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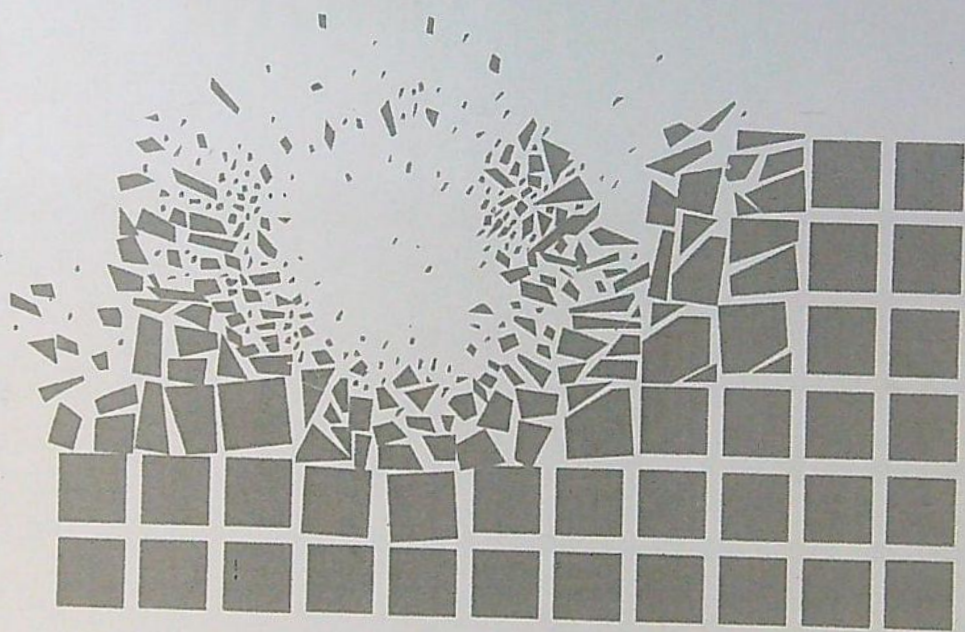
RURAL IRELAND

Modernisation and Change

1600~1900

Edited by

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Introduction

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While it is statistically correct to state that today more than fifty per cent of Ireland's population now resides in settlements defined by the census authorities as urban, it is also true to say that the dominant ethos on this island has remained overwhelmingly rural made explicit in a wide range of attitudes and behaviours ranging from recreational activities to religious observances. It would be too daunting a venture as yet to write a history of rural Ireland as there is a dearth of regional and local case-studies available. Nevertheless, congruent themes to those explored in this book have been addressed in such recent publications as L. M. Cullen's *The Emergence of Modern Ireland 1600-1900* and in the recent compendium of studies focused upon *The Irish Town* edited by David Harkness and Mary O'Dowd. What is on offer here is a selection of essays, each of which explores in depth a number of themes critical and central to any understanding of modernisation and change in rural Ireland between 1600 and 1900.

The contents of this book were originally presented as papers at a conference held at Trinity College, Dublin on 11th May 1985. Afterwards, most contributors amended their papers to respond to comments raised in short discussions which followed each pair of papers. The conference itself was the second in a series of annual gatherings organised by the editors of this work as a platform on which geographers, historians and other cognate species could exchange and share the fruits of recent research through an understanding of each others methodologies and perspectives. Contributors from different institutions from all over the

island were asked to divulge the results of their most recent research so as to reach as wide an audience as possible.

Modernisation and change were selected as the filters through which critical aspects of the recent transformation of the rural Irish context could be examined in a quest to identify the generic processes which precipitated such alterations. The book does not seek to present a total explanation of change. Instead it offers a rich compendium of vital assessments of aspects of modernisation too often neglected in the past because of their perceived mundaneness – to name but one – the fate of Irish women in the nineteenth century.

For the purposes of this work modernisation is regarded, not as an inflexible sociological categorisation, but rather as a loosely defined construct within which complex social outcomes can be scrutinised and understood. In this sense modernisation is not a term with a high level of usage and a low level of meaning. Neither is it a term then which implies specifically determined outcomes, nor does it refer to a terminal state of development. Here modernisation refers to the impact of forces, of exogenous or endogenous origin, on Ireland between 1600 and 1900, ranging from changes in farming technology to colonialism. Many parts of Atlantic Europe endured these kinds of changes and their past and present economic and social structures testify to the sharing of many processes through time.

Selective analyses of change in Ireland between 1600 and 1900 have often been accomplished within the framework of invasions, plantations, exploitation and capitalistic penetration to name a few familiar themes. The examination of the emergence and metamorphosis of different kinds of commons is an innovative departure, at least, for Irish historical geography. While different types of Irish public commons can be ascribed seventeenth-century origins, subsequent events as the author, Professor Andrews argues, promoted conditions where, paradoxically, the emptiest areas became the most densely occupied. Harbours many unsalubrious images of being outside the realms of civilization in the minds of landowners and their substantial tenants, the emergence of congested commons packed with multitudes of people anticipated arrangements of land ownership, which became more widespread in the nineteenth century. By focusing our attention on this specific, but cartographically weakly represented bounded space, Professor Andrews shows that distinctive kinds of squatting communities had emerged by the late eighteenth century and, elusive as the sources may be, it is possible to outline a causal framework to account for their development and

to indicate the forces which sustained their continuity or extinction.

In a country which is supremely committed today to adapting to and innovating with technology it is surprising to note that we have paid little attention to the past contribution of technology in promoting modernisation. Indeed indigenous technology as a complex has usually been the topic of adverse comment. This may not be surprising in a state which has housed its ethnographic memorabilia in a derelict and isolated reformatory which is closed to the public. It is probably no historic accident that a revisionist assessment should come from a member of the staff of a most successful 'folk' museum at Holywood in County Down. While the thrust of his paper is directed towards an analysis of farming innovation adoption in 'high' or commercial farming areas in nineteenth-century Ireland, Jonathan Bell strongly argues that in these and other areas 'common farming' practices were much less inert and damaging activities than they were formerly believed to be even in circumstances where there was severe population pressure. By concentrating on the interface between theory and innovation, common practices and efficient farming, the author predicates that positive rather than negative outcomes resulted from the interaction between apparently opposed systems. In a further challenge, the author invites us to consider what he regards as a mistaken view, namely the fact that nineteenth-century Irish farming production systems were archaic. Drawing on a broad canvas of source material, extending from partisan literature to the assessments of contemporary observers, we are presented with a powerful revisionist appeal which should generate more detailed regional and estate based studies to match against Bell's prospectus.

Studies of social disintegration in Ireland have tended to be largely set in the nineteenth century. Dr. Seán Connolly's paper attempts to remedy this imbalance by addressing the theme in an eighteenth-century context. The authors reliance on a disparate range of highly informative and mainly primary source materials stresses how the skilful use of these documents can yield much evidence on changing social relationships. These underused sources also help to indicate how people defined themselves in relation to their perceived adversaries. He identifies certain parts of the country which remained outside the law in the early eighteenth century but he argues that these kinds of refuges along with various forms of anti-social behaviour, especially banditry and duelling, became far less common as the century drew to a close. Popular violence too did indeed make sudden and sometimes devastating appearances but, it too seems to have been far less blood thirsty than its continental parallels.

While sources which detail crime and social infringements in the eighteenth century are neither numerous nor informative, the exploitation of surrogate material can, as Connolly has demonstrated, yield fundamental insights into the successful extension of state control. Detailed regional work is also required to explain the causes and consequences of different degrees of social integration in a country in which only a few were able to derive substantial material benefit.

It is apposite that Connolly's piece is followed by a detailed local analysis of a major breakdown in public order in the last decade of the eighteenth century in County Wexford, the effective cockpit of the 1798 nationally significant turmoil. Setting the scene for this felicitous local study, Dr. Kevin Whelan uses an early census document to show that there was a high degree of spatial interpenetration in the incidence of Catholics and Protestants in Wexford. Consequently, the fall-out which ensued from the turbulent collision of the groups, both of which had become deeply politicised, was considerable. The results of the violent encounter between the different religious factions was instantly dramatic, precipitating house burnings, redistributions of population, and often death. Whelan also posits that the long-term effects of the turmoil were particularly serious for the Anglican community. This kind of work emphasises the amount of ground research that remains to be completed by solid local studies before we can formulate generalizations concerning the economic, social and psychological consequences of sectarianism. It is also necessary to assess the role of religion as a contributory element prompting the disintegration of public order. Whelan argues religion was one of the chief catalytic forces in Wexford and in other parts of Ireland promoting the outbreak of the 1798 rebellion. The citation of diaries and other local source material gives this kind of analysis a pungent insider perspective of how the events unfolded.

Geographers, ethnographers and other students of Ireland's material heritage have had long standing and successful associations with the study of the Irish house and Irish settlements patterns, yet as Dr. Alan Gailey notes, even after half a century of achievement in this area little progress has been made with the pre-Ordnance Survey record. In a penetrating essay, Dr. Gailey presents a broad and incisive assessment of the canvass of pre-Ordnance Survey house-type research. His work stresses that the most valuable results have been achieved to date in Ulster. The use of estate records, however, may break this logjam and may serve as the key towards unfolding the complex story of variations in house-types especially after the middle of the eighteenth century. The

rich often polychromatic record of an extensive national collection of estate maps also remains largely unexplored in this regard, and the later detailed census returns have, as yet, failed to attract many scrutineers.

Analyses and explanations of the changing character of Ireland's core urban and rural regions has had a venerable place in Irish historical geography and Professor Tom Jones Hughes's essay is a departure from this tradition. It seeks to clarify the different character of two regions distinctively defined by cultural and argicultural traits. The Cavan-Meath divide was one of the many sharp and long-standing divisions of nineteenth-century Ireland. It was a border zone which separated areas which had evolved distinctive modes of production. In this sense, the methodological framework devised by the author can serve well as a general model for an exploration of other such areas in nineteenth-century Ireland, such as the divide between the more cerealist south-east and the predominantly pastoralist south midlands. The varying fortunes of settlement and society is also profitably addressed within the bounded spaces of parish networks which act as a touchstone to measure the stark distinctions that persisted in landscape and life in both areas. The fortunes of several major social classes are examined and novel explanations are offered for their different responses to the forces promoting either change or stability in these two deeply contrasting counties.

Two papers on population conclude the book. One of them is an in depth evaluation of a specific parish register which is explored to provide a broad insight into pre-Famine population in Ulster. William Macafee examines an Anglican register from a predominantly rural area in which 46 per cent of the population were Anglican. As more and more of these registers from different parts of the country are now coming to light together with the discovery of many late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Catholic registers it is evident that, for this period at least, we are no longer going to be dependent on traditionally crude evaluations from generalised data. While admitting that specific problems associated with the register in question do exist, such as the under registration of child burials, the author provides a comprehensive assessment of the local conditions by evaluating such components as life expectancy, age at marriage, fertility and so on. By a careful analysis and comparison of the results with other studies, the author maintains that the results are in line with recent findings but at variance with some of the propositions made by such authorities as Connell. With the advent of sophisticated computer packages, and in the Republic, finance from short-term employment schemes and a popular awakening of interest in

genealogy it is likely that many more studies of this genre will be undertaken. The formulation of a series of regional profiles will allow useful generalizations to be made concerning the relationship between the spatial characteristics of demographic change and more extensive socio-economic movements. We are still only at an initial stage of pre-census evaluation and many basic differentials, such as urban - rural distinctions and ethno-religious differences require exploration.

It is generally agreed that societies do not pass on the road to modernisation through a predetermined series of linked stages. One might also be tempted to claim that the historic demographic behaviour of females also has not been predictable. In a successful attempt to rescue the Irish female from historical oblivion and redress the balance in the historiography of the nineteenth century, David Fitzpatrick shows that the lot of most females was a constant struggle. Fitzpatrick argues that most Irish females occupied an intensely marginal situation in society especially in the early nineteenth century but as marriage, property and asset redistribution became hopelessly entangled the position of women gradually began to change. Here, for example, he is able to isolate and stress the hitherto underrated significance of female celibacy. By examining such critical indices as fertility, age at marriage, and their relationship with modes of inheritance and migration, crucial insights may be gained into understanding the activities of women in nineteenth-century Ireland. It is possible to claim that few females gained substantially from modernisation and emigration as virtually the only potential response by those who wished to escape to a less oppressive life world and 'modernise'! Fitzpatrick has hewn a pioneering furrow in Irish studies. His resultant picture is one of real desolation for so many and it is a timely reminder of the other kinds of famines which took root in Ireland.

An approach of this kind exposed both the challenge and constraints of such constructs as modernisation. It stresses that the outcome of these processes can as easily provoke a deterioration rather than an amelioration in the life style and living conditions. The variegated nature of Irish rural life continues to subvert simple categorisations as this collection of papers clearly demonstrates.