

"About the crops upon the hill"

The following poem, written by John Quin of Acton, is interesting in that it gives information regarding the varieties of potato grown on Acton Estate in 1844, just before the great famine. It is widely asserted that one factor which greatly contributed to the devastation caused by potato blight was the almost total reliance of the people on a single variety of potato, the 'lumper'. This variety is said to have been particularly susceptible to the fungus which causes potato blight. Contrary to most accounts, there appears to have been a wide variety of potatoes grown locally although whether the local people generally had access to all, or any, of the varieties named is highly unlikely. In the poem he names twelve varieties of potato grown on the Acton Estate in 1844.

"As the author was employed by Mr Dobbs of Acton Castle to arrange his potatoe (sic) crop, on being laid up for the winter of 1844 he took the liberty of writing the following lines, viz:

His honour bade me use the quill
About the crops upon the hill,
To dress the holes and bings to fix
Lest seed and eating they would mix;

He bade me climb Parnassus mount,
If I was called to give account
To show each sort, I was in care
Not like the wheat spoiled with the yare.

First on my list is the **Scotch Greys**
A better sort ne'er clad the brays
Protestant Boys both large and big
A full grown crop and fit to dig.

The **Seedlings** next a prize has won
Off a hundredweight can show a ton;
The **Williamsons**, too they would alarm
You might for size across your arm

The **Victoreys** here would please you quite
The founder's name was Mr Wright -
The **Cups** were famed in days of yore,
Round the green banks of Erin's shore.

Highland John Awkeys? are but few,
To a great size this year they grew
The large and small came from the rigs

Midcalf* may steam them for the pigs.
Sons of the Cup most do agree,
Their equal yet they ne'er could see.
The **Russets** too quite splendid grows
But few there are their goodness knows.

The **Millers Thumbs** grew in the glen
They are for seed, but not for men
Now the **Cork Reds** for to repeat
Their food is good for man to eat.

The **Apple potatoe** concludes these lines
Substantial food the farmer finds,
Throughout the year they're good and dry
To harvest come June and July.

Excuse me sir, the leave I take,
If not too rude for me to speak
Against your will I didn't resist
Be good enough to read the list.

Some will say that, and others this,
And some no doubt I've said amiss
Obedient, sir, to your desire,
What more from me will you require?

John Quin

* *The man whose office it is to steam the potatoes for the castle*