

Pre-Famine Poverty in the Parish of Aghaderg

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One of the many popular misconceptions about Irish history is that the Great Famine of 1846-47 was a unique occurrence — the only famine in our history — and that prior to that time Ireland was a land of plenty. Nothing could be further from the truth for partial famines and severe local famines were almost an annual feature of life for the poorer classes, and a large proportion of the population lived under the constant threat of hunger and want.

Every part of the country was effected and the following notes related to the Parish of Aghaderg, will serve to illustrate the extent of the problem in this area and the attempts which were made to combat poverty and want in its different forms.

In 1747 by far the most important man in Loughbrickland was one Carelton Barry. He was 'Justice of the Peace,' collector of taxes, overseer of roads, supreme arbiter of morals, Father figure to the poor, judge and jury all rolled into one. He was Vicar or Rector of the Church of Ireland and with his Curate, Henry McCulla was at the hub of everything which happened in the Parish.

An entry from **30th September, 1747** in the Parish records illustrates his role as overseer of roads:—

“At a vestry held in the Parish Church of Aghaderg on 30th day of September, 1747, pursuant to notice given there of the Lord’s Day before, it is agreed, concluded and enacted by the Minister and Church Wardens with the majority of Parishioners then present, that the following persons do serve as surveyors of the Parish aforesaid for the ensuing year and that the following townlands be annexed and appointed to the repair of their respective contiguous roads viz:

Mr. John Burke and Mr. James Wallace do serve as surveyors of road leading from John Devlins to Adger’s Bridge and the half of Loughbrickland contiguous thereto and the near half of Drumnake townland do work at the same....” Every bye road is detailed in the same way.

The problems of the poor and of distributing **Poor Money** are regularly recorded.

On 11th October, 1747 — “For clothing and dieting of Wm. Fowler’s child £1-1-0 for ¼ year.”

16th May, 1749 — “£2 reward to discover the parents of a foundling.”

10th April, 1749 — “Poor money given out on this day:—

	s.	d.
Owen McKey	1	- 1
Widow Willis	1	- 7½
Widow Collins	4	- 1
Pauper Ellen (plus 2 bfls. milk and bread)	3	- 9
Widow Burns	1	- 1
Owen McBrin	1	- 1
(Scarva).....”		

20th February, 1753 — “No farmer, house holder, Cottager or cottier, shall harbour any stranger, stroller or vagabond great with child, or entertain them as a lodger, servant or spinner. Otherwise they will have to pay the upkeep of the child themselves or if not able to pay, a cess will be laid on their townland.”

An ongoing source of grievance, especially to those in the parish not members of the Church of Ireland was the collection of Church Tithes and Taxes to meet the expenses not only of aiding the poor, but also general outlay on repairs.

14th November, 1749 :—

	£	s.	d.
For elements		16	- 0
To Church Wardens	2	- 0	- 0
To Sexton	2	- 0	- 0
To Washing Church Linen		6	- 0
Shingling Church Roof		10	- 0
To nurse a foundling child	2	- 10	- 0
To Mending Church Seats		5	- 7
Dashum and Whitemny Church	1	- 10	- 0
Mason’s work at Church	1	- 10	- 0
New Bell rope and nails		5	- 3
			etc., etc.

The church raised the money to meet these expenses by means of taxes (cess) which were levied on all land owners irrespective of their religious denomination. As already stated this was a source of great irritation to all and particularly to those who didn’t belong to the Church of Ireland.



Aghaderg Parish Church, Loughbrickland.

In 1772 a Presbyterian caused something of a sensation, as the "Newsletter" of April 7th, 1772 records.

*"Whereas on Sunday morning 8th day of March last past, Francis Beck being then in the Meeting House of this Parish, did present a written treasonable paper to the Dissenting Minister of the said parish to be published by him to his Congregation, reporting that the parishoners should pay no more than 1 penny by the Acre for any Cess; and that every of the said Parishoners who had any grievance should repair to the Captain of the "Hearts Of Steel" then abiding in Cappoy in the neighbourhood of said Meeting House. And whereas the said minister refused to read or publish the said Treasonable Assertions the said Francis Beck did stand up in the Meeting House and before the whole congregation did publish these treasonable assertions and did invite the people to comply with them. And whereas the said Francis is since fled through fear of punishment now I Osborne Shiel *Vicar do hereby offer a reward of 5 guineas for apprehending the said Francis Beck and bringing him to justice so that he may be convicted of the said offence."*

Dated Loughbrickland 4th April 1772

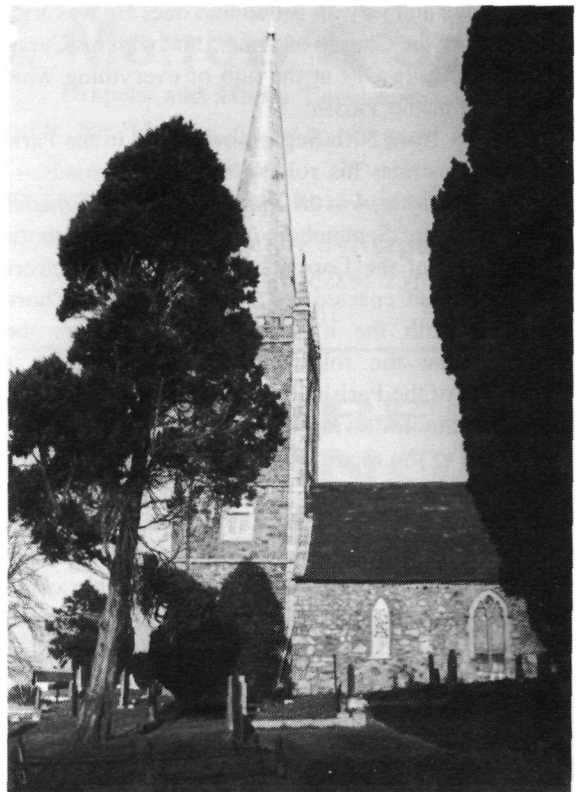
*New Rector.

In 1756 there were widespread shortages of food and this led to rioting. The following account by George McCartney of July 22nd 1756 illustrates the conditions in Belfast.

"All order and government were now at the end. Crowds of hungry people unable to buy what little grain was for sale were surging through the streets of the town seizing sacks of meal and forcing shopkeepers to sell bread below the market price. The rioting continued until the year's harvest had been gathered in."

The following is a list of those who received "Poor Charity" in Loughbrickland in 1757 (It appears that a collection was taken-up at Sunday service for these weekly payments).

	d	d	d	d	
1	Widow Lucas	3	7	6½	4½
2	Widow Quinn	3	7	6½	4½
3	Widow Maxwell	3	7	6½	4½
4	Dan McBrin	3	7	6½	4½
6	Alicia Savage	3	7	6½	4½
7	Widow Stewart	3	7	6½	4½
8	John Aston	3	7	6½	4½
9	Widow Devlin	3	7	dead	—
10	Pat Ferrland	6	7	6½	4½
11	A Foundling	1s-1	7	6½	4½



Aghaderg Parish Church and Graveyard.

In 1760 the Poor on the church books who each received about 8d. per week were:—

- 1 Daniel McBrinn*
- 2 Widow Dilorth
- 3 Edward Kincaid
- 4 Edward Forsythe
- 5 Bartholomew McCabe
- 6 Agnes Molloy
- 7 Winnifred Doran
- 8 James McClory
- 9 Ann Patterson
- 10 Widow Burns
- 11 Widow Boyd
- 12 Phelim Burns
- 13 Widow McConnell
- 14 Widow Collins
- 15 Owen Burns
- 16 Widow Ross
- 17 George Willis
- 18 Mark Brown
- 19 Widow McClory
- 20 George Dickson

*I have reason to believe that Daniel McBrinn was an old soldier who had fought in the Continental wars of the period. Each parish had to supply recruits for the army. They were often chosen by ballot and joined regiments such as the Enniskillen Dragoons or South Down Militia particularly during emergencies. The minute book often refers to “a quota of men to serve...”

By 1761 the numbers of destitute persons “tramping the parish” begging had grown to such an extent that it was decided to draw up an official list of “Those Poor permitted to beg in the Parish of Aghaderg.”

They were:—

- John O’Brien of Creevy
- Constantine McMahon of Drumsallagh
- John Rogan of Drumsallagh
- Hugh Fulton of Glenloughan
- Fergus Morris of Glaskernmore.

In that year “Christmas Money” was distributed to:—

	s - d
Widow Dilworth	1 - 7½
Rachael Stuart	1 - 1
George Willis	1 - 1
Judy Fearon	10
Widow Collins	10
Widow Burns	10

Widow Smith	10
Daniel McBrinn	10
Pat McCabe	10
Widow Molloy	10
Widow Forsyth	10
Owen Byrne	10
George Dickson	10

In the list for 1763 new names to appear are George Millar, and Widow Boyle, while there is no further mention of Daniel McBrinn or Widow Dilworth.

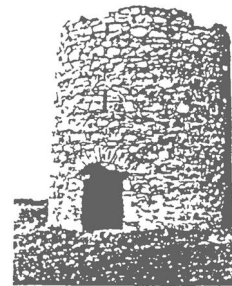
On 8th May 1764 it is recorded that “Thomas Fivie claimed and was paid 5/3 for burying a foundling child.” The problem of Foundling children was a very serious one.

It is recorded on 6th December, 1768 that “A foundling child cared for by Alice McCamley was carried to Dublin by Ann Graham.” Expenses incurred were shared out between the different churches as follows:—

- “Meeting House Loughbrickland 11/4½
- Meeting houses of Glasker and Scarva 7/8
- The Mass House in this Parish 7/=
- Church of Ireland Loughbrickland 8/=

In 1768 the church records list the following as refusing to pay their taxes for repairing the Church of Ireland the rate of tax being “1/4¼ per score of acres.”

- Abraham McClelland, Derrydrumuck
- Alexander Gordon, Ballinaskeagh
- Jas. McAllister, Glaskernmore
- Moses Woods, Shankill
- Arthur Burns, Shankill
- Jas. Kennedy, Shankill
- Neal McClory, Brickland
- Darby McClory, Brickland
- Widow McDowell, Caskum
- John Mitchell, Meenan





Poor Badge.

“Badging the Poor”

In order to deter the wandering beggars a new initiative was taken in 1774 when the Parish of Aghaderg decided to issue Badges to those entitled to beg within the parish.

John Reilly of Scarva House presented 24 badges to the vestry on May 3rd 1774. He had ordered them in Dublin, where they were made by Robert Goodison, pewterer. It was passed in Vestry that... “no beggars, whatsoever, shall receive any alms in the parish...” and that ... “those deserving of charity in the Parish shall receive badges to beg if they get a favourable recommendation.”

These badges were always to be worn in public view and any badly disabled person was to get charity at home.

The front of the badge read:— “Parish of Aghaderg, County of Down. 1774, with the trademark of the maker Robert Goodison.” On the back of the badge was the inscription:— “Blessed is he that considereth the poor, The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.” (Poor Badge No.14) and “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord and that which he hath given will He pay him again.”

Badging the poor dates from 1525 when Henry VIII had badges made for the poor of London. In 1682 the beggars in Dublin were provided with badges and other towns and parish followed their example.

The Aghaderg Badges were made of Brass, were circular and had a heavy rim. There were two holes

to affix the badge to the wearer. They were numbered individually from 1 to 24. Numbers 10 and 24 are in the Ulster Museum, Belfast.

The first people to receive the badges in Aghaderg were as follows (each recipient of a badge had to have someone to act as security).

Badge No.	Security
1 Pat Collins, Drumsallagh	Mr. Templeton
5 Widow McMullan, Creevy	Mr. Wallace
3 Murtagh Burns, Greenan	Donal Burns
6 Thomas Atkinson, Greenan	Henry Savage
24 Lawrence Devlin, Drumiller	John Kinnen
23 Bridget McKay, Glasker	Joseph McAllister
22 Dan Mulholland,	Ballygowan Fr. Mulholland

Following the death of Pat Collins, his badge (No.1) was transferred to Constantine McMahon, Drumsallagh with James Fell as security.

Each had to sign a certificate. The certificate for Badge No.6 read:— “I promise to pay the Church Warden for the Parish of Aghaderg the sum of 5/= for value received this 22nd September 1774. Signed Henry Savage.”

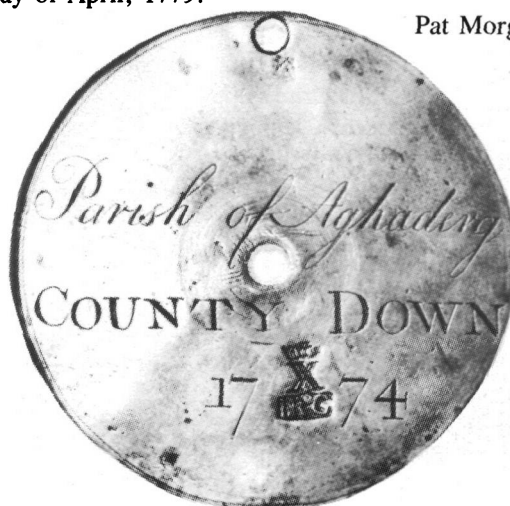
A later certificate reads:— “I do hereby certify that John Canavan is a good honest man, a native of the Parish and a real object of charity. Given under my hand this 13th day of March, 1779.

Signed Pat Morgan.

and further....

“I promise to be accountable for badge No.17 now in possession of John Canavan or to pay the Church Wardens of the Parish of Aghaderg the sum of 5 shillings and 5 pence in lieu of the same. This 15th day of April, 1779.

Pat Morgan”



A note attached “Canavan dead and badge to be returned.”

And so it went on, as the poor died the badges were redistributed and new certificates signed. But like everything else in life it wasn't a total success for the rules were broken. In 1777 it was enacted in the Vestry that “No Poor persons shall be relieved who do not show badges and any found offending shall be strictly dealt with according to the law.

Signed Osborne Shiel (Vicar).”

On 7th May, 1783. The local Parish Priest, Fr. John Malon acted as security for one Loughlin Bryns of Loughadyan who received badge No.2

Conditions elsewhere were no better than they were in Aghaderg. In 1780 when Arthur Young toured Ireland, he reported that...

“The cabins of the Irish are the most miserable hovels that can be conceived. The furniture is as bad as the architecture — beds are not to be found universally and often families lie on straw on the floor...”

Foundlings

Foundling children presented an ongoing and serious problem. There was an institution in Dublin set up to care for foundlings — “The Dublin Foundling Hospital.”

Sometimes foundlings were put into care of a woman in the parish, on other occasions they were sent to Dublin.

A note dated 30th April, 1759 states that “£4 be paid by the Parish to Ann McCambley for maintenance and clothing of a foundling child.”

Again on May 8th 1764. Thomas Fivey claimed 5s-3d for burying a foundling child.

In May 1768 Peter Quinn was paid ½ guinea expenses for “carrying a foundling child to Dublin.”

A ‘receipt’ from The Dublin Foundling Hospital, dated 9th October 1795 states: “Received from the Hands of Alice Muckleboey a male infant from the Parish of Aghaderg County of Down and admitted into the Foundling Hospital...”

On April 15th 1787, “11s-4d to be paid to Mary Fearon an helpless child.”


At a vestry meeting on 4th June 1788 three overseers were appointed to take care of all children under 12 months of age “who are deserted or exposed in this parish.” These overseers also were given powers to raise money on the Parish for the upkeep and support

of these infants. This money was known as “The Foundling Fund.”

From 1788 onward the problem of ‘exposed’ infants was discussed regularly and overseers to take charge of them were appointed every Easter. The church records contain many receipts for the upkeep of these infants. The following is a typical example.

18th September, 1798

“Receive £2-16-10½ which is in full for one year’s keeping a Foundling child. I say received by me.

Peter  O’Hare
his mark

From 1794 on, different problems beset Aghaderg. Watches were set up at night in each townland to prevent illegal ‘drilling’ and a fund was established to bear the court costs of any parishoners who were “...hurt in their persons or property by the desperate banditti who infest the neighbouring county.”

In 1800 the Act of Union was passed but it did not lead to any improvement in the plight of the poor. Joseph McCormick was Vicar at this time and at a vestry on 11th March, 1800 it was resolved that some plan of relief be adopted to “mitigate the distress of the poor occasioned by the very extravagant price of provisions.”

Collectors and inspectors were appointed for every townland to “... probe into the conditions of the poor,” and to report to a committee consisting of — Rev. Joseph McCormick, John Fivey (Treasurer), Rev. Mr. Smith, Mr. Malone, Mr. James Scott, Rev. Knox, Rev. Hicks and Rev. Rogers.

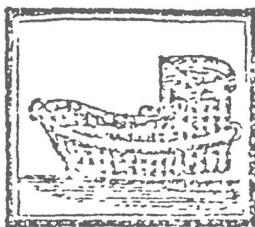
The collectors for Lisnabrague and Loughadian were William Fivey and Samuel Shannon.

The success of this scheme was obviously limited, for by 10th March 1801 a meeting was called to consider the “Calamities of the Poor and the threat of an approaching famine.” The Parish of Aghaderg was to be divided into four districts to supply want and to look into the distress of the poor.

The committee decided to buy foreign grain in “face of this dreadful menace,” and to sell it cheaply to the poor. It was decided to raise a loan of £500 for this purpose but some of the wealthier parishoners did not attend the meeting. It was resolved also that “all stragglng beggars be banished from the Parish.”

On May 23rd 1801 a meeting was held in the church with the object of devising ways of bringing to justice the parents of foundling children who ... “are in the

D U B L I N



FOUNDLINGS.

RECEIVED by the Hands of *Alice Muckley* Infant, from the Parish of *Shadyside of Lower*
a Male and admitted into the Foundling-Hospital, belonging to the Work-House of the
 City of Dublin, this *9* Day of *October 1762*
 with the following Clothing, viz. Biggins — Forehead-Cloaths Caps —
 Shirts *1* Waistcoats — Rockets — Clouts — Flannel —
 Pitches — Swathes — Ribbons — Bibs — Frocks —
 Petticoats. *1*
Theo. J. J. Porter.
 Porter.

Foundling Hospital Certificate.

habit of exposing or murdering their infants, to prevent such shocking and barbarous excesses." A committee was formed in each townland to discover "any pregnant spinster or stranger likely to burden the Parish in this way." A reward of one guinea for each discovery was also offered.

There appears to have been some slight improvement in living conditions during the Napoleonic wars for by 1815 orphans were receiving some education for which the church wardens were paying.

"28th April 1818, Mr. Clugstone received 10/ for teaching an orphan.

28th April 1818, Mr. Bryars received 10/= for teaching an orphan.

14th November 1829, James McNally received 5/ for teaching an orphan, Joseph Henry."

In 1820 conditions once more deteriorated and there was talk of re-badging the poor and once more a Committee was established to investigate the problems of beggars and poverty.

On April 1st 1823, the church wardens were ordered not to pay more than 6s/1d for burying any pauper, and thereafter there are long lists of pauper burials annually.

Another element which added greatly to the distress of the poor was the practice of eviction of ejections.

The following were evicted in 1827 with the name of evicting landlord in each case.

John Hall

Francis McAlcavey

Bernard McGivern

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James Crawford

Charles McAlcavey

Ardle Rice

Robert Anderson

Hugh Henry

Charles Monaghan

Francis McDonnell

Margaret McKay

Robert Kenny

John Connell

John Gordon

James Miles Reilly

Mr. Stewart

Charles Whyte

Hugh Trevor

In the decade before the famine, there were large numbers of pauper burials. All religious denominations were buried in the Church of Ireland graveyard. The following are some examples of the variety of works of charity extended to the poor of the parish at this time:—

"1828 For burying a man drowned in canal 8/=

1828 For burying a man drowned in Loughbrickland Lake 8/=

For bringing boat from Poyntzpass 3/=

1832 To Farron for going Banbridge for Police 8d.

1833 Burying a child found drowned in Brickland bog 2/=

To relieve a stranger taken ill at chapel 1/=

To bury stranger, died at Gawley's Blacksmith's 7/=

Clothes for a deserted child in Ballyvarley 3/6

Clothes for a deserted child in Glenloughan 10/=

1834 There were 8 foundling children being reared and paid for by Parish.

1835 For burying a poor beggar died in Ballyvarley 8/=

1836 For burying a child found in Brown Bog 1/6

For burying a travelling woman, unknown 7/=

To James Lively for burying his wife 8/=

In 1833 a lighterman died from Cholera on a barge carrying turf on the Newry Canal: Quarrantine was imposed in the area and no one was allowed to enter the village of Loughbrickland from that direction until the 'scare' was over.

During the 1830s the church had much difficulty in collecting church cesses as an increasing number were unwilling to pay.

In 1836 the government carried out "An Enquiry into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland." One of those questioned was Rev. William Reid. The following is part of his interview.

Question — What is the ordinary diet of the labouring class?

Answer — Potatoes and salt or herrings in winter, potatoes and poor milk in summer. Their clothes is rags.

Question — What are the daily wages of labourers?

Answer — 8d per day (with diet). 10d per day without — but they are only occasionally employed.

Question — What might an average labourer's pay amount to in a year?

Answer — I would suppose about £10

Question — Of what discription are their dwellings.

Answer — Small farmers have truly miserable dwellings. Their furniture is wretched and their body rags with maybe a blanket covering their straw beds.

According to Patrick O'Donnell in his book "The Faction Fighters" there were five partial famines in the 1830s — 1831, 35, 36, 37, and 1839.

An Aghaderg in 1837 the district was on the brink of famine once again. A meeting was held on 27th June to try to do something to relieve the poor and destitute of the parish. A large committee of every denomination reported that more than 700 individuals in the parish of Aghaderg were in a state of destitution from want of employment, scarcity of money and the high cost of provisions. All absentee landlords were to receive letters from the chairman N. C. Whyte asking for contributions to a relief fund.

In 1840 the poor of Aghaderg were 'Badged' again and at this period the church wardens were issuing blankets to the poor and destitution was widespread. But at the beginning of the decade which saw the calamitous famine, the role of the Church of Ireland wardens came to an end, with the establishment of 'Poor Law Unions' in 1838. Under the provisions of the Act of Parliament of 1838, 137 Poor Law Unions were established, each with its Workhouse or 'Poorhouse'. Anyone seeking assistance would have to go to obtain relief. Banbridge Workhouse, built to house 800 opened its doors on 14th June 1841.

When one looks at the details of one area such as Aghaderg, "the good old days" don't seem so good and perhaps in light of these details we shouldn't judge the present permissive age too harshly.



Loughbrickland village.