful crop. Even the poreens produced large size potatoes. From that onwards, people took courage and began to set more and more."*

<sup>1</sup> The Great Famine 1845-1852, Attymass Parish. Patrick Flannelly 1946. [Original held in the Folklore Collection, U.C.D.] This and other related documents can be found at [www.attymass.ie/historical\\_documents/famine](http://www.attymass.ie/historical_documents/famine)

Illustrations taken mainly from the London Illustrated News and are part of a collection compiled by Steve Taylor. See <http://adminstaff.vassar.edu/sttaylor/famine/>

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Further reading:

The Famine in Mayo. Ivor Hamrock 1998. ISBN: 0951962450. A collection of contemporary records from books, newspapers & official documents.

In Their Own Words. The Famine in North Connacht 1845-1849. Liam Swords 1999. ISBN: 1856072479.

Famine. Liam O'Flaherty 1937. ISBN: 1-903582-20-2. Fact based, historically accurate novel based on the Galway/Mayo border during the Famine. Gives an excellent feel for the times.