1845-1848 An Gorta Mór
The Famine and Emigration in Glann

The people of Glann fared no different than the rest of the Parish and indeed the whole of the Connemara area when the potato crops were affected by Blight (or *Murrain* as was called then) in September of 1845.

At that time the people were totally dependent on potatoes, eating them three times a day. A working man would eat 14lbs (6.4kgs) per day. There was 1.75 million acres under potatoes in 1855. In 2010 there were only about 75,000 acres grown. 50% of the crop was lost in the first year of the famine. A question that is often posed is, did they not live beside a lake full of fish? Indeed they did but they were not allowed to fish on the lake. There was no tradition of any kind or the means to catch fish.

There were hundreds of people in the Glann area without food. They had no money and they had to sell whatever grain and livestock they had to pay the rent. Every square yard of arable ground was planted. And if land was improved the rent was upped.

At the time it was recommended that relief works should be started to give people some work. Bótharín na Mine was a relief road built to give access from Glann road at Newvillage to the lake at Derrymoyle. The only road to Oughterard then was via Newvillage or the high road/old road as we call it now.

Abandoned ruins

Thomas E. Trevellyan was the English civil servant given the job of organising the "Relief Effort". Nationally 715,000 men were employed on the relief schemes. Robert Peel who was the English Prime minister at the time tried to revoke the penal Corn Laws which protected the rich growers. The growers who were rich landlords complained so nothing changed. He did organise grain in the form of maize, with the first load arriving in Feb. 1846. This Indian corn (maize), as it was known, was unground, difficult to cook, hard to digest and caused diarrhoea. It was a poor substitute for a feed of spuds, had no Vitamin C so scurvy became a problem. It became known as "Peel's Brimstone".

Locally it was called the "Yalla mail" (yellow meal). The people born after the turn of the last century remember it well. It was mostly fed to cattle then.

The editor of the *Galway Mercury* newspaper described a scene from a visit to Glann in March 1847.

"Coming nearer home we turned our steps towards the ill-fated village of Glann westward of Oughterard about 2 miles, and what do we find there? Gracious Heavens, how can we contemplate the scene before us! In one wretched cabin ten human beings constituting an entire family, lie DEAD in one heap of rottenness and petrification! In another, several miserable creatures have already paid the debt of nature, while four others are struggling in the last throes of agony! In a third half covered hut, an expiring wretch is found crawling on the ground, endeavouring to sustain existence upon a few turnip peels – not fit for sustenance for the beasts of the field."

Anthony O Fflaherty M.P. visited Glann in 1847 and he witnessed the plight of the people. He was informed that ten people in one household alone died of hunger that year and the rest were living on turnips. He condemned publicly the sheer neglect by the Government. He was also appalled when he discovered that money voted by the Government for relief of the poor and hungry was finding its way into the pockets of officials and food exporters at the time. Robert Brown rector of the Protestant Church wrote a series of letters to the "Galway Vindicator" in which he said, "If such is the dreadful conditions of a locality, where so much exertion has been made by the Catholic and Protestant clergy as well as the few resident gentry belonging to it, for the protection of the poor from starvation, what must be the fate of other contiguous districts which from their remote and isolated situation, render it impossible for the clergy to procure for them the least relief.

George Fortesque O Fflaherty of Lemonfield wrote to the poor Law Commission in October 1851 and spoke about, "a district brought to the very edge of pauperism by the united action of six years past of famine, pestilence and taxes.

It was the lack of food, overcrowding and the absence of governmental and spiritual guidance that allowed the Irish Church Missions to flourish in the Glann and other Oughterard areas. The missioners preyed on the physical weakness of the people and set up several Soup Kitchens and Soup Schools. One can easily understand why the people were easily enticed by the spiritual and temporal aid offered. Many converted to the Protestant religion rather than see their children die.

The priests of Oughterard then became concerned about the plight of their parishioners who had come under the influence of Alexander Dallas and Rev. John O Callaghan, two extreme propagandists. They wrote long letters to the *Galway Mercury* stating their case and begged the people of outlying areas for financial assistance.They implored their fellow priests to come and help them convert the people back again. The Vicar General Rev. B.S. Roche and Fr. Godfrey Mithchell came to Oughterard in June 23rd 1850. They preached to the people making references in their sermons to the Old and New Testament proving to their congregation that they too had knowledge of the Bible. Gradually the people returned to the Catholic faith (see article on Dallas and the Irish Church Missions).

On the old road through Farravaun townland where the lane by Catherine Flaherty's meets the old road there is a woman and child that died of hunger buried there beside a large old Oak tree. The old people talked about bodies on the side of the road at Curraghduff West and of fields where bodies were buried. Some field names bear the names of dead families (e.g. Lacey's field in Curraghduff Middle).

George Petrie (1789-1866) famous for his collection of old Irish music among other things wrote about the post famine period. 'The "land of song" was no longer tuneful; or if a human sound met the traveller's ear, it was only that of the feeble and despairing wail for the dead. This awful unwonted silence, which during the famine and subsequent years, almost everywhere prevailed, struck more fearfully on their imaginations, as many Irish gentlemen informed me, and gave them a deeper feeling of the desolation with which the country had been visited, than other circumstances which had forced itself upon their attention.' *The Ancient music of Ireland*.

The population of the area would have fallen dramatically after the famine, stabilising for a few decades but then again falling in the forties and fifties due to emigration. The area once had its own school but this sadly closed its doors after the school term in 1971 as numbers were too few. Before the famine there were over 10,000 people in the Oughterard area. Fifty years after the famine the population had fallen by almost 50%. Nationally in a period of five years one million died as a result of the famine and a further 1.3 million left the country. Before the famine there was emigration also with about 50,000 leaving each year. In 1847 alone 250,000 departed our shores.

The population recovered somewhat at turn of the last century, but thousands left Ireland in every decade

Ruins of one room dwelling

of the last century. Emigration was particularly high in the thirties and fifties. Families were large and there was no work or factories to employ those that couldn't stay on the land. Only one member of the family could stay on the farm. After the famine it was forbidden to divide farms up.

This old practice of continually sub-dividing the small holding led in part to the disaster that became the famine. Many siblings never saw some their older brothers and sisters as they had emigrated often before the younger ones were born. There were those who had to go and those who went out of a sense of adventure or the promise of land or gold or a job. Often those that stayed at home may not have wanted to, and many ended up having sad lives when all their friends and neighbours had gone, having stayed out of a sense of duty, to an elderly parent or the family homestead. More women than men left with the result that whole villages and communities died out as there was nobody to marry, and there were a disproportionately high number of bachelors in most communities all over rural Ireland. Our area alone had in the region of 20 during the sixties.

When someone decided to go, a few bob had to be gathered up for the fare/ticket on the boat. Something was sold or a few bob was borrowed from somebody. There would be a going away get together or 'American wake' as they were called. The following day there would be a lot of crying at the railway station in Oughterard. All the family friends and neighbours would go to see the person off. The following is a photograph taken at the railway station in Oughterard of Pat Sullivans departure for America c.1910.

There was a period of emigration in the late seventies and early eighties. Many of these returned to rear their children in Ireland, as things improved, they were the people that drove the boom of the late nineties and early naughties. Sadly it is their children that are on the move again to Australia and Canada. The only period where one could say there was some stability was from the late eighties up until 2007, when the so called 'Celtic Tiger' died.

The following poem was written by an emigrant from Glann, Sr. St. Edwin R.I.P. after she returned to France after a visit home. She was aunt to Peggy and Edwin McDonagh and sister to Walter in the above picture.

Front: Tommy Joyce, Bridget Clancy, Unknown, Pat Clancy,Pat Sullivan, Tessy Morrissey, Eileen Morrissey, Annie Matt Clancy Catherine Mons, Margaret Morrissey, Mary Joyce(nee Kelly) Back: Walter McDonagh, Michael Mons, 'Pal' Sullivan, Johnny Kelly, Joe Kelly, Matt Mullin, Morgan Lydon.

ODE

Dear maidens of the cheerful glance,
beyond the waters blue,
which separate or isle from France
I often think of you,

The present rich the affection great
The Feast you've made for me,
What'er on earth shall be my fate,
shall not forgotten be.

When I'm before God's altar here
as oft I am each day,
for you and all you hold most dear
I'll not forget to pray

God bless them all, those Glanners dear
and keep them from all harm,
may angels ever fill and cheer
their lives with heavenly charm.
And Mary with maternal love
Will mark them for her son,
And e're watch o'er them from above
Until their crowns they've won
A hundred years from now we'll meet,
On heavens eternal shore.
Fond parents, youths and maidens sweet,
in joy forever more.

Farming in Glann in the Sixties

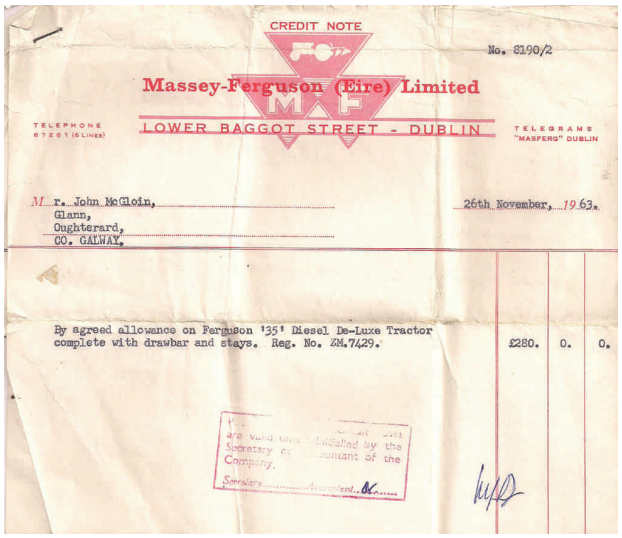
Compared to the present, farming was the most important activity in the life of the Glanners at this time. Donkeys and cows still grazed the long acre. There were about 30 active farms in the area. Currently this is more like ten, with hardly any depending on farming fulltime for their income. Some farms have enlarged others lie idle or are just grazed. Sadly many have become overgrown and unkempt with weeds and encroaching scrub taking over.

Forest planting, part-time fishing/angling and a fledgling tourism industry were the other contributors to income in the sixties. Every household had some land and a piece of bog for turf cutting. It was all very labour intensive.

Up to the sixties the horse and donkey were still the main animals for carrying out the farm work, ploughing, tilling, mowing and drawing the hay, oats and turf home. Christy Butler, Peter Clancy, Mick Canavan, Paul Joyce and Johnny O Connor had work horses and did much of the ploughing and tilling in the late fifties and early sixties. Engine powered mechanisation was just about arriving at this time. Few had tractors although many were now hiring men with tractors. The first tractor came to the area in 1954 in the form of a petrol powered grey Massey Ferguson 20 bought by John and Mary McGloin. The number was ZM 7429. It was traded in in 1963 for a Massey Ferguson 35. Eamon King bought the next one and they both operated as contractors

Every household sowed some crops, potatoes were number one, as well as oats, barley,turnips and mangolds. The potatoes were mostly sown on ridges similar to the lazy bed system dating to when the potato first arrived in Ireland.

Lazy beds can still be clearly seen on the Glann hill dating to famine times. Every farm had a few cows



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and sheep. The cows were milked by hand to provide milk and butter for the household. Most houses kept a pig which was slaughtered to provide bacon and black pudding. All farm yards had hens and a rooster for eggs and chicken meat. A fat rooster was selected for slaughter on Saturday morning and prepared for Sunday's dinner.

Many also kept ponies for towing the trap, for showing, and for racing. Walter Butler had a few successes with ponies such as The Hill of Doon, Kitty the Hare and Goldwing.

People worked very hard in an effort to eke a living from their small marginal farms, many needed off farm employment to support their earnings as prices for cattle and sheep were bad during the sixties, although relative to today one could buy a lot more then with the money received from the sale of a bullock or sheep. Wool was valuable then and helped to buy seed and fertilizer.

In the late '50s and '60s the state saw the need for