

**Localised Pasts and Presents:  
Critical Viewpoints on The  
Making of County Mayo's  
Commemorative  
Heritages**

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I hereby declare that this is my own work

Signed: Michael Quinn

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## GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIB	Allied Irish Bank
AFrI	Action from Ireland
EC	European Community
ESB	Electricity Supply Board
EU	European Union
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
FÁS	Forasa Áiseanna Saothair (State training and employment authority)
FCA	An Fórsa Cosanta Áitiúil (Reserve defence forces)
MP	Member of Parliament
OPW	Office of Public Works
RTC	Regional Technical College
RTÉ	Radio Telefís Éireann (Public service broadcaster)
TD	Teachta Dáil (Member of Irish Parliament)
UDC	Urban District Council

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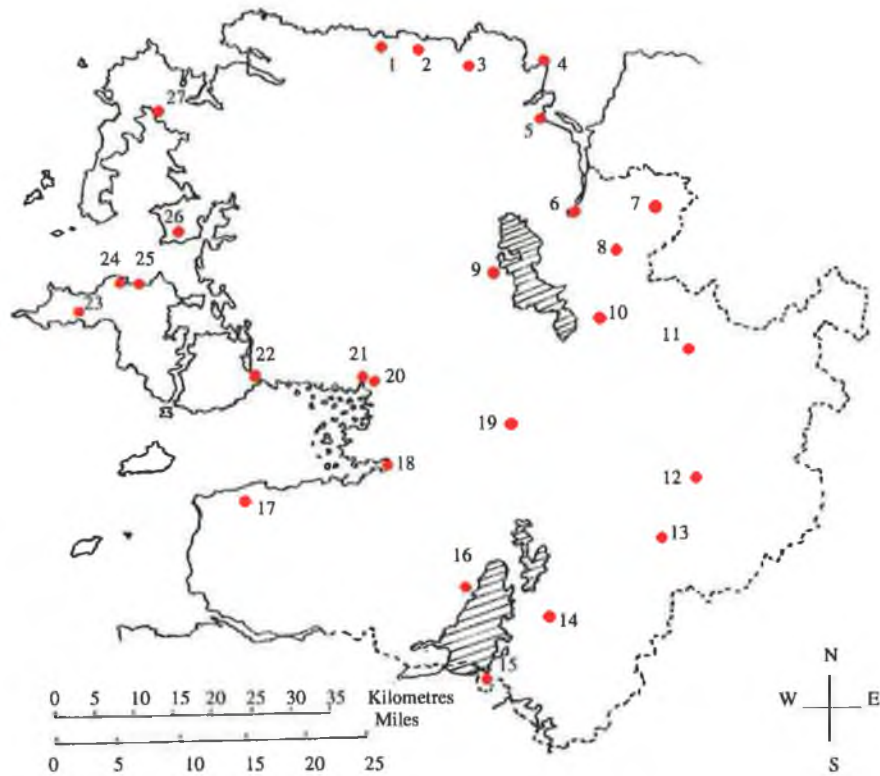
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## ABSTRACT

Both in Ireland and internationally, acts of commemoration have garnered much attention in recent time from political organisations and academic circles, as well as from the media and general public. Much of the focus has been on the ability of commemoration to keep open the old wounds which have long-divided certain communities and territories, or, conversely, on the power of these remembrances to unite opposing factions by finding common ground and avenues for reconciliation. Commemoration has also become increasingly commercialised, as evident through spin-off publications, video-productions and memorabilia, as well as the general rise of what is often loosely termed as the heritage industry. Indeed, our commemorative heritage has today been largely and variously moulded by interested parties and individuals; some with the honourable intention of acknowledging important aspects of history; some with ulterior motives.

This thesis focuses on how the commemorative heritage of County Mayo has come to be constructed, and by whom? In exploring three distinct facets of the county's commemorative heritage, the nature and characteristics of what is held as commonly dear, and how it is remembered is thus investigated. The efforts to establish the Céide Fields centre in Mayo and the 'Mayo 5000' programme it gave rise to, are examined with a view to gauging how commemorative heritage can be employed for commercial gain. The commemoration of the Famine is appraised with regards to the gradual willingness to confront such an episode and the appropriateness that these remembrances took on in the county. Thirdly, the changing modes by which the 1798 Rebellion has been memorialised in Mayo in light of contemporary concerns and political agendas are analysed. The overall investigation will highlight the benefits, yet also the pitfalls which have been encountered as the county has sought to commemorate its heritage – whilst also pointing to the subtleties which give the county unit its distinctiveness.



**County Mayo locations referred to in thesis**

- |                   |                                 |               |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Belderg        | 13. Claremorris                 | 25. Doogort   |
| 2. Céide Fields   | 14. Ballinrobe                  | 26. Doohooma  |
| 3. Ballycastle    | 15. Cong                        | 27. Belmullet |
| 4. Kilcummin Head | 16. Tourmakeady.                |               |
| 5. Killala        | 17. Louisburgh                  |               |
| 6. Ballina        | 18. Westport                    |               |
| 7. Bonniclonlon   | 19. Castlebar                   |               |
| 8. Attymass       | 20. Newport                     |               |
| 9. Lahardane      | 21. Burrishoole                 |               |
| 10. Foxford       | 22. Mullaranny                  |               |
| 11. Swinford      | 23. Dooagh                      |               |
| 12. Knock         | 24. Slievemore Deserted Village |               |



# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

## Introduction

Memory is central to cultural identity. Both in the case of individuals and groups, memory is an essential part of 'who we are'. For the individual, few waking hours are devoid of recall or recollection; only intense concentration on some immediate pursuit can prevent the past from entering the mind. For a community, however, memory is prompted and sustained by written and oral tradition, but more commonly as a group activity, by acts of commemoration.

Commemoration allows members of a particular group – a family, a locality, a county, a nation – to evoke some epoch's splendour, some person's power or genius, or some unique event of glorious triumph or common suffering. A common legacy of memory is viewed as integral to the identity of a group, and protection of this legacy is equally vital to the maintenance of communal solidarity. Thus a nation as an imagined community becomes the continuous updating and retelling of a shared past by consecutive generations. Besides consolidating a sense of identity, this constant renewal and recounting of history serves other objectives. Commemoration can act as a yardstick for the measuring of progress – where we are in relation to the event being commemorated. By re-examining the past, unfinished business can be addressed and a more inclusive society forged while the resurrection of lost detail can often lead to a broadening of perspectives. On the flip-side, commemorations can be seen to stagnate communities, capturing them in a cycle of misguided loyalty to the past. This can polarise rather than unite people and instead of benchmarking progress, it can stifle it altogether.

These accusations have been particularly levelled against the nationalist and loyalist communities of Northern Ireland. Events such as Wolfe Tone's death, the 1916 Rising and Bloody Sunday continue to be celebrated by nationalists, while loyalist ideology clings steadfastly to the anniversaries of the Siege of Derry, the Battle of the Boyne and the Battle of the Somme. For both groups however, as for society in general, the constant re-visitation of the past serves further purposes. Commemoration has the ability to reduce complex historical processes to basic images; a simple statue, for example, can represent victory and legitimise further struggle. The claim to certain spaces can also be habitually re-affirmed and handed down as a legacy.

On a broader scale, the past can often be seen as a safe place for societies to visit communally. While the future is uncertain and unsecure, the past is viewed as tangible, fixed and unalterable. It also has the ability, (usually on one's own side) to absolve sins; actions taken in the past are justified because they are exactly that – taken in the past. Whilst allowing wrongs to be forgiven, a trip to the past can also provide communities with a nation of sameness and stability. Paradoxically, however, in this quest for continuity, commemorations become overlaid with contemporary preoccupations. Every commemoration becomes something of a child of its time; just as perspectives of history are in constant flux, so too are the values of the society engaged in the activity of communal remembering. As memory takes on a history of its own, changes in the way a community commemorates the past reflect changes in politics, culture and society.

### **The County**

This thesis aims to make an in-depth study of events surrounding three specific commemorations, within the spatial confines of County Mayo, namely The Céide Fields centre/'Mayo 5000' programme, The Great Famine, and the 1798 Rebellion. The county, covering 5,397 square kilometres and with a population of 117,500<sup>1</sup>, borders the Atlantic Ocean on the West Coast of the Republic of Ireland and as one of the five counties of the western province of Connaught, it is historically associated with a rugged landscape, poor economic development and a rural lifestyle. The thesis will also evaluate the subjectiveness of collective memory, which has led to the establishment and/or sustainment of such events. Furthermore, with each of the commemorations to be studied having a distinct theme – celebration, remembrance and apotheosis, respectively – the sense of identity which each has conceived or fostered shall be explored. Though the commemorations examined in this work by no means seek to reflect the totality of a Mayo identity as a group, or for that matter to accurately convey the preoccupations of the entire area, they do provide a snapshot of certain histories which the county holds as collectively significant and the manner in which these histories are perpetuated. Examples of other commemorative events, which occur within the county, are those to various republican episodes that most notably take place at the republican plot in the Catholic graveyard in Ballina. Observances to anniversaries of Michael Davitt's birth (1846) and death (1906) have regularly been conducted in Mayo (the recent centenary of his death being a prominent example), particularly in his native village of Straide which also boasts a Davitt Museum. Admiral William Brown, born in Foxford in 1777 but regarded in Argentina as a

father of the nation, is widely commemorated through the efforts of the Admiral Brown Society in Mayo who have fostered strong links between the county and the Argentine Navy, which was founded by Brown. A differing instance of a group seeking to recognise its historical significance is the recently established 'Mayo World War Remembrance Committee', which has held memorial services on Remembrance Sunday and is in the process of establishing a garden of remembrance in Castlebar. In the wider sphere of communal interests, religious and spiritual events in Mayo continue to garner mass appeal as numbers at Knock Shrine's annual novena or the climbing of Croagh Patrick on the last Sunday of July testify. Popular political engagement – evidential in the constituency of Mayo having a 5% above average national turnout in the last general election<sup>2</sup> – continues to warrant widespread attention, and sporting fervour in the county is perennially reflected in the unflinching mass support for Mayo's GAA footballers.

While acts of commemoration for the people of Mayo do not hold the same level of contention as they do in communities with strong sectarian divisions, (e.g. in parts of Northern Ireland) displays of communal remembrance do however express a sense of identity which predominately either feed into nationalist ideology or portray the area in terms of its uniqueness. Though not all the commemorative events examined in this thesis were specifically held on a county-wide basis, the county is undoubtedly the main unit of designation by which a sense of place is associated with both people and events in the Republic of Ireland. Indeed the notion of connectedness to one's county is an interesting and relatively new phenomenon. While long a system of political administration, the idea of affinity or loyalty towards the county unit was at the start of the nineteenth century 'very much the preserve of the landed gentry'.<sup>3</sup> A number of events and occurrences over the next hundred years, however, helped to engrain the notion of county identity amongst the wider collective population. Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Association which campaigned for emancipation did so on a county basis. The mapping of boundaries in the mid-1800s reinforced the notion of county identity, and at this time, 'the growing tendency to identify people by county was probably accentuated by the decline of the Irish language and increased literacy'<sup>4</sup>. Emigration also helped to stress this pattern among the Irish overseas. A number of anti-establishment groups such as the tenant rights movement, Land League and Home Rule movement organised themselves on a county footing. The latter part of the century also witnessed the enactment of the Local Government Act (1898) which effectively ended the influence of the landlord class in Ireland and established a

proliferation of Catholic-dominated county councils, receiving their mandate on the affairs of the county from the electorate of the jurisdiction. A number of nationalist newspapers bearing county names in their titles such as the *Mayo News* (1893), *The Longford Leader* (1897) and the *Meath Chronicle* (1897) were also established around this time.<sup>5</sup>

Associations with county allegiance and identity continued into the early part of the twentieth century, as the names of old IRA units during the War of Independence referred to the county or at least part of. In the 1920s the practice of GAA teams competing for All-Ireland titles whose numbers were made up of players from throughout the county began to replace the previous system of club representation. Despite some officially voiced hostility to the county as an administrative unit by Minister for Local Government and Public Health, Sean T. O'Kelly, in the early years of the independent state, its grounds as a domain for group and individual identity had been firmly established.<sup>6</sup>

This premise was again bolstered in the 1950s and 1960s by further waves of emigration, and improvements to communications and transport systems also negated the significance of the parish as a spatial entity. In recent times the strengthening of local authority government has reflected the notion of a county historical consciousness; county museums now abound and the majority of county councils in the Republic now employ Heritage Officers with the duty of implementing county heritage plans.<sup>7</sup> County councils also participate in, and fund, popular commemorations in their respective areas of remit. The series of county histories published by Geography Publications with Dr. William Nolan as series editor, has also done much to assist this concept. In essence the county is the place one identifies with in terms of birth or residence, and the sphere in which events of national importance occur. While Graham<sup>8</sup> has correctly drawn attention to the waning importance of the county unit in Northern Ireland administrative and cultural structures in recent times, the significance of county identity in the South remains consistently strong. In popular culture this was recently demonstrated in the voting along county lines for contestants in RTE's talent competition 'You're a Star', while the common sporting of county GAA jerseys is also much in evidence. Loyalty to the broader boundaries created by the Ordnance Survey was also recently observed through the fervent support afforded to Munster Rugby team.

## Structure of the Thesis

Other than the stature of the actual event being commemorated, universal key elements of commemorations, which have a bearing on a community's psyche, include the nature and frequency of commemorative events, the location and iconography of memorials and monuments, and the status of the organising body. The exploration of each of the three Mayo-based commemorations is dealt with in this thesis through three central chapters.

Under the title 'Commemoration or Fabrication?: The Céide Fields and 'Mayo 5000' Activities', Chapter Four of this thesis deals with the 'Mayo 5000' anniversary, a programme of various events that took place over the course of 1993. The programme was prompted by the discovery of 5000-year-old farming practices in Céide Fields, North Mayo and the subsequent establishment of an interpretative centre at the site. In contrast to the other remembrances being dealt with in this thesis, 'Mayo 5000' owes its distinctiveness to the fact that it was based on archaeological evidence rather than an historical event as well as being an unlikely commemoration to be repeated (for the foreseeable future at least).

The chapter examines the significance of the archaeological excavations at the Céide Fields and the processes involved in the establishment of an interpretative centre at that location; a development which saw a small locally-based proposal upgraded to large-scale, state-run initiative which brought with it excessive economic expectations. A critical review of the centre is undertaken with a view to appraising how the heritage industry portrays the past and fuels collective memory. The 'Mayo 5000' programme of events, which was designed to coincide with the opening of the Céide Fields centre, is also explored in terms of the nature, significance and objectives of the individual events it comprised. These included the foundation of a sculpture trail in North Mayo, a Mayo-themed conference and a gala concert. Indeed the establishment of the Céide Fields centre and the 'Mayo 5000' programme seems to have skirted between recognition of the past and regional economic aspirations. Central to this chapter then, is an evaluation of which of these goals took precedence, whether or not Céide Fields/'Mayo 5000' can be justly deemed as a commemorative endeavour, and what, if any, is their legacy for the people of Mayo.

Chapter Five, entitled 'Remembrance of Calamity: The Great Famine Commemorations' proceeds to scrutinise the commemorations in Mayo relating to the Great Famine; many of which took place in the mid 1990s, to mark the sesquicentenary of the tragedy. In order to contextualise such events, details are provided on the particular events and effects of the Famine, firstly at a national level and then with regards to Mayo. Thereafter, an examination of previous efforts to mark the centenary of the Famine is provided. Inconspicuous as these were, the Irish Folklore Commission project and the state-sponsored publication *The Great Famine*<sup>9</sup> warrant attention as not only disputed sources of Famine history but also as they highlight the changing attitudes towards the remembrance of the Famine by the time of the next key commemorative period, 50 years later. The chapter then reviews some of the more contentious commemorations of this juncture before exploring the background to the main endeavours to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Famine in Mayo. These efforts are also evaluated critically with regards to their propriety and relevance.

Among the examined is the annual Famine walk between Louisburgh and Delphi in County Mayo, which is scrutinised in relation to its endeavours to commemorate those who died in one of the most infamous tragedies in the county during the Famine, whilst also highlighting the plight of those around the world that still suffer from famine and war. A study is then made of The National Famine Memorial, located at Murrisk, County Mayo. Its unveiling in 1997 constituted the final commemorative act of the government's Famine Commemoration Committee. The memorial – a bronze 'Coffin Ship' sculpture by artist John Behan is examined in terms of the reasons for its commissioning, the site location and the artist's representation.

In 1996, a Mayo Famine exhibition also journeyed as far as London's House of Commons after its tour of the county. Entitled 'The Famine in Mayo 1845-1850', the exhibition was part of Mayo County Council's contribution to the Famine commemorations of that period. Owing to popular demand in Ireland the content material was edited and published in book form in 1998. The chapter explores the nature and scope of this publication – the only one devoted entirely to the history of such a tragedy in the county. An investigation into a proposed interpretive centre at an abandoned 'Famine

village' at Slievemore, Achill, County Mayo is also conducted in this chapter. Here, the benefits and pitfalls of enclosing and interpreting what has hitherto, been a free and accessible yet endangered reminder of the Famines affliction are discussed

Chapter Five will also survey the way in which Famine commemorations relevant to Mayo have been exported for the consumption of overseas audiences. A Behan sculpture entitled 'Arrival', which was installed at the United Nations headquarters in New York, is a variation on the National Famine Memorial in County Mayo and depicts the survivors from the 'Coffin Ship' embarking in the United States of America. Also in New York, The Irish Hunger Memorial, opened in Battery Park in 2002, comprises largely a ruined 'Famine cottage', which was transported to New York from the townland of Carradoogan near Attymass, County Mayo. The chapter concludes with a summary of these Mayo-based events and initiatives and seeks to establish the meaning of commemorating the Famine for the people of the county and beyond.

Chapter Six, entitled 'The Memorialisation of the 1798 Rebellion', Chapter Six addresses the commemoration of perhaps the most conspicuously remembered aspect of Mayo's past. Seventeen ninety-eight provides an ideal opportunity to chart and study the history and progression of commemorations surrounding a particular historic event. As a backdrop to this, details are provided on key events of the Rebellion in Mayo. Though not widely celebrated on its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1848, the Rebellion was given some recognition at this time by the members of Young Ireland, and this homage is noted through their literature and the establishment of Confederate Clubs across the country. Particular emphasis is given in this chapter to the centenary commemorations of 1798. The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the rebellion was marked at national and local level by an intriguing struggle between various groupings of Irish nationalists to control the commemorations and these efforts are explored at length. The change in political climate from one remembrance to the next is documented as the chapter moves on to study the nature of commemorations in the Free State in 1948 and what was by then firmly construed as a Catholic revolt. The principal parties behind the organisation of each key commemoration shall also be investigated while a number of locally organised remembrances – particularly the erection of memorials are also reviewed. Throughout its history, the erection of



monuments, memorials and insignias have played an important part in commemorating 1798 and an examination of a number of these markers is provided.

The bicentenary of the Rebellion brought about a telling reinterpretation of the Rebellion; one which sought to re-establish the 'forgotten' efforts of Presbyterians and Protestants in its execution and which also sought to emphasise the egalitarian principles behind the event. This review of the past was wholly endorsed and indeed assisted by the government and its 1798 Commemoration Committee (a continuance of its Famine Commemoration Committee, whose membership included scholars such as Kevin Whelan) as well as bodies in Northern Ireland such the Community Relations Councils who attempted to utilise the unifying rather than dividing power of history in the era surrounding the signing of the Good Friday agreement. Thus, a certain slant was put on the commemoration, which was not to everyone's agreement. These issues are investigated as the main national and Mayo bi-centennial commemorative events are charted. 'Memorialisation of the 1798 Rebellion' concludes with a summary and critique of the principal events to remember 1798 in county Mayo and notes the *zeitgeist*, which they respectively captured.

Based on the evidence gathered over the three core chapters, the concluding chapter of this thesis aims to establish the significance of each of the three remembrances addressed in terms of their connotations for the people of Mayo. It will question which contemporary concerns have been allowed to colour these commemorations and to what end. More broadly the chapter will seek to evaluate the societal relevance of the act of commemoration.

**References:**

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.cso.ie/statistics/popofeachcountycity2002.thm> Accessed 22 August 2004.
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.cso.ie> Accessed 24 August 04.
- <sup>3</sup> M. E. Daly, (Ed.), *County and Town: One Hundred Years of Local Government in Ireland* (Institute of Public Administration, Dublin, 2001), p. 4.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- <sup>5</sup> H. Oram, *The Newspaper Book: A History of Newspapers in Ireland 1649-1983* (M.O. Books, Dublin, 1983), pp. 89-90.
- <sup>6</sup> Daly, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
- <sup>7</sup> See for example, *Mayo County Council Draft Heritage Plan 2005-2010*.
- <sup>8</sup> B. Graham, review of *Tyrone: History and Society* and *Armagh: History and Society* in *Journal of Historical Geography* Vol. 29, No. 1, January, (2003), p. 140.
- <sup>9</sup> R. D. Edwards and T. D. Williams, (Eds.), *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History 1845-52* (Browne and Nolan, Dublin, 1956).

**Chapter Two**  
**Literature Review**

## Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to this thesis's overriding concern with matters pertaining to commemorative heritage. Such literature includes that which deals with issues of historical remembrance and commemoration, both internationally and with particular regard to Ireland. Material relating to the county unit and specifically Mayo is reviewed. Applicable literature regarding the Céide Fields/Mayo 5000, the Famine and the 1798 Rebellion is addressed, especially that which deals with the modes by which these events are remembered, and indeed their legacy for contemporary Irish society.

## Historiographical Perspectives on Commemoration

Literature concerning the theme of collective memory in an Irish context comprises a limited but growing body of academic scholarship. Many of the discourses relating to the subject were prompted by the widespread commemorations that marked the bicentenary of the 1798 rebellion. Previous international studies into the matter had come from American, British and French scholars who themselves had often been motivated by events surrounding the anniversaries of historic events such as World Wars I and II and various domestic revolutions. The notion of debate into collective memory and commemoration would also seem a natural progression from the revisionist debates of the 1970s and 1980s. With an increased emphasis on the importance of value-free history, there soon followed in the 1990s a growing tendency to examine the validity of society's relationship with its respective pasts.

Internationally, the notion of the contemporary meaning and relevance attached to past events had become a substantive subject in its own right in the 1980s. Examples of this include the American academic David Lowenthal's *The Past is a Foreign Country*, which studied the insatiable public appetite for consumption of the past, whilst also examining the benefits and costs of society's relationship with history.<sup>1</sup> British historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger deconstructed a wide range of European and English traditions through their study of commemorative rituals and symbols in *Invention of Tradition*<sup>2</sup>, while in France, Pierre Nora's seminal 1992 publication *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (translated to *Realms of Memory*) postulated the notion of 'realms of memory' – an entity, material or non-material, which has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community.<sup>3</sup>

Given the attention which the subject of history, memory and commemoration has attracted from international academics, Ian McBride's *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, published in 2001 was certainly timely – even more so when one considers the frequency with which opposing communities in Ireland have invoked the past, erected monuments and observed anniversaries.<sup>4</sup> A principal text on themes of communal recall in Ireland, McBride's collection of essays comprises an interdisciplinary and international range of contributors, who address the relationship between the past and the present in Irish society and the ways in which identities have been moulded through the evocation, commemoration and mythologisation of crucial episodes in Irish history. McBride asserts the contention of French academic Ernest Renan that remembrance is essential to national identity and that 'a shared heritage of glorious triumphs and common suffering'<sup>5</sup> takes precedent over familiar criteria – racial origins, language religious affiliation, natural frontiers – in adequately explaining the division of western Europe into nation-states. In an Irish context, McBride expresses the view that the interpretation of the past has been at the heart of national conflict and his book is thus concerned with the 'way in which historical consciousness has been shaped and structured by oral traditions, icons and monuments, ritual ceremonies and re-enactments'.<sup>6</sup> He puts forward the idea that our understanding of pivotal moments in Irish history is under constant change owing to the pressures of 'individual actors, cultural patterns, social forces and technological advances'.<sup>7</sup>

*History and Memory in Modern Ireland* has certainly helped to define a number of the main concepts, arguments and concerns in what is an emerging field of enquiry in an Irish context. Some of the more contemplative issues addressed in the book include a review of the uncomfortable role the government has played in state commemorations by David Fitzpatrick, the significance of monuments as a means of remembrance by Joep Leersen and a discussion on the selectivity of social memory in Northern Ireland by Enda Longley. The majority of essays in the book are concerned with the use and abuse of history in the shaping of either a Unionist or Republican identity. McBride pronounces that 'whenever the Irish past is invoked we must therefore ask ourselves not only by which groups and to what end, but also against whom?'<sup>8</sup> In following such a line of debate, the authors unfortunately skim over, or fail to address details pertaining to communal celebrations, acts of reconciliation, which involve recognition of each other's historic adversities or indeed the notion of a singular Irish identity. Another publication, which has

addressed commemorative practices in Ireland, albeit rather superficially, is Brian Walker's *Dancing to History's Tune*.<sup>9</sup> In a chapter entitled 'Commemorations, festivals and public holidays' Walker takes an overview of the history of St. Patrick's Day festivities as well as observances of the Easter Rising of 1916, the 12<sup>th</sup> of July and Remembrance Sunday. Though lacking in-depth academic critique, Walker does draw attention to the historic and deep-rooted nature of these events.

A more recent publication, which does highlight the ability of commemorative activity to unite, is Eberhard Bort's *Commemorating Ireland* – a collection of essays based upon papers that were delivered at a 1998 University of Edinburgh conference concerning commemoration.<sup>10</sup> As with McBride's publication, Bort and his contributors examine the assorted commemorative events which have taken place in regard to some of the most commonly evoked aspects of Irish history, namely 1798, the Famine, Battle of the Boyne and World War I. However, unlike *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, which tended to focus on the polarity which commemorative events create or sustain, *Commemorating Ireland* leans toward the apprehension that remembrance of the past can and should lend itself to the establishment of a more cohesive society.

Bort embarks upon setting out the advantages associated with acts of commemoration; the ability to measure social progress, the urge fulfilled in re-examining and understanding the past for its own sake and the uniting of societies through 'creating common images, thus providing social and cultural glue, collective reassurance, shared belief, coherence and identity'.<sup>11</sup> While he acknowledges that occasions can present themselves whereby the past can 'colonise the future, limiting options and possibilities' and that commemorations can sometimes be 'an unwanted burden, a hollow ritual, an ironic distancing of the past', the author prefers to focus on the concept that commemorative events should be 'healing, bonding experiences and should help us focus on contemporary challenges'.<sup>12</sup> Bort lists some of the most famous international events whose commemoration have been highly evocative or contentious; the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, the fall of communism in Europe and more recently, the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York. He closes by posing a series of questions; 'Do we strike the right balance between actively remembering and actively forgetting to liberate ourselves from the past? Is there too much commemoration going on? Are we developing a new inclusive culture of commemoration?' Although he concedes he does not have the answers

to all of these uncertainties, Bort does believe the volume as a whole points 'with some confidence to an Ireland neither blind to its multi-faceted past nor its plural and diverse future'.<sup>13</sup> While Bort may be accused of being somewhat naively positive regarding the power of commemoration in reconciling the conflicting factions of Northern Ireland, the recent allocation of funding for Orange Order parades to become more inclusive and tourist-friendly (the so-called 'Orange-Fest') may point towards an emerging culture of deferential commemoration. It is certainly true that although still somewhat contentious, the Apprentice Boys parade in Derry has latterly undergone something of transformation in a bid to be more encompassing.

Mark McCarthy has also charted the gradual shift away from the remembrance of a linear form of history towards a more 'multivocal' and pluralistic approach to the past, which has taken place on the island of Ireland and beyond in the introduction to his edited volume *Ireland's Heritages: Critical Perspectives on Memory and Identity*.<sup>14</sup> These practices of remembering and forgetting are often undertaken in a bid to protect one's own cultural identity in light of the perceived threat from another and this theme is furthered in the first section of the book entitled 'Commemoration and the Politics of Heritage'. Containing contributions on the disputed role of the heritage industry as vehicle of remembrance by Guy Beiner, the 'overlooked' history of the Connaught Rangers by John Morrissey and discourses on the notion of Irish identity as has been perpetuated by the diaspora in Australia and America from Lindsay Proudfoot, Dianne Hall and Deborah Sugg Ryan, the opening section of the book is particularly timely in light of the wealth of contemporary commemorative activity. In 2005, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ending of World War I was marked across the world and special services were held to remember the liberation of Auschwitz concentration camp from Nazi control. In Ireland, 2006 has witnessed a resurgence of state participation in the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1916 rising while even more recently the government was also to the fore in acknowledging the Irishmen who lost their lives in the Battle of the Somme in the same year. The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the Maze Prison hunger strikers has also given rise to debate and recall, while a number of the major political parties in the South have celebrated noted 'birthdays' of late. Britain recently marked 1st anniversary of the London terrorist bombing and no doubt the eyes of the world will focus on America as the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9/11 al-Qaeda attacks approaches.

The relevance of statuary as a tool of commemoration is considered in this thesis. Specific evaluations of such monuments which informs this discourse have been made by Judith Hill in *Public Sculpture in Ireland*,<sup>15</sup> by Gary Owens in his contribution to *Ireland: Art into History* entitled 'Nationalist Monuments in Ireland, c1870-1914: Symbolism and Ritual',<sup>16</sup> and by Nuala C. Johnson in 'Sculpting Heroic Histories: Celebrating the Centenary of the 1798 Rebellion' in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*.<sup>17</sup> The authors examine the means by which public monuments were used in Ireland to express nationalist aspirations and to transmit political ideas, particularly at the turn of the nineteenth century when 'statuemanía' was at its peak in Europe. These two works investigate some of the monuments erected to commemorate 1798, especially those which marked the centenary of the event, and also the way in which symbolism and ritualistic devices have been used to further specific ideologies.

### **Céide Fields/'Mayo 5000'**

Although there is not a great deal of literature specific to the Céide Fields and the 'Mayo 5000' celebrations, the interpretative centre has been succinctly and critically reviewed by David Brett in *The Construction of Heritage*.<sup>18</sup> A small sample of the burgeoning research into the heritage industry which has been examined are the works of Prentice and Vergo, respectively entitled *Tourism and Heritage Attraction*<sup>19</sup> and *The New Museology*.<sup>20</sup> Moya Kneafsey investigated the role of landscape and its relationship to society and tourism with particular regards to the Céide Fields in her contribution: 'A landscape of memories: Heritage and Tourism in Mayo' to Kockel's *Landscape, Heritage and Identity: Case Studies in Irish Ethnography*.<sup>21</sup> Other relevant material, which further explores themes of place, identity and tourism, include specific contributions to O'Connor and Cronin *Tourism in Ireland: A Critical Analysis*.<sup>22</sup> Literature from brochures, guides and pamphlets pertaining to Céide Fields/Mayo 5000 also inform this section of the thesis, as do contemporary newspaper reports particularly those from the Ballina based *Western People* which did most to champion the cause of the establishment of the interpretative centre.

### **The Famine**

With regard to literature on the Famine, there had been a noticeable dearth of work in this area prior to the sesquicentenary of the event. Of the two earliest books on the tragedy there was a marked contrast in their historiographical approach. Published in 1962,



*1852* and *A Death Dealing Famine*<sup>31</sup> stand out as accessible and thought-provoking, yet highly researched pieces of work. In an uncompromising and thorough style, Kinealy was, it appears, seeking to revise the revisionists in what is a general history of the event. As part of her wider investigation, these two books also contain a deal of material on the Famine in Mayo. Following on from the economic analysis of the Famine in *Ireland: A New Economic History 1780-1939*<sup>32</sup>, Cormac Ó Gráda provided a welcome and more concentrated study of the event in his 1999 publication *Black '47 and Beyond*.<sup>33</sup> In it he combines a range of interdisciplinary methods such as historical analysis, economic theory and folklore analysis to paint a fuller and more rounded picture of the Famine. An appreciation of the folkloric sources relating to the Famine is also the aim of Cathal Póirtéir's *Famine Echoes*,<sup>34</sup> in which he compiles material from the 1940s Folklore Commission collection in an order, which follows the chronology of the Famine itself. Under headings, which deal with subjects such as such as Famine want, deaths, burials and relief works, Póirtéir seeks to give voice to the ordinary people who suffered in the Famine. The book contains the testimony of a number of informants from Mayo.

Póirtéir also edited the compact but impressive *The Great Irish Famine*<sup>35</sup> as part of the Thomas Davis Lecture Series, which comprised a collection of congruous essays from a range of noted historians with particular expertise on the Famine. A number of contemporary reports from the Famine era were edited and reissued during what might be loosely termed as the 'commemorative period'. Of these, and with particular reference to the West of Ireland is *Annals of the Famine in Ireland*<sup>36</sup> – the travelogue of American Protestant widow and philanthropist Asenath Nicholson, who provides profound details on Famine scarcity in Mayo and surrounding counties. The effects of the Famine in specific regions is also brought home in *Mapping the Great Irish Famine*<sup>37</sup> by Kennedy, Ell, Crawford and Clarkson, which despite its numerically quantifying style, manages to lay bare the stark realities of the Famine period.

Two further publications of note, which came in the wake of the Famine commemorations, are Tóibín and Ferriter's *The Irish Famine*<sup>38</sup> and McLean's *The Event and Its Terror*.<sup>39</sup> The former is most creditable for the intelligent overview of Famine literature by Colm Tóibín, who dissects the emotion (or lack of), which has been brought to bear of the writing of the history of the Famine. McLean – an American academic – tackles the relevancy of cultural memory in the present in his work. In what is one of the

most recent publications on the Famine, the author studies the contemporary legacy of the event and in doing so evaluates some of the less appropriate commemorative events which took place in the mid 1990s. At the time a number of these did come in for some criticism, not least in contributions to the *Irish Times* by journalists such as Fintan O'Toole and John Waters.<sup>40</sup>

Although one of the worst areas of Famine deprivation, there is a paucity of published material specific to the event in Mayo, and chapters in county-based histories have tended to use more general accounts of the tragedy as a source of reference. A chapter in Donald Jordan's *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland: County Mayo from Plantation to Land War*,<sup>41</sup> does, however, stand out as a well researched statistical analysis of the calamity. Ivor Hamrock's *The Famine in Mayo: A Portrait from Contemporary Sources*<sup>42</sup>, which was compiled as part of Mayo County Council's contribution to the sesquicentenary of the event (and which is discussed further in Chapter Five), has also gone some way to correcting the imbalance. Notwithstanding, the majority of writings on the Famine in Mayo tend to be more localised by focusing solely on the Poor Law union. Articles on the Famine in Westport have appeared in *Cathair na Mairt: The Journal of the Westport Historical Society*<sup>43</sup>, while Swinford Historical Society has compiled a small booklet entitled *An Gorta Mór: Famine in the Swinford Union*.<sup>44</sup> Sections relating to the event in the immediate area are also common in local publications; a chapter in *Achill Island: Archaeology – History – Folklore*<sup>45</sup> by Teresa McDonald is one example. With regards to the commemorative events that have taken place in the county to mark the Famine, material is primarily sourced from contemporary local newspaper accounts.

### **The 1798 Rebellion**

Despite the abundance of published material relating to the 1798 Rebellion, there remains a deficiency of academic research with regards to the French campaign under General Humbert in the West of Ireland in the late summer of that year. Published in 1876, Charles H. Teeling's, *Sequel to the History of the Irish Rebellion of 1798: A Personal Narrative* is one of the earliest historic accounts, which deals with events in the West at any length.<sup>46</sup> Like later versions, however, such as Richard Hayes' *The Last Invasion of Ireland: When Connaught Rose*<sup>47</sup>, published in 1937 and Thomas Pakenham's *The Year of Liberty: The Great Irish Rebellion of 1798*<sup>48</sup> published in 1969, studies of the western rebellion, although informative, are narrative driven and lack analytical form. To date, the

most competent if somewhat compressed studies of 'The Year of the French', are recent contributions by Harman Murtagh to Póirtéir's *The Great Irish Rebellion* published in 1998 and to the 2003 tome: *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, edited by Bartlett, Dickson, Keogh and Whelan.<sup>49</sup> Prior to this, Marianne Elliot had expertly investigated the links between revolutionary Ireland and France in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and the prelude to Humbert's mission, in her influential *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France*<sup>50</sup> published in 1982. Another important source is the contemporary account of Joseph Stock, the Church of Ireland bishop who was held captive by the French in his Killala residence for the duration of the Franco-Irish successes. Originally published anonymously, it was long known who had penned the account, which was subsequently republished in the 1980s in light of the success of the RTE drama *The Year of the French*.<sup>51</sup>

In connection with the bicentenary commemorations of 1798, a number of articles provide well-researched insights into the commemorative efforts which marked that particular era, whilst also highlighting the historic nature which remembrances of the Rebellion have taken on. Of these, Timothy J. O'Keefe's 'The Efforts to Celebrate the United Irishmen: The '98 Centennial' is the most informed and comprehensive, while Senia Paseta's '1798 in 1898: The Politics of Commemoration' is also a valuable studies.<sup>52</sup> Kevin Whelan too, comprehensively reviewed the changing narrative of the Rebellion throughout the nineteenth century in *The Tree of Liberty*.<sup>53</sup> Another work, which in part deals with the centenary of 1798 as well as the Rebellion's influence on earlier revolutionary protagonist, such as the Young Ireland movement, is *Rebellion and Remembrance in Modern Ireland*.<sup>54</sup> Edited by Laurence Geary, this publication arose from a 1798-themed symposium held in University College Cork during the bicentennial year. *Who Fears to Speak of '98? Commemoration and the Continuing Impact of the United Irishmen*<sup>55</sup> was also inspired by the bicentenary of the Rebellion. Although a creditable history of the commemoration of 1798 both north and south of the border from the late nineteenth century up to 1998, the book, (which was compiled by Peter Collins, Secretary of the Belfast-based, United Irishmen Commemoration Society, which has as its brief, the promotion of 'the United Irishmen as part of our common heritage and history') is somewhat over assuring of the inclusive spirit engendered by the bicentennial commemorations. Primarily based on folkloric remembrances, a more localised study of commemorations is undertaken by Guy Beiner in his thesis *To Speak of '98: The Social*

*Memory and Vernacular Historiography of Bliain na BhFrancach* which has recently been published in book form.<sup>56</sup> In it the author looks at the remembrance of the French invasion of Connaught. Through the study of documented folklore traditions, he analyses the way in which provincial communities narrated, interpreted and reconstructed their past.

In a number of the many publications, which were designed to coincide with the bicentenary of the Rebellion it became something of a common practice not only to record the historic events and the new perspectives, which recent studies had provided, but also to add a philosophical reflection on the modern relevance of the Rebellion. Mary Cullen's edited volume *1798: 200 Years of Resonance*, is an example of such work.<sup>57</sup> Published in 1998, it opens with an analysis of The United Irishmen and Wolfe Tone, moves on to examine the role of women in the Rebellion and the guiding principles of its leaders and closes with studies of the significance of 1798 commemoration and an investigation into the politics of memory by Martin Mansergh and Kevin Whelan respectively. Mansergh was special adviser to the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern while Whelan, an historic geographer was the chief consultant to the Government at this time and thus played a key role in guiding the bicentenary commemoration.

It was this role of Whelan's, in conjunction with other Irish historians such as Thomas Bartlett and Daire Keogh, which led to a factious renewal of the long running revisionist versus nationalist/post-revisionist debate. Whelan himself drew particular criticism from revisionist historians who accused him of being party to a manipulative state-orchestrated commemoration. The dispute, played out between the opposing factions through the pages of the *Irish Times*<sup>58</sup> and publications such as Whelan's *The Tree of Liberty*, Tom Dunne's *Rebellions: Memoir, Memory and 1798*<sup>59</sup> and Roy Foster's *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland*,<sup>60</sup> as well as a host of other newspaper and journal articles from historians of various viewpoints, centred on Whelan being charged (particularly by Dunne) with distorting the historical details, which fed into an idealistically and politically motivated commemoration in post Good-Friday Agreement Ireland. The government's chief historic consultant, was, it was claimed, guilty of altering his view of the Rebellion from that of a primarily sectarian/agrarian conflict to that of an egalitarian, politicised and visionary insurrection. Charges of claiming ownership of 1798, glossing over rebel atrocities and fabricating facts concerning the establishment of an all-inclusive 'Wexford Republic' were further levelled against the academic.

In a review of Dunne's *Rebellions*, Whelan used the opportunity to hit back at his detractors and asserted that the events of 1998 were led, not by the political establishment, but rather, by historians whose work 'has now moved decisively in a post-nationalist and post-revisionist direction'. According to him a rapidly maturing Ireland of the Robinson presidency, the Celtic Tiger and the Good Friday Agreement had given a platform to a renewed civility in Irish discourse, in which many different voices could speak and divergent views be held without the malevolent partisanship and divisiveness which had marked the 1970s and 1980s. Further to Whelan's argument was the challenge that the commemorations met a real need, emanating from communities themselves, who took ownership of their past and of the commemoration through a plethora of locally-based events; thus dispelling the theory that the commemorations were concocted by the state. The author highlighted what he felt was disproportionate attention attributed by his detractors to incidents of sectarianism in the Rebellion, in particular the massacre of 200 Protestants civilians at Scullabogue, Co. Wexford.

Details on commemorative activity in Mayo dating from the centennial through to the bicentennial are largely sourced from newspaper archives such as the *Connaught Telegraph*, *Mayo News* and *Western People*. Published local histories and history journals from historical societies in the county have also provided valuable material and reference points. This information also is bolstered by the broader discussions on the remembrance of history, particularly those relating specifically to the commemoration of 1798.

### **Conclusion**

With regards to the entity of the county unit, Mary Daly has been one of the few writers to delve into the idea that shared historical events have given rise to a sense of county allegiance and connectedness, and thus identity.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, a plethora of county histories with varying levels of ambition have been published across the country regularly since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most accomplished and uniform of these is without doubt the County: History and Society Series, edited by William Nolan which commenced with County Tipperary in 1985 and has most recently published its sixteenth volume, that of County Fermanagh. In the introduction to the volume on Tyrone, Proudfoot asks:

“The geographical identity of a place, that elusive and unique sense of difference which distinguishes each locality from its neighbours, is notoriously hard to define and even harder to uncover. What is it that gives a townland or village, a city or a region, its character and sense of identity? And how, whether as historians, archaeologists or geographers but almost always as outsiders are we to recapture these identities and render them intelligible to others? How, in short, are we to distinguish between one place and another in terms which do justice to the complex human relationships and experiences which – past and present – manifestly form an important part of each one of them?”<sup>62</sup>

It is here that this thesis attempts to fit into the corpus of work on the county – specifically Mayo. By examining not just the history of a given area, but the modes by which contemporary societies communally interact with that history, can we perhaps seek to understand just one of the facets which differentiates, and indeed makes comparable, one community to another. Thus the nuances of how and what a community chooses to remember can possibly provide a fuller and richer view of the relationship between history and society.

As such, this work is entering onto relatively new literary grounds. While place, and indeed the county unit, has long been a favoured subject matter of the historian, there has been relatively little examination conducted on themes of identity within given locales in Ireland (Catholic and Protestant culture in Northern Ireland notwithstanding). This thesis aims then, to show how commemoration of a localised past can thus provide insights into such identities.

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## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

## Introduction

In this chapter the various methodologies employed in researching this thesis are discussed. The thesis itself examines three specific remembrances within the spatial confines of the county unit of Mayo, and, as such, can be loosely classified as a work of 'local history'. Raymond Gillespie – one of the eminent voices of local history studies in Ireland – has argued that 'it is people that should be the main focus of Irish local historian's efforts' and that 'what remains as a major lacuna in local history' is an understanding not of the material worlds which so many previous discussions have given rise to, 'but of the mental worlds of those who lived in the past.'<sup>1</sup> In accordance with this notion, the emphasis of this thesis is very much on both the human, and psychological acts of communal remembrances. Gillespie further notes that within the realm of local or regional studies, it is 'communities of interest' (societies with shared activities and historical experience) who do much to determine what Estyn Evans has called 'the personality' of a particular locale.<sup>2</sup>

In essence, this thesis delves beyond the confines of what is commonly termed as local history. It has been contended that 'to historians, local/regional is preferred to differentiate subject matter from the national or international emphasis of other, often traditional, forms of history.'<sup>3</sup> In this work, however, and in order to avoid falling 'victim to the difficulty of 'particular places'' (that is, seeking to solely explain 'what is unique to an area rather than what was normal in that kind of society'<sup>4</sup>), attention is given to the national narrative and perspective in an effort to provide comparison as well as contrast. If the term 'local' is slightly unfaithful then so too is the designation of 'history'. This thesis deals with the remembrance of events and epochs ranging from the Neolithic up to the mid-nineteenth century. The commemorative activities themselves relating to these events and epochs span from the 1840s to the present day, with a large number having occurred in the 1990s. Here then, the thesis shifts away from historical perspective into what may be the field of contemporary studies. This, however begs the question as to when does the past become history? When indeed does 'contemporary' metamorphose into 'yesteryear'?

While procedures in gathering information for each of the chapters in this study do overlap, there are also specific methods undertaken, which correspond to the nature of the data being sought. For this reason the research methodologies of Chapters Four to Six are dealt with separately below.

### Researching the Céide Fields/'Mayo 5000' Activities

Archaeological journals relating to the excavation at Céide Fields provide the core research material for the opening section of the chapter, while a range of other published works on topics such as tourism, place and nationalism have aided in critiquing the Céide Fields centre both as a heritage enterprise and as a vehicle of historico-cultural interpretation. Local newspapers were of particular relevance in charting the centre's progression from conception to completion as well as cataloguing the various events, which 'Mayo 5000' comprised. Where possible these details are supplemented and also at times contrasted by the views and sentiments of national newspapers and periodicals with a circulation beyond the county.

Access provided by the Mayo County Development Board to the initial proposal for a centre at the Céide Fields provided a welcome and interesting means of comparing the original intention for a modest development with the comparatively high-profile construction which was subsequently sanctioned by the state. Another promising document which the credentials of researching this work provided access to was the *Evaluation of Mayo 5000 Programme* which was commissioned by the company behind the event, which now operates as a tourism development body called Mayo Naturally. This document, however, characterised much of the written sources relating to either 'Mayo 5000' or indeed the Céide Fields, as it focused heavily on the financial implications of the year's events. As such there was a distinct paucity of documented evidence on the cultural or intangible benefits of the 1993 programme of activities in the county.

With the documented data regarding the Céide Fields/'Mayo 5000' containing such a propensity for economic distillation, it was decided to augment the appropriate written sources with the personal views and experiences of a number of people involved in the establishment or management of the centre and/or the execution of 'Mayo 5000' activities. Such an approach, enacted through specific questioning in e-mails and also through semi-structured telephone and face-to-face interviews<sup>5</sup>, met with a restricted response. Though certain protagonists were obliging and forthcoming with information there was a strong tendency among respondents to recount the factuality of events, much of which had already been noted through documented sources such as local newspapers. There also appeared to be a lack of willingness on the part of respondents to comment either

favourably or unfavourably on the legacy of the Céide Fields centre or on the worth of 'Mayo 5000'.

A number of guidebooks and pamphlets relating to the Céide Fields and the 'Mayo 5000' events were of use and helped to provide an insight into the mood which surrounded the opening of the centre and the related activities. A visit to, and tour of the Céide Fields centre by this writer helped to inform a critique of the interpretive elements of the centre while participatory observation was conducted on a component of the tour which involves visitors being escorted and informed by guides in an outdoor designated section of the actual fields, where they are encouraged to use probing instruments to 'locate' subterranean wall structures lying beneath the blanket bog. As the only enduring manifestation of the 'Mayo 5000' programme, field trips were also undertaken to a number of the Tír Saile sculpture trail sites. Such visits brought about a greater understanding of what one of the key events of the programme set out to achieve, and along with trips to the Céide Fields itself, provided an opportunity for the taking of relevant photographs and also for familiarisation with the barony of Erris – the region which was due to benefit most from the centre's establishment.

### **Researching the Famine Commemorations**

It was assumed that many of the Famine remembrances in Mayo could be quite localised and therefore inconspicuous by nature – simple markers to denote otherwise unmarked gravesites perhaps. An appeal was thus made through local press in Mayo for information regarding commemorative acts or memorials within the county. Though the success of such a request is difficult to estimate, a number of events and markers relating to the Famine on a local or parish level were brought to the author's attention. The Mayo County Library Service were of assistance in proving background information to an exhibition and subsequent book which it had produced as part of Mayo County Council's efforts to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event. The library also provided access to papers it had received from local groups and schools as part of a failed nationwide project to compile an inventory of Famine-related sites around the country. It was clear, however, that what could have been an apposite act of commemoration and a valuable source of local and national history, was lost in Mayo as elsewhere through poor central administration and lack of public awareness. The inventories that were returned

also frequently highlighted the varying levels of local knowledge of the Famine and its continued relevance to respective communities.

Westport Famine Commemoration Group were also co-operative in providing the documented proposal which it had compiled and presented to the Government's Famine Commemoration Committee in the mid 1990s. Their successful submission proposed to have the National Famine Memorial located outside the town at the foot of Croagh Patrick. Viewing of a video entitled *Famine Ship*, which explores the construction of the monument and features its creator, John Behan, was also conducted. The video, which had been previously aired on RTÉ television helped in not only understanding the sculpting but also the conceptual processes involved in the monument's formation. Another video of benefit to the research process, and one which was sourced through the public appeal, was provided by the Mayo Film and Video Club. This audio-visual source featured the mass which was celebrated in Knock Basilica in 1997 to commemorate Famine victims in the West of Ireland and was beneficial in sourcing the pertinent homily given by Monsignor Faul and the speech delivered by distinguished guest, Lord Alton.

Participant observation was also undertaken on the annual Famine walk at Doolough in County Mayo, which is organised by non-governmental organisation AFRI, who campaign on global human rights issues. The organisation provided details on themselves as well as information on previous walks, and allowed this writer to distribute questionnaires among participants in the 2004 walk. The questionnaire was designed to build up a profile of participants in the walk in relation to personal data as well as attitudes and behaviour with regards to the walk and to Famine commemoration in general. Advised by the methodological guidelines set out by Kitchin and Tate<sup>6</sup>, the questionnaire sought to gather both analytical and descriptive answers through open and closed questions. As with most questionnaires, the responses represent a sample of the entirety of those who took part in the event. Of approximately 300 walkers, 62 were given questionnaires of which 51 were returned completed. While this provides a significant margin for 'non-response error', issues also arise concerning the sampled group, as there seemed to be a tendency towards middle-aged professional city-dwellers. This was perhaps due to the fact that the questionnaire was distributed for completion within the congenial surrounds of a public house, where refreshments were being served following the walk. As such, the main group in attendance were those who were waiting for a number of chartered buses, which had

been organised to transport walkers to and from urban centres. It is possible also that local participants may have been more inclined to return directly home on completion of the walk. There was also a clear lack of child and teenage respondents, significant numbers of whom had been clearly evident on the walk.

Published material, comprising both local and national newspaper reportage, once again formed a large part of the methodology relating to research of the commemorations. Further field trips were also undertaken to sites of Famine remembrance throughout the county in order to collect photographic evidence.

### **Researching the 1798 Rebellion Commemorations**

Microfilm copies of local newspapers formed an integral area of research for this chapter of the thesis. This source was especially useful in investigating the commemorations of 1798, which were held in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these commemorative acts involved the unveiling of memorials by invited dignitaries or political representatives, who often provided lengthy orations as well as religious services. Of great benefit to this research the fact that in newspapers at this time, 'there was a far greater proportion of straight, often verbatim reporting of sermons, speeches, the proceeding of annual meetings...'<sup>7</sup> This emphasis correspondingly negated the possibility of over-written slanted news features and led to a more balanced mode of reporting. Hard copies of these newspapers continued to provide information regarding commemorations of 1798 up to present day.

A thorough examination of Mayo's local history journals proved beneficial in gathering reference points to further research sources, while a range of additional secondary source material was utilised. Contact with members of the Castlebar 1798 Commemoration Committee of 1998 also proved worthwhile in investigating the activities which took place in the town to mark the bicentenary of the Rebellion. Unfortunately, members of their equivalent in Ballina proved more difficult to communicate with, while Mayo County Council was not forthcoming when asked to provide any documented material such as meetings of minutes, allocated budgets or official correspondence regarding 1798 commemorations which they may have held. The prominent 'Wynne Collection' of local photographs dating back to the late nineteenth century was explored with regards to any of which featured activities in the county commemorating 1798.

Photographic evidence was again also gathered during field trips to the sites of various 1798 memorials. These trips also allowed for the recording of inscriptions, where possible, on these monuments.

### **Other Evidence**

In relation to each of the chapter/topics, a number of theses relevant to this work were examined. Various websites were also accessed and were notably advantageous when seeking details regarding recent commemoration-related speeches given by state representatives. The website of the House of the Oireachtas is one such example, while that of the Department of the Taoiseach is another.

Throughout this thesis, a methodological effort is made to supplement the empirical evidence on Mayo's commemorative heritages with an informed critical evaluation. In each chapter, the local perspective is complemented with information regarding its context within the national arena. In so far as possible, events surrounding the respective remembrances are dealt with chronologically. Altogether, the methodology employed is based on examining the shared attitudes and behaviour of a geographically defined social group towards a number of key facets of its collective past.

**References:**

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- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48-53.
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## **Chapter Four**

### **Commemoration or Fabrication?: The Céide Fields/‘Mayo 5000’ Activities**

## Introduction

In the 1970s and 1980s, archaeological excavations in North Mayo uncovered a large Neolithic farming site. This site, which would come to be known as Céide Fields represents one of the most extensive Stone Age monuments in the world. These excavations, gave rise to exhaustive efforts to develop a centre at the site, which would mark and interpret the significance of the location. Furthermore, as the site was deemed to be 5,000 years old, a year-long programme of events entitled 'Mayo 5000' was put in place to coincide with the opening of the centre.

In this chapter it is intended to uncover whether the creation of the Céide Fields centre and the 'Mayo 5000' anniversary it gave birth to, can justly be deemed as commemoration. On the surface, it is obvious that the centre and the event in 1993 in Mayo can draw parallels with 'official' commemoration. For instance, just as it was decided to remember the death places of many Irish republican martyrs, for example Michael Collins, a decision by an individual or group must be taken, consensus reached, funds raised and a monument explaining the historical significance of the site, erected. These processes are also evident in Mayo's efforts to mark and interpret a location of prehistoric significance.

While this may constitute a revaluation of what is prescribed as a monument, the Béal na mBláth memorial and the Céide Fields centre both seek to represent, to intimate and to inform. The significance of the respective locations on which they stand also hold meaningful resonance. At the same time, one must also be conscious of evolving technologies and changing cultural values. Furthermore, although the life and passing of Michael Collins may be remembered with greater frequency than the so far once-off 1993 celebrations which denoted 5000 years of rural life in Mayo, it is not beyond the realms of conceivability that the event may indeed be marked again in the distant future. However, instead of the normal and more formal activities associated with commemoration such as ceremonies and rituals, a series of cultural and festive events were designed to mark 'Mayo 5000'.

In order to evaluate the Céide Fields centre and its position within the metanarratives of County Mayo's commemorative heritages, an examination is made of the background to the establishment of the centre. This charts the archaeological discovery at

the site, the conception and subsequent evolution of the proposed centre, and the efforts undertaken to enshrine it within the county's cultural memory and economy. The centre's interpretive elements are also explored as is its context within the heritage and tourism industries. Prior to its establishment the Céide Fields site was touted as being something of a panacea to an economically under-developed and lagging region. The soundness of such a prediction is another concern which warrants attention. An examination is also made of the significance of the Céide Fields and related centre to the local community and wider Mayo populace. While a sustained influx of tourists to a particular area can alone bring about cultural shifts, so too it could be argued, might the theme espoused by the Céide Fields centre, which draws a meaningful continuum between the Neolithic farm dwellers of the area and the present-day rural inhabitants.

The entire county of Mayo was invited to celebrate this linkage to its ancient and rural past when in 1993 – the year in which the Céide Fields centre opened – ‘Mayo 5000’ was initiated. Though this type of geographically defined commemorative celebration is not a particularly new concept – the cities of Galway, Cork and Dublin celebrated commemorative milestones in 1984, 1985 and 1988 respectively – it does bring into question the historically based legitimacy of these modern anniversaries. Local festivities were organised under the ‘Mayo 5000’ banner while five flagship events were organised as part of the overall programme. This programme, as with the establishment of the Céide Fields centre itself, lent itself heavily towards attracting inward investment, predominately in the form of tourist currency. These key events of ‘Mayo 5000’ are therefore investigated and appraised with a view to establishing whether they bore any legitimate themes of remembrance or commemoration, or were simply designed to market the county's tourism attributes. In turn it is anticipated that this enquiry may lead to evidence of some of the traits of what has been noted in Chapter Three as the ‘personality’ of place.

## **Céide Fields**

### *Archaeology and Topography*

Opened in 1993, the Céide Fields interpretative centre is situated between the villages of Belderrig and Ballycastle, 35km north of Ballina in North Mayo. (See map on page v.). The centre itself was born out of archaeological research and discovery in the surrounding area which dated back to the 1930s when the local national school teacher,

Patrick Caulfield, wrote to the National Museum, telling of how local farmers had discovered stone walls beneath the bog whilst cutting turf.<sup>1</sup> Decades later, his son Dr. Seamus Caulfield, an archaeologist based at the Department of Archaeology, University College Dublin, returned to excavate and map the site. He found an enclosed field system which at *c.* 5000 years old was a thousand years older than any similar arrangement that had previously been found in Europe. The area was also archaeologically significant for its dense concentration of Neolithic tombs.

In his first published paper on what was then labelled the Behy/Glenulra site, Caulfield writes of excavating a series of parallel walls, 150 metres to 200 metres apart, running from the edge of sheer cliffs, inland, for a distance of at least 800 metres and up to 1.5 km which were divided by offset cross walls into rectangular fields of up to 7 hectares in area.<sup>2</sup> The site included enclosures and a previously excavated court cairn located within the fields, which produced archaeological evidence such as Neolithic pottery, flint and chert scrapers, stone axes and javelin and arrowheads. Through radiocarbon dating Caulfield placed the occupation of the site at *c.* 3000 BC and suggested that forest clearance through burning or felling, and enclosure of the land for the purposes of annual husbandry, was conducted as a single operation by a sizeable and co-operative community.

In 1983, and with 100 hectares of farmland and 6 kilometres of field boundaries surveyed in the Behy/Glenulra townlands, Caulfield was focussing his attention on the nature of the Neolithic farming practices, which had taken place at the site. In a further paper he proposed that owing to the wall height of the field system, the area had lent itself towards beef/dairy production. Combining data on Neolithic cattle weight, models of herd composition and grass growth potential, Caulfield postulated that under a beef economy alone the area could have supported up to five families.<sup>3</sup>

By 1985 and following two years of intensive excavations funded by the National Monuments Branch of the Office of Public Works, the scale of the North Mayo Neolithic field system had become apparent. Archaeological survey revealed that the bog-covered site extended to over four hundred hectares and contained 24 kilometres of stone walls, thus making it the most extensive Stone Age site to be recorded in Western Europe. At this time Caulfield began to imagine the possibility of the site becoming a visitor attraction. In an article penned for the Mayo Association Yearbook in 1985, he drew comparison

between the scale of work involved in bringing the thousand acres at Céide into production, and that, which lent itself to the construction of Newgrange Cemetery in Co. Meath.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Caulfield by then applied the local (and more marketable) name of Céide Hill (Céide translating as 'Meeting place') to the area, which in part encompasses the field system, rather than the previously used townland designation of Behy/Glenulra. He further alluded to the similarity in age of both sites and notes that although the restored Newgrange monument had led to much speculation regarding the lives of its creators, the Mayo site in its 'Pompeii-like' state of preservation, provided the possibility of a unique window into the lives of its Neolithic farmers. At this time the site was deemed to have maintained 25 farming families. Caulfield pointed out that prior to the cultivation of the land a similar area would have supported just one hunter/gather family for one month of the year.

#### *Establishing the Céide Fields Centre*

Ongoing survey at Céide led archaeologists to the discovery that the fields covered an area of at least 1,000 hectares with a wall system consisting of 250,000 tons of stone, which had the ability to sustain a community of between four and five hundred people. In early 1988, Caulfield and Professor Martin Downes of the Department of Biology, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth drew up proposals for the development of the 'Céide Fields' site which included the acquisition of 'as large an area of the 2,500 acre [1,000 hectare] site as is practical', construction of access roads and parking facilities and the establishment of 'a major Environmental Interpretive Centre' to incorporate an auditorium, internal and external display areas, research and teaching areas, an outdoor viewing area and facilities such as a restaurant, restrooms and a shop.<sup>5</sup> The proposal stated that 'what makes it a unique tourist product is the fact that the stone walled fields of Céide lie beneath the bog which has been growing for almost five thousand years'. As well as the archaeological dimension, the need for the centre to exhibit and interpret the ecological importance of the surrounding landscape and the geological significance of the nearby cliffs was also highlighted. The proposal anticipated that within five years of opening, the centre would be attracting 100,000 visitors per annum.

The County Development Team, to whom the proposals were submitted, offered to back the project to the amount of IR£40,000 on condition that the same amount would be raised locally. A committee comprising representatives of development organisations in

the vicinity of Céide Fields, together with representatives of state agencies, the County Development Team, Ireland West Tourism and Teagasc (the Farm Research and Development Agency), as well as Seamus Caulfield and Martin Downes was put in place. The objectives of the committee were to raise the matching IR£40,000, to purchase some land on which to site the proposed development and to develop site access. Caulfield also set about designing a small prototype guidebook based on excavations in the area.<sup>6</sup> At this time the interpretive centre was costed by Mayo County Council at approximately IR£500,000. Fundraising drives were undertaken with targets being set for each local community. Castlebar International Walks committee organised a fundraising walk from Castlebar to Céide with the intention of highlighting the significance of the development for the county as a whole. By autumn 1989, the IR£40,000 matching fund was in place. Mayo County Council also contributed IR£50,000, while three personal contributions of \$5,000 each towards the project were received by Dr. Caulfield.<sup>7</sup> Céide Fields committee was incorporated as a limited company, with the power to fundraise, purchase land, borrow money and promote the development of facilities for tourists in North Mayo. A sub-committee set about negotiations with private landowners, commonage holders and Coillte Teoranta (the State Forestry Service) for the purchase of lands, which incorporated the Céide Fields.

By this time, however, the proposed scale of the development had taken a dramatic shift. In early June 1989, the Deputy Director General of Bord Fáilte met with Céide Fields Company and members of Mayo County Council to discuss the nature and scale of the project. At this meeting it was agreed that given the international archaeological significance of the site, the original concept of a IR£500,000 development would not produce a centre worthy of this project. Following lengthy discussions, it was decided that a centre in the order of £2.5million would be in keeping with the project and in September of that year Bord Fáilte pledged that 75% EU Structural Funds would be made available for the project if 25% of the cost could be put in place by the committee. Dr. Caulfield and Professor Downes undertook much of the raising of this Irish contribution. North Connaught Farmers Co-operative contributed IR£50,000 and FÁS (the Development and Training Authority) gave IR£80,000 via the Social Employment Scheme. University College Dublin, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, the Heritage Council and the Irish American Fund made up the remainder of the contribution.<sup>8</sup>

On 19 December 1989 the Céide Fields project received a major setback when Bord Fáilte announced that only 50% structural funds would now be offered. Over the next few months, however, intense behind the scenes political lobbying took place while a pledge of IR£300,000 was also secured from the Heritage Council. Prior to a visit to the Céide Fields by the then Taoiseach, Charles Haughey<sup>9</sup>, in July 1990, speculation was rife that structural funds of IR£1.5million would now be offered by the government. The public perception of the Céide Fields at this time seems to have shifted from one of archaeological interpretation to that of economic expectation. In anticipation of the Taoiseach's visit the *Western People* newspaper reviewed the project, ambitiously stating that 'estimates put the tourist potential of the Céide Fields at anything up to 200,000 visitors a year initially' and in even more elaborate fashion went on to predict that 'the entire area of 3,000 acres, could if developed, constitute the greatest theme park in Europe, if not the world.'<sup>10</sup> Thus, an obvious conflict seemed apparent between this Disney-esque interpretation and Caulfield's original more sedate ideas of incorporating archaeological research with tourism and, promoting a broad development potential for the region.

Following the Taoiseach's visit to the site, the remainder of the IR£2.5 million was indeed pledged by the Government, with politicians obviously gaining political mileage out of the government's substantial contribution. In drawing comparisons between the Céide Fields with the Pyramids of Egypt, the Roman Forum and the Parthenon in Athens, Mr. Haughey – upon his visit to the site – went on to enthuse: 'This ranks as one of the greatest wonders of the ancient world, I am personally attracted to this development – it's the engine of recovery for this region, and I want to see it happen.'<sup>11</sup> The editorial of the same newspaper, which carried extensive coverage of Haughey's visit to Céide, announced: 'For the north Mayo community at large it cannot happen quickly enough: the wait has been a long and patient one, but Mr. Haughey's pledge that there will be action has made it all worthwhile'.<sup>12</sup>

The Government pledge meant that Dúchas, The Heritage Service (formerly the Office of Public Works) would take over the project and undertake the building of the centre. In August 1990, a meeting was held between representatives from the Department of Tourism, Dúchas, Mayo County Council and Céide Fields Ltd. At this meeting it was decided to set up two groups to progress the project: -

- (1) A Steering Committee who would meet on a three-month basis.

(2) A Working Group, which would report to the Steering Committee. This group would meet on a monthly basis.

Membership was made up of representatives at Dúchas, Dr. Seamus Caulfield (the Vice-Chairman of the Céide Fields Company), Professor Martin Downes, the Regional Tourism Officer for Mayo and a representative of Mayo County Council.

Dúchas undertook to have an outline scheme to include building design and interpretive approaches by the end of 1990 with the centre opening for the 1993 tourist season. Céide Fields Company continued to meet and regularly received progress reports of the work of the Steering Committee and the Working Group. It was becoming apparent to the Céide Fields Company that their input into the development – since ownership of the project had been handed over to Dúchas – had greatly diminished. The Company often expressed concerns over the increasing portion of the budget being appropriated for the centre itself and the consequent decreased budget for on going research and external interpretation. Spells of internal wrangling arose as the features of a top-down rather than a bottom-up development emerged. Other facilities contained in the original proposal such as teaching and research areas were also sacrificed to the building, while a row over staffing at the centre led Caulfield to threaten his resignation.

Despite these difficulties, the centre officially opened to great local fanfare on 28 May 1993. Fianna Fáil Minister of State at the Department of Finance, Noel Dempsey, conducted the formalities, while a weekend of festivities took place in the surrounding Ballycastle area. Speaking at the opening, the Minister expressed confidence that the centre would fulfil its primary function of serving to protect the site and enlighten visitors. All local newspapers carried details of the opening, with the *Western People* – which had done most to champion to the Céide Field's cause – in particularly buoyant mood. It carried a three-page spread on the event, providing details on the archaeological significance of the site, a history of its development, interviews with Dr. Caulfield and tourism chiefs, congratulatory advertising from state agencies and extensive photography of the location. The general feeling portrayed was that the Céide Fields was to be the catalyst for regeneration and growth in the North Mayo area. The editorial of the newspaper echoed this sense of optimism in announcing: 'Local investment has been dramatically increased through the multiplier effect, and Céide now provides a major sheet anchor for the



development of tourism in the disadvantaged – in socio-economic terms only – North Mayo region.’<sup>13</sup>

The national press gave praise to the design of the building and also commended the communal spirit in which funding for the centre had been gathered:

‘Perhaps the Céide people did leave another legacy. The spirit of co-operation obviously still lives strong in Mayo, judging by the way they worked hard together to raise the money needed to bring the professor’s dream to reality’.<sup>14</sup>

A major point of note – in the same week that the controversial interpretive centre at Mullaghmore in the Burren had brought a ruling from the Supreme Court, that state authorities were not exempt from planning control – was that no objections had been raised to the Céide Fields Centre. The same *Irish Times* article commenting: ‘Here at last is an Office of Public Works interpretive centre, which no one objects to and most people actually admire’.<sup>15</sup>

This issue was not lost on those who supported the Mayo project and its proposed economic benefits. The *Western People’s* most outspoken columnist, Christy Loftus, claimed that there were those who stood in the way of other proposals by the Office of Public Works with the sole aim of halting development:

‘That area of Mayo has been neglected for centuries, millennia even. And that is why Céide Fields Interpretive Centre has managed to get off the ground. The people who would oppose such a development have not arrived in numbers. But, believe me, they are on the way, and God protect us from them’.<sup>16</sup>

### **Céide Fields as an agent of tourism**

The ‘support at all cost’ ethos that surrounded the Céide Fields centre’s establishment is questionable. The idea that it would deliver sweeping wholesale benefits appears to stem back to the period in 1989-1990 when the proposed centre was upgraded from a IR£0.5million to a IR2.5 million project, and furthermore, to the Taoiseach’s visit to Céide, which in effect re-established the Government’s commitment to the venture at a time when it seemed to be flagging. As one local quoted in the *Western People* put it, ‘Our future has been secured by the Taoiseach’s declaration of support here today.’<sup>17</sup> This inflated level of expectancy must however, be viewed in terms of the social and economic position of Mayo in the early 1990s. In 1991 a local newspaper article attested:

'Recent figures indicate a reduction of 20% in population throughout many parts of Erris [the barony in which Céide Fields is located] over the last 5 years and the enrolment at our National Schools is declining steadily.'<sup>18</sup>

The editorial comment of another newspaper in 1993 portrayed further degeneration:

'These are hard times on the jobs front, a sad commentary on 1993, as borne out by the latest batch of unemployment figures for Mayo. At the end of last year there were almost 10,000 people collecting the dole in the county. The number shows a jump of 2,000 in the space of 2 years. That cold statistic fails to take account of the army of young people who just packed their bags in frustration and left the country altogether.'<sup>19</sup>

The potential number of visitors and the associated benefits to the region were, however, greatly overstated by local press, government and to some extent by the centre's instigators. The project was unrealistically seen as the catalyst which would herald a vibrant, new economic era, it being noted that 'Céide Fields was billed as something of a panacea for North West Mayo'.<sup>20</sup> The Government's decision to allocate such a substantial level of funding to the project was taken in line with policies relating to rural development in the early 1990s, which had been apparent across Europe since the publication of the *Future of Rural Europe*, by the EC in 1988. Attention to rural development had been provoked by the increasing 'flight from the land throughout rural Europe where smallholders could no longer eke a sustainable living from traditional farm enterprises and agricultural diversification is limited.'<sup>21</sup> In an Irish context, tourism was thus seen as key to this rural development. However, the type of one-off large-scale project as typified by the Céide Fields interpretive centre has been questioned as a viable economic alternative. Its opponents have argued that it is not obvious that economic benefit will automatically ensue from the enterprise for the population as a whole and that any increase in tourist numbers to a particular area can bring about a noted transformation to local cultural norms. Thus, cases have been made that for benefits to accrue to the overall population, a community-orientated, holistic approach to rural tourism should be adopted. Such proposals, which seem less at odds with Caulfield's original low-key proposal, have called for an approach that:

'is not orientated exclusively to individuals' economic gain but which places value on all aspects of the social development of the local community. In order for holistic development to occur, statutory, voluntary and private interests must embrace such an approach and must recognise that it will inevitably bring with it cultural as well as economic change'.<sup>22</sup>

This recognition of an unavoidable cultural shift brought about through rural tourism, particularly the high volume tourism envisaged by certain interests, was also an issue to which the State seemed impervious. While the positive effects of tourism in terms of mutual benefits and cross-cultural understanding have been established,<sup>23</sup> it has also been acknowledged that it can destroy unique place identities and cultures through commodification. Kneafsey cites arguments relating to the potential for rural host communities to become dependent on tourists for reassurance and self worth and the possibilities for such communities to conform to the expectations of visitors from more politically and economically powerful cultures.<sup>24</sup>

As the anticipated large scale tourism in the Céide Fields region never materialised, however, neither has any significant cultural transformation. Against the backdrop of numbers visiting the centre having dropped from an initial high of 63,500 in 1993 to a recent average of 35,000 per annum<sup>25</sup>, Kneafsey – who gathered much first hand anecdotal evidence relating to common perceptions of tourism initiatives in Mayo – notes that locals continue to view the Céide Fields site with an attitude of indifference and amusement:

‘For them there is something a little humorous in the sight of tourists, archaeologists and politicians tramping around the bog in Wellington boots to look at a pile of stones which their grandfathers had always known of’.<sup>26</sup>

Coupled with this, Kneafsey also identifies a lack of enthusiasm among the Ballycastle business quarter, in providing for, and benefiting from the stream of visitors who have been directed their way. It is hard to assess whether this inertia is symptomatic of the over-hyped numbers predicted to visit the area, a lack of tourism support initiatives and training or simply a sense of apathy on the part of locals towards visiting tourists; possibly there are elements of each of these factors. While an air of deflation lingers around the project in the area, it remains to be seen whether the lack of mass tourist numbers provided by the Céide Fields Centre will ultimately be viewed in North Mayo as failure.

#### *Interpretation at Céide Fields*

The design of the interpretive centre at the Céide Fields was led by the Office of Public Works architectural team, who set about creating a building which it was considered, would settle harmoniously into the bogland and mountainous surroundings. Conceptually, the team felt that the chosen design should be a simple, strong, unified form

in the tradition of a Martello Tower or lighthouse. A pyramid design with a 25 metre square base, was chosen upon, as it was seen to be a peak emerging from the bog – half the structure being underground – to form a natural extension to the landscape, similar to the crests of the nearby Stags of Broad Haven sea stacks.<sup>27</sup> The pyramid design also sought to bring attention to the fact that the Céide Fields predated the Egyptian pyramids. Extensive use of local stone and peat like cladding went into the structure itself – these natural materials use deemed to age well, while a glass belvedere which can be reached from outside by a railed path that spirals up three of the four faces of the building, constituted the apex of the pyramid and acted as a viewing area.



**Fig. 1. Céide Fields centre**  
Source: Author

In *The Construction of Heritage*, in which he explores the complexities of the visitor experience at many of Ireland's interpretive centres, museums and tourist attractions, David Brett describes the Céide Fields building as being located in 'a particularly bleak and sublime spot' and notes that impressions of the Céide Fields begin to form on the approach road to the site where 'a wonderful coast appears in view of bays and cliffs and stacks'. Hills and valleys too form part of this access route while 'long slopes of turf descend steadily to the edge of immense vertical cliffs'. Of the main edifice, Brett records:

'The pyramid is made of exactly cut and smoothed silvery-black limestone blocks, repetitious and uniform. This is a small example of the sublime in architectural shape; the combination of the bleak site, the vast cliffs below and the stark symmetry of the building... Physical

grandeur, antiquity and death are brought together in a single, simple and very ancient architectural image. We are confronted with an archetype.'<sup>28</sup>

The centre was indeed viewed as an architectural triumph and has received several awards including; joint first prize in The Sunday Times Irish Building of the Year Award (1993), Europa Nostra-European Architectural and Natural Heritage Award (1996) and The Royal Institute of Architects in Ireland, Triennial Gold Medal (1997) for the best Irish building 1992–1994.<sup>29</sup> The stone, metal and woodwork, both interior and exterior, have also been commended for the high level of finishing produced by some of Ireland's most respected craftsmen.<sup>30</sup>

On entering the centre, the first feature to which the visitor's attention is drawn, is an enormous piece of bright bog timber standing in the centre of a circular gallery area. This striking pine tree trunk, which penetrates upward through the gallery, has been dated to about 5000 years old and was discovered by Caulfield's late father while cutting turf. (See appendix 4.1.) Marks on the piece bear witness to his attempts to cut through the trunk before realising its largeness. This ground floor space, as well as containing an information desk, refreshment area and toilets, holds an exhibition area given over to the 'interpretation' of the archaeology, natural history and flora of the Céide Fields region. Mural displays deal with the forest clearance and cultivation of the land by the Neolithic community and the subsequent formation of the bog. Textboard details of burial sites are provided through an examination of the nearby Behy Court Tomb. A part recreation of the 4,600 year old, archaeologically significant Ballyglass house – found close to Céide – complete with model Neolithic family is also on show. This exhibit, which is certainly rather sparse and unnatural looking, has drawn particular criticism from Brett, despite a lack of ideas as to a viable alternative:

'There is a dismal simulation of ancient life in the form of huts, dummies, artefacts and murals, some of which are wretchedly bad. But given that simulation is a constant feature of the heritage idea, what might have been the reality that could best be exhibited here?'<sup>31</sup>

The principle visualisation involved in the centre is the video film, which is shown at regular intervals in the auditorium. Entitled *Written in Stone*, it was produced by the Audio-visual Department of UCD directed by Leo Carey and scripted by Seamus Caulfield. Opening with the Seamus Heaney poem 'Belderg', references are made to 'stepping back in time' and 'the great Celtic peoples'. The film then takes the viewer

through the geological structures of the North Mayo coast, exploring the unusual rock collisions and confusions. The erosion of this coastline through the millennia – including the insecurity of the cliffs, the formation of caves, blowholes and indentations is portrayed. The glacial plenishing of the Ice Age is detailed before the film moves into the realms of human history. Here the narrative depicts the conditions under which the Céide Fields community lived and the audience is told that the present North Mayo landscape is a much degraded human environment compared to the rich vegetation and great pine trees it once supported.<sup>32</sup> With references to the arrival of Christianity and the Great Famine, the viewer is brought forward to present-day Mayo and informed of the close parallels between contemporary farmers and land dwellers, and their Neolithic ‘ancestors’.



Fig. 2. Section of the interpretive display at Céide Fields (See also appendix 4.2.)  
Source: Author

As with the majority of interpretive centre audio-visual footage, this genre of film is designed to engender a sense of awe in the viewer. This is certainly true of *Written in Stone* as depictions of the sublime are created in the many shots of wild coastlines, soaring cliffs and vast waves, whilst also being expressed through the evocation of geological time.<sup>33</sup> Added to this is the sound track, which makes use of traditional Irish music, spliced with crashing waves and synthesised drum rolls. Although the overall remit of informing the visitor is fulfilled, the film is somewhat over ambitious in the time-scale it seeks to condense.

The first floor gallery is reached by a stairway, which leads up from beside the refreshment area. The gallery – holding cased geological exhibits, has a display of local rocks, the oldest of which is thought to be one billion years old – has a steel and polished wood rail round it, and the top of the pine tree rises up through a circular opening in the floor. From here the visitor can continue via a steep stairwell up to the glassed belvedere viewing area, which provides panoramic views of the Céide Fields to the south and the Atlantic to the north. Entering on to this balcony according to Brett ‘on a day of high winds is an exhilarating experience’. A spiral stepped ramp then descends round three sides of the pyramid. Each step represents a century in time so that the final step is 5,000 years ago.



**Fig. 3. View of Céide Fields from centre**  
*Source: Author*

The visitor is encouraged to walk or be guided up the field system behind the centre and to inspect, and even probe for, traces of Neolithic walls. This, the Office of Public Works brochure states, is the essence of the Céide Fields ‘experience’:

‘As we look today at the great expanse of modern unbroken bogland it is hard to imagine that a second very different landscape is present beneath the blanket of bog. Céide Fields is this second landscape that exists in exactly the same place but now lies buried in anything up to four metres of bog. It is separated from us today, not just by metres of bog but by five thousand years of time...The experience of walking again in these ancient fields which have been buried for almost fifty centuries – that is what Céide Fields is about’.<sup>34</sup>

*Céide Fields as an agent of nationalism*

David C. Harvey has noted how the Newgrange monument has come to be representative of the 'cultural nation'.<sup>35</sup> Such a process is also at work at the Céide Fields, where the scope of the 'nation' seems to be expanded and contracted as suits the metanarrative of North Mayo's commemorative heritages, the wider county or indeed, the nation as a whole. Central to the interpretive narrative at the Céide Fields is the portrayal of the harmonious lifestyle of the Neolithic people who lived there. The lack of defensive structures, the scattered nature of the dwellings and the dearth of weapons recovered points to a people who were neither at risk from within or outside their numbers. Further to this is the theme of a rural way of life in North Mayo having changed little through subsequent millennia; the land is still farmed, a dispersed pattern of homesteads prevail as the norm, the family unit remains all important and a relatively unthreatened people continue to co-operate for the betterment of the community. The opening lines of the Céide Fields brochure announce:

'Céide Fields was a farming countryside of typical stone-walled fields where herds of cattle once grazed, a countryside of homes scattered through the landscape surrounded by their garden walls. In many ways it was little different to much of the Irish countryside today'.

It seems ironic that this idealised version of present day rural Mayo, has in fact demanded alternatives – such as the centre itself – to the rewards which this type of subsistence farming affords. Such depictions, however, fitted snugly into the long-standing visual representations in tourist literature which up until recently had pictured 'Irish "natives" as predominately working in agriculture and suggest implicitly that an organic relationship between people and their natural environment is to be found in Ireland'.<sup>36</sup>

Aside from traditional tourism representations, this sanitised exposition of localised rurality and society may also have had its roots in the cultural-historical approach to the archaeology, which underpinned the excavations at Céide. This approach came to prominence in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is one which remains dominant in many countries to date. It is closely linked with nationalist history and is concerned with 'the identification of discrete archaeological entities which might correlate with distinct population groups or specific peoples in time or place.'<sup>37</sup> The approach is thus used 'to bolster the pride and morale of nations or ethnic groups. It is most often used for this purpose among peoples who feel thwarted, threatened or deprived'.<sup>38</sup>



The marginalised population of his native North Mayo may well have represented such a grouping in relation to Caulfield's excavations. Culture-historical archaeology has also been noted for a tendency to 'glorify the primitive vigour and the creativity of people assumed to be national ancestors'.<sup>39</sup> In following this line of thought Caulfield has marked contemporary Mayo inhabitants as the descendent of an ancient people and inheritors of their land.

In turn this may have opened up a sense of 'genealogical nationalism' with regards to a sense of 'Mayo-ness'. As geographer Catherine Nash has remarked: 'ideas of roots, ancestral belonging are important in indigenous people's political claims and are the basis of ethnic nationalism.'<sup>40</sup> Thus, the Ceide Fields and its association between 'local' and 'ancient' perhaps gave a Mayo identity an artificially privileged position. As has been noted:

'in modern times it is considered very desirable, very prestigious to have roots that go deep into the earth. This leaves the people of North Mayo streets – or perhaps fields is a more apt description – ahead of their competitors'.<sup>41</sup>

This brings into play the notion that places are in competition and are engaged in a process of labelling themselves in the hope of economic gain. However, it is not just at local level where such associations are seen as important for morale and confidence, but at a larger scale; 'Céide Fields has been seen as an important national symbol, in terms of the Irish as a whole being able to say that they have roots, origins and know where they came from'.<sup>42</sup> This was evident in Taoiseach Charles Haughey's declaration, in which he widened the context of genealogical lineage from local to national:

'The whole world is tracing its roots, but while most of it is stumbling around in the dark, we in this country, have something unique. We can trace our continuity over five thousand years and that's of phenomenal interest'.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, while it has been noted that 'old bases of national identities are being rapidly undermined by economic globalisation and transnational political integration'<sup>44</sup>, it has also been claimed that 'an interconnection of belonging and territorial space remains fundamental' to representation of identity and place.<sup>45</sup> As such, the notion of place and time which the Céide Fields has given rise to, can be seen as a heritage which 'distills the

past into icons of identity, bonding us with precursors and progenitors, with our own earlier selves, and with our promised successors'.<sup>46</sup>

*Céide Fields as an agent of the heritage industry*

The heritage industry as a whole is one which has been the source of much debate and controversy particularly since its explosion in Ireland since the 1990s. Often central to this contention is the establishment and role of the interpretive/heritage/visitor centre. Opponents of such centres consider them to debase, standardise and sometimes embellish historical fact. Discussing some of these questions in relation to the controversial Mullaghmore centre in the Burren, Co. Clare, Fintan O'Toole concludes by describing interpretive centres as misconceived, because:

'they present the experience of a place precisely as being infinitely repeatable. They define the experience and offer it again and again, day in day out, throughout the season. They seek to satisfy, when the quest is for a form of dissatisfaction, to offer a calculable gain, when the search is for a sense of loss. They treat tourists as rational consumers rather than what they are – consumers of the irrational'.<sup>47</sup>

In describing the narratives of such centres as 'pop-history', Roy Foster condemns the idealisation of history; 'it is hard to feel comfortable with the idea of historical memory as a feel good, happy-clappy therapeutic refuge' and questions the need for:

'the revival of simplistic and fusty versions of the story of Ireland, just at the point where it seemed that the analysis of Irish history had reached a new level of professionalism, impartiality and nuance'.<sup>48</sup>

Further, but often complimentary to these arguments, are debates on the tourism and commercial nature of such enterprises and the physical siting of these centres.

Supporters of the interpretive centre have pointed to various benefits such as the educational remit provided; Vergo suggests that even the most overtly entertainment oriented presentations will have some educational value, if only widening of horizons and experiences,<sup>49</sup> while Prentice argues that the perceived opposition between education and entertainment, and the idea that pleasure is almost by definition, mindless, should be challenged.<sup>50</sup> The promotion of tourism and subsequent economic development to a particular area – as most obviously propounded by the Céide Fields project – has been forwarded. The breakdown of cultural barriers associated with the traditional museum, the support engendered for policies of preservation and protection which seek to safeguard

cultural heritage, and the management and control of visitor flow at environmentally fragile sites have been highlighted too. It has also been argued that heritage planning can reinforce place identities and can benefit cultures by ‘recovery’ of their collective past.<sup>51</sup>

As an interpretive centre the main failing at the Céide Fields Centre is, ironically, that it is over-reliant on its scale of interpretation. Compared to other prehistoric attractions in Ireland such as Newgrange, Knowth, the Hill of Tara, Dún Aonghusa and Carrowmore megalithic cemetery at which the interpretive demonstration of the site is secondary to visual impact and impression of the monument on view, the opposite is true of Céide, where a sparse archaeological display does little to conjure up a particular way of life. The Céide Fields brochure concedes to this, stating ‘There is nothing spectacular to be seen in this ancient country site’.<sup>52</sup> Caulfield too accepts this viewpoint but believes the significance of Céide warrants the accompanying interpretation: ‘If there was no centre, all they’d find would be a few bog holes in the ground and there’d be no idea of the importance of the place’.<sup>53</sup> The visitor can only be let down, however, when it becomes apparent that a line of stones sticking out of the bog are the sole archaeological display at Europe’s most extensive Stone-Age monument. The inaccessibility of the nearby Behy megalithic court tombs (due to land-rights issues), coupled with the non-display of any artefacts recovered at the site, adds to the sense of deflation. A mainstay of the guided tour is an oval field enclosure, though the brochure proclaims: ‘As a monument the enclosing oval wall is architecturally unimpressive’ and instead encourages the visitors to ‘try to visualise in the mind’s eye what it was like fifty centuries ago’.<sup>54</sup> Although there is no doubting the archaeological significance of Céide, it falls to the interpretive centre to fill the void of sensory appeasement. Frequent reminders that the site is older than the Egyptian pyramids serve only to remind the visitor of the dearth of archaeological evidence on display, and in doing so elevate the architecturally esteemed interpretive centre to the position of the central monument on show. This is backed by the OPW’s *Visitor Information for Heritage Sites* brochure, which features a photograph of the centre rather than the fields themselves. Figures of those who attend the centre further support this notion with an estimated one third of visitors not participating in the guided tour of the fields.<sup>55</sup> This begs the question of how often the interpretive fashions and technologies will need updating and whether the contemporaneously commended architectural design of the building will stand the test of time.

In 1990 Bord Fáilte proposed that the Irish past be mediated through a series of 'interpretive gateways'. These were categorised under five broad themes and each theme was to be examined through a series of 'storylines'. The five themes comprised: 'Live Landscapes', 'Making a Living', 'Saints and Religion', 'Building a Nation' and 'The Spirit of Ireland', with each supported by specific sub-themes.<sup>56</sup> The spirit of Ireland, for instance, which might loosely be termed 'culture', had associated storylines of literary Ireland, language, folklore and legend, and art in Ireland. This themed strategy sought 'to avoid replication and to enable the tourism package to be regionalised (fixed in space) in a coherent manner'.<sup>57</sup> Foster again has argued against this commodification and standardisation of history and points to Bord Fáilte's documented encouragement of this strategy because of their belief that visitors have limited time and do not easily understand Irish history. The plan concludes that the result of such a themed approach, would 'be more repeat business, better word of mouth publicity and the creation of a strong brand image of Ireland as a quality heritage destination with unique heritage attractions'.<sup>58</sup>

Although it does not sit easily into a specific categorisation, officially the Céide Fields interpretive centre was positioned under the 'Making a Living' theme with the storyline: 'Farming Heritage'.<sup>59</sup> It appears that the representation of chronological time in conjunction with the solely recommended 'themed space' at Céide are as a result of Caulfield's and Downe's insistence on the subject matter to be treated; archaeology, botany, geology and geomorphology all being interpreted at various levels. The scope of the topics analysed, however, does seem too broad. The archaeological significance of the site and the representation of 5000 years of rural existence become enmeshed with mention of one billion year old rocks and reference to the nineteenth century Famine. While Foster and O'Toole may object to a linear historical narrative, it seems that the Céide Fields interpretive centre has on the other hand sought to cover too much information, and in doing so, has failed to convince on any particular subject. Questioning the cultural policies of the Haughey administration under whose aegis the building was proposed, Brett writes:

'The office of Public Works as an agent of the state needs to be clear in its orientation. As the Céide Fields Centre now stands, it is not sufficiently clear just what is being celebrated or explicated or why. There is an opportunity to develop an exhibition dedicated to these questions that would qualify the architectural sublimity with dispassionate enquiry. Without that, this impressive building is no more than a rhetorical gesture directed at nothing clearly defined'.<sup>60</sup>

### ‘Mayo 5000’

The concept of ‘Mayo 5000’ rose directly out of the research at Céide Fields, which had dated the earliest activity at the site to approximately 3,000 BC. Thus the idea of 5,000 years of rural settlement, culture and heritage in Mayo was seen by Ireland West Tourism and Mayo County Council as an ideal theme on which to organise a year-long programme of events – which would coincide with the opening of the Céide Fields centre – to encourage cultural activities, to focus attention on the county’s strengths as a tourist destination and to create the confidence for further investments. While commemorative heritages of events such as the Famine and the 1798 Rebellion have a history of their own, the idea of a county celebrating its lineage back to prehistoric times was something of a unique concept. In this section of the thesis the events which made up such a programme of commemorative heritage are explored with a view to examining how (if at all) each acknowledged, sought to remember, and paid deference to, 5,000 years of Mayo history.

This type of celebration took its lead from the cities of Galway, Cork and Dublin which had hosted their own anniversaries from 1984-1988. This trend had started in Europe where the ‘birthdays’ of Amsterdam, Berlin and Brussels had been celebrated. For Cork and Galway the decision to stage this form of commemoration, was, to a degree, bolstered by historical fact; despite being urban settlements for some time, both locations had indeed been granted by charter the status of cities 800 and 500 years prior to their respective celebrations. For Dublin there was a more notable sense of cynicism that a bandwagon was jumped on,<sup>61</sup> as the city had been a Viking settlement from as early as 841, yet was seeking to mark its millennium in 1988. Some of the incidents of significance attributed to 988 AD which were mooted included the levying of tax on the city’s citizens for the first time and the watershed capture of the city by Mael Seachnaill II.<sup>62</sup> Mayo’s decision then, to credit itself with a 5000 year anniversary in 1993 was sure to raise concerns as being somewhat arbitrary,<sup>63</sup> particularly given the non-specific nature of radio-carbon dating in archaeology and the fact that Mayo as a spatial entity was not established until the shiring of the 1570s.<sup>64</sup> In an article for the *Mayo Association Yearbook* in 1993, Seamus Caulfield sought to head off any concerns and thus legitimise the ‘Mayo 5000’ concept:

‘Céide Fields can help to create this awareness of the greater depth of our rural roots. If urban centres such as Galway, Cork, Dublin, and Limerick can celebrate their different number of

centuries of urban living, it is perfectly valid for a rural county such as Mayo to celebrate its roots, also hence the Mayo 5000 in 1993'.

In 1992 the 'Mayo 5000' company, limited by guarantee was set up by Mayo County Council in co-operation with the County Development Team, FÁS and Ireland West. Board members were drawn from these agencies as well as local LEADER Companies and from private sector tourism interests. Mr. Brian Quinn was appointed as CEO and Mayo-born President of Ireland Mary Robinson, was elected sole patron. Organisations running events that year were encouraged to do so under the 'Mayo 5000' banner. In excess of 200 of these events took place ranging from village fairs to plays and exhibitions to sporting events. Many of the prominent festivals were publicised at a press launch for 'Mayo 5000 Summer Festivals' in Trinity College Dublin. The launch was attended by then Minister of Tourism Charlie McCreevy in March 1993. This commemorative heritage programme was the first major tourism campaign at county level in Ireland and involved extensive publicity and media coverage in Ireland and overseas.

#### *Mayo as representative of the nation*

Much of the promotional material used by the 'Mayo 5000' company focused heavily on the rich and varied landscape, the warmth and friendliness of locals and the relaxed atmosphere within the county. These types of images and concepts of the West of Ireland had for many years been used by the Tourist Board and Board Fáilte as archetypal of the Irish landscape and experience. Indeed the West had long been celebrated by cultural nationalists, as it symbolised not only the part of Ireland, which was 'farthest from England and therefore most isolated from the cultural influences of Anglicization, but that its physical landscape provided the greatest contrast to the landscape of Englishness'.<sup>65</sup>

Thus the region came to be perceived as a pool of Irish cultural and physical strength and beauty, in a sense 'embodying the nation'. Over time the West:

'came to stand for Ireland in general, to be representative of true Irishness. It could be seen as a way of access into the Irish past through its language, folklore, antiquities and way of life, yet also be conceived of as outside time, separated from normal, temporal development'.<sup>66</sup>

Much of the very areas represented in tourist material were, according to the 'Mayo 5000' Company, those being most neglected by official state tourism support.<sup>67</sup> This was to be rectified as the company took the marketing of the county into its own hands.

Promotional literature for 'Mayo 5000' events, other visitor attractions and accommodation guides were accompanied by homely slogans and depictions of picturesque landscapes. If the West was representative of Ireland, then Mayo was staking its claim to be representative of that West. One particular piece of literature encapsulated this promotional ethos – a nineteenth century painting of a mountain range in Achill Island was headed with the tag-line: 'Where is the only part of Ireland that's more Irish than Ireland? Mayo Naturally'.

### *The programme*

Augmenting the local annual events were five commemorative heritage initiatives conceived by the company, not just to attract tourism, but to create a sense of awareness, pride and celebration of 5000 years of human activity in Mayo through community involvement, cultural enhancement and academic debate. Whether this balance was struck is a debateable issue and one which can either justify or invalidate 'Mayo 5000' as a sincere form of commemoration.

The overall programme was launched on New Year's Eve in Castlebar, by newly appointed EC Commissioner Pdraig Flynn. Light was the central theme of the launch with over 400 local children taking part in a 'Parade of Light' behind a number of marching bands. As part of a separate synchronised European-wide celebration, Commissioner Flynn lit a European beacon of light. A firework display also took place and a 'Mayo 5000' logo was lit up by pyrotechnics. Many towns and villages around the county also staged 'Mayo 5000' events, lighting bonfires at midnight on the same night to mark the event. Addressing an estimated crowd of 2000 people, Mr. Flynn wished 'Mayo 5000' success and declared: 'The celebration linked Mayo with its past and there was no part of Ireland which had quite the same sense of being linked with its history as Mayo'.<sup>68</sup>

The level of importance being attributed to 'Mayo 5000' was evident in the expectant editorial at the *Western People*:

'We hope that as we approach year's end, the county and its people will all be richer for it; richer in the sense of having created a greater awareness of the wealth of attractions in Mayo and the West, richer for having developed a greater sense of community and cohesiveness in the community of Mayo and its exiles abroad and richer in the sense of having fashioned and achieved something great. At this time, perhaps more than any other in our recent history,

there is a great need for a sense of pride, of identity and of realisation of being capable of achieving success in both Mayo, the West and the Country as a whole'.<sup>69</sup>

The notion of self-empowerment was also highlighted by Dr. Caulfield who wrote in a somewhat introverted article (which seemed to exclude Mayo's urban centres):

'It should be a celebration of our rural way of life in every parish in the county, celebrating with pride what we are today because we know the depth of our unbroken roots in the county. What we are today in a rural county is not how others in particular the cities like to view rural Ireland, but how we know and see ourselves'.<sup>70</sup>

This apparently anti-urban theme is one which McCarthy notes as harking back to the notion that towns and cities were alien impositions on the traditional 'Gaelic' landscape.<sup>71</sup> Caulfield thus, seemed to perpetuate the idea of the 'purity' of the rural living.

#### *World Convention of Mayo Associations*

The first of the five commemorative heritage events organised by 'Mayo 5000' was the World Convention of Mayo Associations held in the county town of Castlebar in April 1993. The event, aimed at Mayo natives now living outside the county was co-ordinated by the Galway-Mayo Association. The Convention was attended by over 300 delegates representing 18 diasporic associations, as well as figures in Mayo from the field of politics, business, planning and tourism. Carrying the theme 'Mayo – Now and into the Future', the assembly received widespread support and coverage from local press:

'In essence this is a unique Mayo think tank with exiles and those at home putting their heads together to see how they can promote the well being of the county...if the love people have for their county can be tapped into, something very tangible can be produced. The possibilities are limitless and we look forward to the outcome with great anticipation'.<sup>72</sup>

Following a civic reception at Áras an Chontae, the official opening of the convention was conducted by President Mary Robinson, herself a former 'Mayo Person of Year'. Her address focused on the familiar theme of exiles and emigration as well as her pride in her native county. At an official dinner on the same night, delegates were addressed by Mr. Paddy McGuinness, Vice-Chairman of Castlebar Urban Council, who called for support in the campaign to establish a Regional Technical College in Mayo. Referring to the depopulation of the county, which he felt a third level college would redress, Mr. McGuinness spoke of 'small rural communities which had survived the Great Famine were now beyond the point of no return'.<sup>73</sup>



The second day of the convention included the delivery of papers on 'Mayo Today' by Mr. Des Mahon, Mayo County Manager, and Sr. Maureen Lally, Teagasc Socio-Economic Adviser. The speakers respectively focused on existing development potential in the county and suggested initiatives to encourage entrepreneurship. An open forum then heard delegates discuss a range of economic development issues – a topic that was furthered by EC Commissioner Pádraig Flynn in his keynote speech at the convention black-tie banquet. The final day of the convention featured a discussion on the future role of the Worldwide Committee of Mayo Associations and the co-ordination of future events. Speaking at a farewell lunch, Mayo Person of the Year and Trinity College Provost, Dr. Thomas Mitchell, referred to the ability of Mayo people to leave 'lasting imprints inside and outside their community'.<sup>74</sup>

The convention gathered much attention and goodwill in Mayo and was seen as something of a return of the 'exiles done good'. It also obviously went some way towards debunking the perception of the Mayo emigrant as the stereotypical gruff, hard-drinking navy. The convention also gave these Mayo exiles the opportunity to highlight and utilise their financial and political influence for the betterment of their native county. Aware of the local importance being attributed to the event, Mr. Dónal Downes announced:

'It is up to us – the World Convention of Mayo Associations – in concert with the county and its inhabitants to put together a backdrop which will ultimately become the Mayo of the future. We have a foundation on which to build. It must be done by people living in Mayo, aided and abetted and supported financially by those of us with Mayo blood who still have a passion for the green above the red'.<sup>75</sup>

According to the Chairman of the RTC action group, Mr. McGuinness, the influence of delegates at the conference did in part help to secure the provision of a third level college for Mayo – which opened in the following year.<sup>76</sup> The politicisation of the conference agenda in 1993 also help to turn the theme of the bi-annual event from solely a social gathering to one of current awareness of Mayo-related issues.

#### *'Spirit of Mayo' Concert*

Performed on 8 June 1993, the 'Spirit of Mayo' concert was seen as a centrepiece of the 'Mayo 5000' commemorative heritage programme. The concert, again attended by President Robinson, which took place in the National Concert Hall, Dublin showcased music, dance and poetry from the county but was also designed to create maximum

publicity for the 'Mayo 5000' concept through print and broadcast previews. On the night of the concert, RTE carried a live broadcast of the second half of the performance.

The concert commenced with Mayo poet, Paul Durcan's reading of 'Woman of the Mountains', a poem he composed upon the election of Mary Robinson to the office of President. The various segments of the show were linked by Mayo personalities, such as Mick Lally (actor) and Shay Healy (broadcaster). Mayo-based musical performers included fiddler Vinnie Kilduff, singer Tommy Fleming, Cajun band Jarróg and traditional group Sean Smith and Family. The *Ácadh Mór Set Dancers* and *The Straw Boys* – a 'mummer' style dance group who traditionally perform at Mayo weddings, staged dance routines. World champion Irish dancers Jean Butler and Colin Dunne then performed, and the first half of the concert ended with a display of contemporary tap and Irish dance by Michael Flatley, who has referred to the event as being designed 'to commemorate the finding of the ruins of the Ceide Fields, – a 5,000 year old County Mayo settlement.'<sup>77</sup>

The second part of the concert, screened live on television, began with a short interview with Dr. Caulfield, in which the archaeologist explained the significance of 'Mayo 5000' and the Céide Fields. There followed a speech by President Robinson on the merits of her native county, which acted as an introduction to what was the core of the show – the specially commissioned 'Spirit of Mayo' suite. The piece – composed by Bill Whelan – opened with Seán Ó Riada's 'Mise Eire' from the 85-piece National Symphony Orchestra. Set in five movements, the suite included solo violin and uilleann pipe performances and a soprano interpretation of early nineteenth century Mayo folk poet Antoine Raifteirí's 'Anois Teach an Earraigh' – all by nationally renowned artists. The piece, and accompanying video backdrop, 'strolled impressionistically through tribal Mayo, Croagh Patrick, industrial looms and the Famine'.<sup>78</sup> Also incorporated into the composition were several choral groups including the Mayo Choir and Anúna – a chamber choir of 200 singers. The Ringaskiddy drum corp was also utilised. With its emphasis on cultural heritage and artistic tradition as well as its visual representations of Mayo's past, the 'Spirit of Mayo' concert perhaps held the most intrinsic commemorative value of the 'Mayo 5000' programme of events. The show was performed only once ever again – in Mayo, but the production created the context for a convergence of performances out of which came the world acclaimed 'Riverdance'.

Although hailed as a 'phenomenal success' by the 'Mayo 5000' organisers<sup>79</sup>, the concert met with mixed reviews both nationally and in Mayo. Prior to the performance *The Irish Times* focused on the commercial rather than the artistic nature of the concert. Previewing the RTE screening of the concert, it cynically observed that the 'Mayo 5000' effort 'to generate business and tourism for the region climaxes this week with The Spirit of Mayo concert'.<sup>80</sup> In its review of the event the same paper complimented some of the individual performances but painted an overall picture of a fabricated and unnecessary production. The concert, it claimed, was 'held in honour of the interpretive centre near the 5000 years old Céide Fields in the county'.<sup>81</sup> The paper's witty conclusion was of a quaint and kitsch display:

'It was a grand concert, and when at the end flowers were presented by a couple of people dressed up as, well heads of cabbage, it said it all really, or at least a goodly part of it'.<sup>82</sup>

In the Mayo press, the musical content of the televised section of the concert drew some criticism, although the overall achievement was still acclaimed:

'What did matter was that the 'Spirit of Mayo' was stylish. It had a touch of class and it showed that we are no mean county. It may not have set our toes a tapping, but it did stir in the blood a pride in what we are, and an appreciation of what we are celebrating'.<sup>83</sup>

Billed as the highlight of the 'Mayo 5000' calendar, the concert was a literal showcase of all that was deemed to be good about Mayo. The event was, however, seen in some quarters as a cynical marketing exercise, lacking an authentic foundation. Much of this scepticism may have led back to doubts over the validity of the 'Mayo 5000' concept. Such concerns did not perturb the Mayo press or 'Mayo 5000' officials who viewed the proceedings as a completely worthwhile venture.

### *The '5000 Fun Run'*

The idea of the '5000 Fun Run' was conceived by its sponsors Allied Irish Banks. This combination of sport and heritage was seen by the bank as an ideal opportunity to involve a large section of Mayo people in a light-hearted and inclusive 'Mayo 5000' event, whilst also focusing on fund-raising for community projects in the county. The event took place in June 1993 and its aim was to have 5000 joggers, runners and walkers cover a 5000-metre course around Castlebar town. A number of years later Roy Foster poured scorn on the idea of 'lycra-clad bicyclists' competing in an Irish leg of the 1998 Tour de

France as being seen to commemorate the bicentenary of French involvement in the 1798 Rebellion. In a similar vein this sporting endeavour bore little commemorative value – and was not, as might have planned, deliberately designed to pass by any sites of historical significance in the county town.

School children were particularly encouraged to take part as National Children's Day also fell on that date but the theme of participation and enjoyment was open to all. In promoting the event in which participants were urged to 'run for your county'. Tom Durcan of AIB announced:

'This run is for everyone, the young, the old, the fit and the not so active. The A.I.B. 5000 welcomes walkers, joggers, runners, pub teams, youth groups, novelty acts, fancy dress, etc. In fact everyone should make the effort to take part in this historic event'.<sup>84</sup>

The day's programme of events commenced with a parade of floats through the streets of Castlebar. Over 20 floats representing 32 community groups and businesses took part with the AIB sponsoring prizes for various categories. Various dignitaries occupied a reviewing stand and observed the parade and run, while the area which acted as start and finish point for the event held a day long programme of family orientated entertainment including musical acts, mime artists, face painting and children's characters. Western-based radio station Mid-West Radio broadcast from the event. A number of Mayo 'personalities' including members of the county GAA football team took part in the run and it was reported that the desired number of 5000 runners took part. The run did not garner much national attention as the Dublin ladies mini-marathon also took place on the same date. The sum of IR£20,000 was raised by the participants and later in the year local projects were invited to apply for monetary awards. The scheme entitled 'Awards of Excellence' was overseen by a group of trustees and two awards of IR£5,000 and five of £1,000 were awarded to groups and projects in categories covering youth, heritage, environment, arts, enterprise, culture, tourism and employment.

The run was the one event of the 'Mayo 5000' programme, which was open to all Mayo people and one, which engendered large-scale social interaction as well as civic pride. An event which was devised as 'for the people, by the people' was enthusiastically participated in and also helped to redress the notion of 'Mayo 5000' as a marketing tool with that of an inclusive and festive celebration.

*Tír Sáile Sculpture Trail*

Instigated by native Mayo sculptor and Vice-Chair of the Sculptors' Society of Ireland, Marion O'Donnell, the Tír Sáile sculpture trail was the one event of 'Mayo 5000', which left an enduring imprint on the cultural landscape of the county. The project was designed to put in place a series of site-specific sculptures ranging over a 60km strip along the northern Mayo coastline from the Moy estuary, just outside Ballina to the Belmullet peninsula. The trail was, and still remains Ireland's largest public arts undertaking. Its organisation was carried out under the auspices of 'Dealbhóireacht 5000 Teoranta' – a company specifically set up for that purpose which consisted of representatives of the Sculptors' Society of Ireland, Mayo County Council, Údarás na Gaeltachta and other community groups with local economic development remits.

As a result of O'Donnell's approaches to Mayo County Council and the subsequent establishment of 'Dealbhóireacht 5000', the company set about acquiring a number of sites in North Mayo, which would be suitable for the installation of sculpture works. A total of 26 sites, many in private ownership, were offered by communities in the area. These sites were surveyed in detail by Mayo County Council and offered for a two-stage anonymous competition. The artist's brief was to:

'mark the landscape in a contemporary way using local and natural materials as far as possible, while at the same time taking account of the integrity of the sites and paying due deference to the sensitivities of the donor communities'.<sup>85</sup>

Added to this was the mandate that 'some part of their work should last through the next five millennia and be recognisable for the 'Mayo 10,000' celebrations'.<sup>86</sup> The guidebook to the trail also noted that the project 'set out to explore a number of topics including the role of art in the making of place and in the making of community'.

From an initial submission of 120 Irish based sculptors, a short list of 30 was drawn up – the judging panel included representatives of An Taisce, the Artists Association of Ireland and the Arts Council, together with the internationally renowned Danish sculptor, Bjorn Runnau. In early 1993 the short-listed sculptors were brought on a two-day tour of the designated sites. At each site local guides provided the sculptors with information on the locality and its history. The sculptors were also given the opportunity to

meet with some of the local groups who had donated the variety of sites which included a disused quay, an abandoned quarry, small fields, sand dunes and cliff faces. A guided tour of the Céide Fields was provided by Dr. Caulfield.

In April 1993 the eight successful Irish artists were announced while four invited artists from Denmark, Japan, the US and UK were also named. A further three sites were added later in the project – a joint student project, a second site developed by Japanese sculptor, Mario Yagi, and an introductory exhibition site, designed to facilitate the work of guest sculptors – bringing the total to 15. Work on the sites was conducted during a three-week long symposium in July. At this time the 12 sculptors were brought together at Ballycastle – near to the Céide Fields – for a series of meetings and public lectures while detailed displays of their proposals were put on exhibition. The symposium and installation of the sculptures was based around the idea of an artistic ‘meitheal’ – a tradition of co-operation, prevalent in agricultural practices in Mayo, whereby a group of people came together to perform a task, which would be difficult for a lone individual to undertake. This ‘meitheal’ saw the sculptors living and interacting together while the communities within which they worked provided support to the artists in sourcing local materials and aiding with the practicalities of installing the sculptures. Speaking at the opening of the symposium, Dr. Caulfield drew attention to the ‘meitheal’ tradition and reiterated the point that this practice had its roots in the construction of the Céide Fields. While the majority of installations had been completed by the project launch at the end of July, work continued on a number of sites throughout the summer of 1993. Further work including landscaping, paving, access improvements, parking and signage continued over the next number of years with the support of FÁS.

Further to the remits provided by the trail’s organisers, the artists explored a number of themes such as settlement, human activity, folklore, mythology and farming. The perception of the area was articulated by Clíodna Cussen in an Sculptors’ Society of Ireland newsletter. She described Tír Saile as ‘a place of our collective imagination...out there to the west, beyond the next headland’.<sup>87</sup> The idea of place and placenames was picked up on by several of the sculptors. This is exemplified in Mario Yagi’s ‘The Echo of Newscape’ at Lacken Bay. The use of flagstones in a spiral count design was a reference to *leac* a (flagstone) quarry which lent itself to the placename Lacken but whose meaning has largely been lost or forgotten through tradition and the passing of time. Likewise in the

North Mayo Gaeltacht, Walter Michael's piece 'Caochán', which took its name from the nearby townland of Dun Chaocháin, interprets the local legend of a one eyed giant. Thus the sculptors often took on the role of concretising or revealing the myths of a place. Similarly, Michael Bulfin's 'Deirbhle's Twist' – situated on a hilltop overlooking Blacksod Bay – which resembled an ancient stone circle, was inspired by the story of Saint Deirbhle whose legend is still strong in the locality.

Tony Murphy also presented an ancient motif in his 'Court Henge', which was an idealised replica of the previously mentioned Behy court tomb at the nearby Céide Fields, which had been rendered inaccessible for proprietorial reasons. Murphy's idea to utilise the enclosure of the piece, as a children's playground within a small estate of cottages is thus seen 'to make it accessible with a vengeance'.<sup>88</sup> Marion O'Donnell too dealt with the subject of burial. Her piece 'Acknowledgement' was remotely situated on an island in Blacksod Bay accessed by traversing the strand. The installation – a construction of earth and grass related to the adjacent children's burial ground that had hitherto been marked only by singular uninscribed stones.



**Fig. 4. Tony Murphy's 'Court Henge'**  
Source: Author

Other works along the trail included 'Wind Trees' by Eilish Ó Baoil – an image of a giant handprint on a bare hill near Ballycastle. The fingertips were represented by five semi-circular walls. In the centre of each walled space native trees were planted and the piece was designed to reflect five thousand years of cultivation in Mayo. Niall O'Neill's

'Stratified Sheep' also paid respect to the history of farming and symbolised the transformation over the millennia of the land by the local, rural culture. 'Battling Forces' by Danish artist Fritze Rind at Downpatrick head featured the ongoing struggle between man and nature. This was represented through the juxtaposition of two forms; one manmade and the other organic (see app. 4.3.). Close to this site is that of British sculptor, Simon Thomas. Set into an existing retaining wall at Kilcummin Pier, 'Tonnta na mBlianta' comprised a thousand small holes drilled into the wall, each filled with local rock; gneiss, the oldest rock at twelve million years, placed at the centre followed by basalt and on outwards through the 'ages of man' symbolised by copper, iron and stainless steel. The work is optimally viewed from the bay when the sun catches the inlays (see app. 4.4.).

The Tír Sáile project was given a broad, if quiet, welcome in Mayo; its potential to attract tourists again being seen as its main merit.<sup>89</sup> Artistically, the overall impression of the trail was a positive one. Brian Fallon of *The Irish Times* wrote:

'A worthwhile idea? On the whole, yes, but there was no single work, which imprinted itself indelibly on my mind. Earth art, if this calls itself that, has rather a limited vocabulary so far ...all have at least the merit that they merge with their locality, usually employ simple and natural looking materials and will not become eyesores in 20 years'.<sup>90</sup>

Tom Duddy, of the prominent arts publication *Circa*, also viewed the project as a commendable one:

'My overall impression of the Tír Saile project was a positive one, a feeling that modern sculptural practices had found an unexpected *raison d'être* in a place which would be considered regional, outlying, peripheral'.<sup>91</sup>

Although criticism could be levelled against the Tír Sáile project for its lack of inclusion of indigenous sculptors, the venture can be seen as having positive and enduring qualities. These are particularly evident in the sculptures, which pay homage to some of the key themes surrounding Céide Fields/'Mayo 5000' such as notions of place, time, rurality and farming heritage. The somewhat arbitrary nature of a number of the other sculptures detracts from the pertinence of these works and surely a remit which placed greater emphasis on the themes listed above would have helped to infuse the trail as an act of remembrance in a year when the county was reflecting on its connection with a 5000 years-old past. Indeed, the links between the relevance of sculpture trails and temporal-spatial celebrations was something of a tenuous one – a series of site-specific sculptures, was also installed by the Sculptors' Society of Ireland in Dublin during its millennium



festival. Despite this, further merit lies in the level of community involvement, which featured in the installation of each piece – bringing a degree of artistic realisation to secluded and isolated, yet scenic, localities. The benefits of re-routing a limited, yet welcome, flow of visitors will be reaped by the respective communities. Signage of the trail has improved and in 2001 a comprehensive guidebook – replacing the one page map of the sites – was launched. The guide gives details of the sculptures and sculptors involved, a brief history of the trail and provides information on local histories, placenames and ecology.<sup>92</sup> Despite these improvements many of the sites are still in obscure locations and continue to require personal directions. For the visitor, however, this diversion from the normal tourist route and the subsequent engagement with ‘peripheral’ communities provides the potential for an enhanced experience. The benefits of the trail concur with the arguments of Kevin Whelan – who, in condemning the ubiquitous heritage centre which claims to be representative its respective ‘place’ – reasons for a ‘more generous engagement with the wider landscape or life, where free-floating explorers cannot be so easily corralled and heralded past a cash register.’<sup>93</sup> Concerns over the ongoing responsibility for the trail will no doubt arise, as many of the sites have become overgrown and unkempt.

#### *La Marche du Général Humbert and other events*

Somewhat curiously for an area celebrating 5,000 years of human activity, only one particular historic episode was singled out for special attention. The events which marked *La Marche du Général Humbert* were a curious mix of re-enactments, parades and contemporary festivities. The festival, which ran from 6<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> August, was based on the expedition by the French Général Humbert and his army to Ireland in 1798 in order to assist in the rebellion against English forces. In many ways the festival acted as a rehearsal for the official bi-centennial commemorations which would take place 5 years later (see Chapter Six). Officially, the march was billed as:

‘Two weeks of festivity and pageantry celebrating the historic expedition of 1798 by Général Humbert and his troops. The festival includes the participation of groups from Ireland, England and France united in celebration within a European partnership. The festival includes music, art exhibitions, pageantry and spectacle from three countries’.<sup>94</sup>

The march featured giant replicas, Humbert figures, costumed French, English and Irish soldiers complete with canons, muskets, swords and pikes comprised 100 people,

many of whom were members of Mayo arts groups. The programme of events commenced at Kilcummin – the location at which the French ships had landed in 1798. Here the pageant entered the village, a bugler played the *Last Post* at the Humbert Monument and a Humbert double read the French proclamation. This was followed by a session of music, dance and song.

These events were largely mirrored in the eight other Mayo towns and villages the march visited. Theatrical re-enactments took place such as the hanging of a priest in Lahardane; Général Humbert's meeting with Bishop Stock in Killala and the 'Races of Castlebar'. Ceremonies including tree planting, wreath laying and plaque unveilings occurred in many of the towns en route, while proceedings often concluded with open air music recitals and song and dance performances. In some locations French and English guests took place in events. An art exhibition featuring artistic work from the three countries ran parallel to the festival while the final section of the march was opened up to sponsored walkers participating on behalf of the Mayo Rehab Association.

The March du Général Humbert provided an ideal platform for a number of Mayo arts groups to showcase their talents through re-enactments, set, costume and prop design. This led to inconsistencies, however, as many local groups staged similar re-enactments in conjunction with the arrival of the official Humbert pageant, in respective towns. Another feature of the event was the somewhat incompatible events, arranged in certain towns, which followed the march – these ranged from open-air rock band performances to vintage car displays.

Other events of note in the 'Mayo 5000' calendar included the embroidery of emblems and logos into a patchwork quilt by respective communities and organisations in the county. RTÉ's *The Late Late Show* also dedicated an entire programme to all things 'Mayo' in November 1993. A pageant displaying aspects of Mayo's history over the previous 5000 years was performed at various festivals in the county by a collaboration of artists, musicians and dancers. Furthermore, a specially commissioned An Post stamp featuring the Céide Fields was launched at the site. All events, which took place under the 'Mayo 5000' umbrella, formed the backdrop to an active marketing campaign at domestic and international level by the Mayo 5000 Company. An official ceremony at the Céide Fields on 31 December marked the end of the yearlong festivities. The commercial success

of the programme, however, led to the 'Mayo 5000' company being rebranded as 'Mayo Naturally' – a body that continues to market the county as a tourist destination today.

### Conclusion

In the final analysis it would be inaccurate to describe the establishment of the Céide Fields and the 'Mayo 5000' programme purely as commemorative events. Though the founding of the Ceide Fields centre can at some level be seen as an act of remembrance, *vis-à-vis* its perpetuating of the memory of a previous community and their way of life, the building cannot be designated as an 'institution of commemoration', just as one might view the National Museum of Ireland for instance. Rather, it serves principally as the commercial packaging and interpretation of the archaeological field-remains, and a subsequent attempt to bolster its regional, national and international profile by means of staging what in essence was a dreamt-up commemorative heritage event.

The Céide Fields centre was originally conceived as a relatively unexceptional construction with the aims of signifying the cultural and archaeological importance of the Ceide Fields, attracting a flow of tourists to the location, and establishing a base for ongoing research in disciplines such as archaeology, geology and botany. What transpired was an ostentatious development which focused heavily on themes of interpretation, and which promised wholesale economic benefits for the northwest of Mayo. This is not to say that the 'revised' centre was not broadly welcomed, as indeed it was – the proposed associated economic benefits ensured all stops were pulled out to ensure its securement. Indeed it has been claimed that the tradition of self-help organisation and co-operative development which created the pre-historic landscape of the Céide Fields was again manifest in the spirit, which over 5000 years later brought about the construction of the interpretive centre. Though somewhat romantic, such a contention does hold true and is best summed up in Caulfield's assertion that: 'the thing that struck me is that these things don't just happen. They have to be taken and made happen.'<sup>95</sup> Interestingly, Caulfield also maintained that much of the energy and momentum which was brought the centre to completion was created as a result of the Mayo football team reaching the GAA All-Ireland final in 1989.<sup>96</sup> In fact, with Caulfield receiving a 'Mayo Man of the Year' award for his efforts, and Charlie Haughey being congratulated for 'remembering his Mayo roots', it has been noted that as the project developed, so did 'a sense of Mayo-ism'.<sup>97</sup>

With regards to such an appellation, what becomes clear about the ‘personality’ of Mayo at the outset of the 1990s, is that there was a strongly held apprehension that the county, as well as others in the west of Ireland were becoming increasingly economically marginalised. For peripheral communities within these counties such a fear was even more abject. While such an issue was not a particularly new one, nor one which has since been fully resolved, it is highlighted by a decision by the Catholic Bishops of Connacht and Donegal to convene an urgent think-tank to deliberate on what was viewed as the continuing marginalisation of the western region at that time.<sup>98</sup> In 1993 this task-force put forward *Developing the West Together* – a strategic report, designed to influence government socio-economic policy for the West.<sup>99</sup> The enthusiasm then, of Dr. Caulfield, supported by the people of Erris and the wider Mayo community was ultimately a reaction against this economic decline and perceived neglect. The subsequent injection of substantial state funds into the commemorative heritage project was warmly accepted, and seen as a coerced response to local initiative on the part of the government. The desire for economic recovery was neatly surmised by one Erris local, who, in relation to the centre, declared: ‘it’s what Ballycastle needs...it needs something’.<sup>100</sup> The goodwill towards the centre was further evident in the local fund raising initiatives adopted and the absence of any planning objections. It is difficult to verify but in the upgrading of the project, characteristics of local identity and personality, which may have imbued the centre with a greater sense of reflection and remembrance, were perhaps lost. Indeed Grimwade and Carter have pointed to the detrimental ‘loss of ownership or identity with the site’ which can occur when management of such enterprises is usurped either intentionally or unintentionally by agencies remote from the site.<sup>101</sup> The imposed decrease in local input and contribution to the venture following the government ‘take-over’ is certainly an issue which has underpinned recent scholarship in the field of rural development.

The concept of ‘Mayo 5000’ was a particularly arbitrary and invented one. This has been highlighted by subsequent research at the Céide Fields, which has led Caulfield to pre-date occupation of the site by approximately 500 years.<sup>102</sup> As with the establishment of the Céide Fields centre, such a programme cannot be viewed in line with what is commonly accepted as pure historical commemoration, although many of the sentiments and attitudes typically engendered by commemorative events, such as unity, pride and self-worth were evidentially induced throughout the year’s events. Commemorations would however, appear to induce a perspective of reflection which was largely absent in the

'Mayo 5000' special events, perhaps suggesting that commemoration cannot meditate such an ancient era or unfixed event. These events were inventively conceived to market the county to the outside world whilst also retaining elements of inclusion, participation and festivity. In aligning the principal events of the calendar so closely with economic concerns, an opportunity was however lost for academic investigation and public reflection with regards to local history, heritage and archaeology as well as themes of shared legacies, and group identity. In fact neither of Mayo's two archaeological and historical journals (*Cathair na Mairt: Journal of the Westport Historical Society* and the *North Mayo Historical and Archaeological Society Journal*) have dedicated articles to the archaeology of the Céide Fields or a contemplation on the course of the county's prehistory and history over the previous 5000 years in 1993 or subsequently. Thus the programme was seen nationally for what it largely was – a major heritage-led tourism campaign at county level rather than an authentic commemorative anniversary, which would no doubt have been more localised and organic.

While there may have been a deficiency of sincere retrospective themes throughout the 'Mayo 5000' year, it is obvious there was a general awakening and flourishing of civic consciousness and local pride in Mayo in 1993. In what was only one of two questions asked which did not pertain to economic categorisation, a commissioned evaluation of 'Mayo 5000' found that 65.5% of respondents believed that community groups developed as a consequence of the programme.<sup>103</sup> The other non-economic, and perhaps most interesting statistic to come out of the evaluation is that 69.1% of respondents considered enhanced confidence within the county to be a perceived benefit of 'Mayo 5000'.

Mr John Coll, then County Arts Officer also points to an unprecedented level of artistic output, which also resulted from the programme.<sup>104</sup> Part of this confidence may have arisen through a nationalist sentiment. As a result of the Céide Fields excavations, the establishment of the interpretive centre and the ensuing 'Mayo 5000' events, a Mayo community who had considered themselves as marginalised and peripheral were now being deemed to have roots which extended far back in time and linked to an organic relationship with the earth; perhaps bestowing the notion of the land as a birthright.

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- <sup>7</sup> H. D. Fahey, *Céide Fields: A Study of the Socio-economic Impact of an Interpretive Centre* (Unpublished MRD Thesis, Dept. of Economics, National University of Ireland, Galway, 1999), p. 32.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- <sup>9</sup> Charles J. Haughey was born in Castlebar on 16 September 1925 but moved shortly after with his parents to Dublin.
- <sup>10</sup> *Western People* 18 August 1990.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 July 1990.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 May 1993.
- <sup>14</sup> *Irish Times*, 29 May 1993.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> *Western People* 11 August 1993.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 September 1990.
- <sup>18</sup> *Western People* 27 March 1991.
- <sup>19</sup> *Connaught Telegraph* 28 July 1995.
- <sup>20</sup> Kneafsey, *op. cit.* (1995), p. 145.
- <sup>21</sup> A. Byrne, R. Edmonson and K. Fahy, 'Rural Tourism and Cultural Identity in the West of Ireland', in B. O'Connor and M. Cronin, (Eds.), *Tourism in Ireland: A Critical Analysis* (Cork University Press, Cork, 1993), p. 238.
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- <sup>29</sup> Fahey, *op. cit.*, p.130.
- <sup>30</sup> *Western People* 26 May 1993; Brett, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
- <sup>31</sup> Brett, *op. cit.*, p.137.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> *Céide Fields, Ballycastle, Co. Mayo* (OPW Brochure, Undated), p. 1.
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## **Chapter Five**

### **Remembrance of Calamity: The Great Famine Commemorations**

## Introduction

The national crisis, which was the Great Famine of 1845-1851, was particularly harsh in the west of Ireland and especially devastating in County Mayo where today, a number of markers and acts of remembrance, both obvious and inconspicuous, testify to the memory of such a terrible calamity. While individual and localised cases of suffering and destitution are largely incomparable, Mayo as a county has been noted as being the 'worst hit' and subsequently at the head of 'a ghastly league table of death'.<sup>1</sup> There were a number of reasons for Mayo experiencing such hardship; large, and consequently difficult to govern Poor Law unions; workhouses which were among the last to open in the country; total failure of the potato crop in an area which was highly dependent on it; high levels of absenteeism among landlords, and a poor pre-Famine economy, which gave rise to a low Poor Law valuation. The latter cause is also reflected in Mayo, along with Kerry, having the highest proportion (close to 60%) of inferior dwellings in the country while at 475 persons to the square mile Mayo was also one of most densely populated counties in the country.<sup>2</sup>

While precise excess mortality rates in any area, as for the country as a whole, are impossible to estimate, it is thought that nearly 100,000 people died in the 'bleak and barren county of Mayo' due to Famine-related causes.<sup>3</sup> Other estimates put the total of Famine driven depopulation in the county at 170,000 and it is certainly true that the population of Mayo declined by 29% from 388,887 to 247,830 between the census years of 1841 and 1851.<sup>4</sup>

In order to set the scene for the examination of the Famine's subsequent commemoration in Mayo, this chapter will firstly commence with an overview of the history of the Famine at national level before moving on to chart the impact and effects of the crisis locally in Mayo. Nationally, there was little done to mark the centenary of the Famine in the mid-twentieth century. Two initiatives which were, however, sanctioned by the state, were the publication of a Famine history and the collection of Famine-related folklore. In light of lack of localised commemorations at this time, and, with a view to contextualising the extensive Famine commemorations of 50 years later, these two projects are duly reviewed. The chapter then moves on to examine the broader national events, which marked this sesquicentenary anniversary, particularly those that invited criticism or

courted controversy for failing to commemorate such a calamity in an appropriate and befitting manner.

With regard to this theme of appropriateness, the commemorative events to mark the Famine in County Mayo are then discussed at length. Although remembrance of the Famine in Mayo as elsewhere permeated customary life in the form of place-names, folklore and song, it would appear that a concerted and organised acknowledgement of the tragedy gave way to a certain level of muteness up until the late twentieth century. The majority of Mayo-based commemorations which are investigated later on herein, unsurprisingly have their roots in the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event. These include the annual Doolough-Louisburgh Famine walk, a memorial mass at Knock Basilica, the unveiling of the National Famine Memorial at Murrisk and the publication of a local Famine history by the Mayo County Council. This section of the chapter deals with the proposed establishment of Famine-themed interpretive centre at the site of abandoned village on Achill Island. Attention is also given to what is labelled as ‘exported commemoration’, that is, the siting in New York of two Famine monuments with particular Mayo associations. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summarised critique of the propriety of the efforts to commemorate the Famine in Mayo as well as an evaluation of the combined legacy of these events for the people of the county.

### **History of the Famine**

The Great Famine of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century was arguably the most destructive and also pivotal event in Irish history. Caused by the failure to the potato crop in three seasons out of four between 1845–1849, due to the fungal disease *phytophthora infestans* – commonly called potato blight – the Famine accounted for the greatest loss of life and flight from the land that the country ever witnessed. Although it has been widely debated it has been generally accepted that in the region of one million people died during these years with a further one million emigrating.

The disease was first noted at the Botanic Gardens in Dublin in August 1845, and, following its spread to many parts of the country over the proceeding harvest months, a scientific commission was set up by the British administration to establish the extent of the crop losses caused by the new disease and to recommend ways of preventing its reoccurrence. Hampered by limited scientific knowledge, however, the commission failed

to recognise the blight – which reduced potato tubers to a black, foul smelling sludge – as a fungal infection. As the consequences of the potato failure became apparent, a central relief committee was established in Dublin, which was augmented by local relief committees throughout the country, comprising local landlords, large farmers and clergymen. The duties of the committees were to raise voluntary subscriptions for the provision of relief which were to be supplemented by government funds, and the purchase and resale of corn from government depots – much of which was part of a £100,000 consignment of ‘Indian meal’ or maize which had been secretly purchased by Tory Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel from the U.S. The committees were also responsible for the overseeing of public relief works.<sup>5</sup> As part of a wider *laissez faire* ideology – which he believed would improve the economies of Ireland and England – Peel also sought the repeal of the protectionist Corn Laws which kept domestic corn prices artificially high. This prevailing economic theory which was a particular principle of the succeeding Whig government often combined with a providentialist interpretation of the Famine and certain views that the collapse of the potato economy provided an opportunity for agricultural reorganisation. The theories of economists such as Thomas Malthus, which held that population growth in the face of limited food supply would regulate itself provided relief was not provided to the lower classes, were also to have a strong influence on government policy. Running parallel to these reactive measures was the permanent system of relief based round the *Irish Poor Law Act* of 1838 which created a nation-wide system of poverty relief, in the form of the workhouse, which was financed by poor rates – paid for the most part by Irish landowners. The country was divided into 130 Poor Law unions with a workhouse in each and 2,049 electoral unions.<sup>6</sup> During the first year of shortages the combined relief measures were largely effective and correspondingly no excess mortality was recorded in this period.<sup>7</sup>

In autumn 1846, the return of the blight caused a far more widespread crop failure, which has been estimated at 90%, marking the arrival of a national crisis.<sup>8</sup> By this time Peel’s government had fallen to the Whig party of Lord John Russell. Dominated by political economists and free traders this government saw a modified and expanded relief work as the cure to Ireland’s ills. Guided by recommendations from Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Charles Wood, and Permanent Secretary at the Treasury, Charles Trevelyan, the Labour Rate Act – which replaced the flat daily rate being paid to workers with a system of pay according to the amount of labour which they performed – was

introduced. The act also approved that wages paid should be lower than the local market rate, that funding for the works should be raised through increased poor law taxation, and that decisions regarding the workforce and other aspects of the relief works required the sanction of the Treasury.

Though the works, costing £5 million provided a vital lifeline for many over the winter months of 1846-1847 (numbers employed rose from 114,000 in October 1846 to a high of 750,000 in March 1847)<sup>9</sup>, the scheme was seen as being insufficient and ineffective as it was dogged by bureaucratic, staffing and administrative problems. Indeed, 'Famine roads' constructed by many of the schemes would come to symbolise tracks that led to nowhere and performed no useful function.

As a particularly harsh winter ensued, newspapers and travellers to Ireland began to report on horrific cases of hunger and death as well as wider conditions of deprivation. Reports of crime – often against food storage properties such as the remaining government food depots, mills and warehouses – soared too, at this time. Although no official records of mortality during the Famine were kept, the local constabulary estimated that 400,000 people died during these winter months through want of food.<sup>10</sup> As part of its Poor Law Extension Act, the government decided in January 1847 to end the public works and to transfer the responsibility for all relief to the Poor Law. This new system was to become operative in the autumn while soup kitchens were to provide relief in the interim period.

The year 1847 or 'Black 47' as it has come to be remembered in popular tradition saw the height of distress of the Famine period as the hunger marches and food riots that had marked the winter of 1846 increasingly gave way to despair, exhaustion and flight. With the workhouse system under severe pressure, and over half the Board of Guardians illegally providing food to non-residents of the workhouse, the Act of Temporary Relief of Destitute Persons in Ireland sought to establish provisional feeding facilities in the form of soup kitchens in each of over 2,000 electoral divisions. Despite the major delays which were associated with this undertaking, the government pushed ahead with its winding up of relief works. From 20 March 1847 worker numbers were to be cut by 20% with a further 10% cut in April, and, by the end of June all but 4% of relief workers had been let go.<sup>11</sup> In the areas which were left without access to official relief in the spring of 1847, it was left to local clergy, charitable individuals and private philanthropy, notably the Society of

Friends (Quakers), to provide assistance. With activities being co-ordinated by their Central Relief Committee in Dublin much of the Society's work – particularly the establishment of soup kitchens – was conducted in isolated communities.

Mortality peaked in this period as malnutrition and disease rather than starvation became the main adversaries of the Irish poor. Both typhus and relapsing fever were transmitted by the body louse and Famine conditions provided an ideal environment for spreading the infection as large masses congregated on the public works, emigration ships or in queues for rations. Workhouses struggled to safely dispose of the dead and infected clothes were baked to kill the fever, while contaminated areas were fumigated with sulphuric acids. Extreme cold was also a problem as little turf for fuel had been gathered in the previous season. This was further manifest in a lack of hot water, which exacerbated poor domestic hygiene conditions.

As the government's own soup kitchens became more organised under the control of the newly constituted local relief committees working alongside separate finance committees, a limited food supply was provided to the masses. The number of rations provided peaked on 3 July when over 3 million people (at least 37% of the population) were in receipt of free rations of soup - the government spending £1,725,000 on the scheme during its execution.<sup>12</sup> While the majority of this money was provided as a loan to the local relief committees, to be repaid out of local poor rates, the poorest unions did receive a combination of grants and loans. The immediate impact of the soup kitchens nationally was largely favourable and by the summer of 1847 the general health of the population was improving and mortality rates levelling. These developments were abetted by falling food prices due to increased imports and a temporary relaxation of import duties while international charitable donations were considerable. With these advancements in mind, the government decreed in August that temporary relief was to cease in all but 26 of the poorest unions while a limited amount of cold food distribution was to remain. This outdoor relief was to be made available to specified groups such as the sick and disabled and widows with two or more legitimate children but also for a two-month period to those who passed a daily labour test usually of stone breaking.<sup>13</sup>

Under the amendments to the Poor Law and following the closure of the kitchens, relief – both Famine and 'ordinary' – became the responsibility of the local Poor Rates,

which were also to include repayment of loans for the soup kitchens. Paradoxically, the most impoverished and neediest unions were now expected to shoulder the greatest burden leading to 22 unions being declared as officially distressed.<sup>14</sup> A further stringent aspect of the Extension Act was the 'Quarter Acre' or 'Gregory Clause' which stipulated that tenants who occupied more than a quarter acre of land could not be assisted through the Poor Law, and which was often used by landlords who wished to rid their estates of small tenants, for whom they were obliged to pay the rates of those whose annual rent was less than £4. The pattern of evictions, which had commenced a year earlier, was set to continue and in 1847 there were 6,026 families evicted – a figure, which had more than doubled to 13,197 in 1851.<sup>15</sup> Emigration levels reached 219,885 persons in 1847,<sup>16</sup> as the notorious 'coffin ships' became associated with the Famine exodus, while the Canadian quarantine station at Gross Île would come to be emblematic of the sheer numbers and destitute nature of arriving emigrants.

Little evidence of the re-appearance of blight in the harvest months of 1847 led the government to declare that the Famine was officially over. With little seed having been sowed over the previous two seasons, however, returns were meagre. Added to this was the continuing economic recession in both England and Ireland. Although the blight was to re-appear in 1848, the declaration from the government led to a decline in the international response to the Famine in terms of charitable donations and sympathy to arriving emigrants.

The abating of the blight in 1847 saw much effort being made to increase the crop of 1848, only for the fungus to rage again. Of the total crop, 50% was lost while the harvest in the west was almost totally destroyed.<sup>17</sup> The year was again marked by enduring despair as the wave of starvation, disease, eviction and emigration continued against a backdrop of soaring Poor Law taxation, which was supporting the 630,000 recipients of outdoor relief.<sup>18</sup> The crucial direct relief which had been provided by the Quakers had been scaled back by the end of 1847 and charitable donations from the British Association dried up in the following July as the weight of assistance fell on the unions. The diminishing government response was further tempered by the outbreak of a rebellion led by the Young Irelanders in the summer of 1848. The repeated failure of the 1848 crop again caused serious repercussions in the winter of that year and throughout the next. Crime levels rose, from 20,000 on trial at the outset of the Famine, to 39,000 in 1849.<sup>19</sup> Crimes were mainly

non-violent and were directed at property, in a bid for food and offences in the hope of jailhouse accommodation or even deportation were becoming more common. Evictions began to be officially recorded in the year and between 1849 and 1854, the number who were dispossessed, formally and permanently is estimated at 250,000.<sup>20</sup> The Encumbered Estates Act that was passed in July 1849 meant that landlords could sell their estates without having to pay off their debts first but encumbered land could also be sold without the agreement of the landlord.<sup>21</sup> It was hoped by this practice that English entrepreneurs would be attracted to Irish agriculture. Homelessness was now as problematic as starvation and an outbreak of cholera caused further hardship.

In July of 1849, the number of people receiving Poor Law relief peaked at over one million, three quarters of whom were in receipt of outdoor relief.<sup>22</sup> With 22 unions still officially distressed and a further 30 in financial difficulties, boundaries were re-drawn and new unions created. In spite of opposition from landlords in Ulster, a Rate-in-Aid Act, which levied tax on the more prosperous unions in the country and redistributed to the poorest unions in the west, was passed. Though reports of the grave instability of certain unions still abounded, there were signs in 1849 that Ireland was starting to emerge from the most severe impact of the Famine. Although the blight had returned, and was to for the next two years, it was increasingly in a more localised form. The economy, assisted in part by an enhanced linen industry, was displaying evidence of improvement. Moreover, death and emigration had cleared the land of many of the most vulnerable members of society.

After 1851 death through starvation and Famine-related disease waned. The influence of the Famine, however, was far-reaching and prolonged. The magnitude of the effect of the disaster was most obvious in the dramatic population decline which took place, from over 8 million in 1841 to 6.5 million 10 years later.<sup>23</sup> The stream of emigration which had heightened over the Famine period, continued to flow and by 1900 there were more Irish people found to be living outside of Ireland than inside. In that same year, the population of Ireland decreased to 4.5 million and continued to decline thereafter. Marriage patterns also changed in the decades after the Famine. People now tended to marry later as the practice of land sub-division ended. Instead, one child would commonly inherit the farm while the others were inevitably condemned to the emigrant ships or to remain unmarried. Birth rates too declined. With an end to sub-division, farms became increasingly larger, leading to a shift away from tillage farming in favour of pasture. Farm



tenants began to demand greater security and rights, reflected in the establishment of movements such as the Tenant Rights Movement and the Land League and culminating in the Land Wars of the 1870s and 1880s as politically, the Famine did much to embitter a population who were opposed to British rule in Ireland. Social and cultural patterns also altered in the post-Famine era. Urbanisation increased steadily while the Irish language diminished from a speaking population of about 50% in 1841 to that of 14% by 1901 as the language became associated with poverty and ignorance.<sup>24</sup> As traditions of music, dance and story telling decreased as well, the Catholic Church stepped in to establish a firm power base in the cultural void created by the Famine.

### **The Famine in County Mayo**

At the outset of the Famine, many western areas including Mayo were reported to have escaped relatively blight free during the initial harvest months.<sup>25</sup> Despite this, demand for employment, as the public works were rolled out, was highest in Mayo as well as other counties, which had undergone periodic distress prior to 1845, including Clare, Galway, Kerry, Limerick, Roscommon and Tipperary.<sup>26</sup> By the following harvest of 1846, and with Russell's government having taken power, the extended works were providing a crucial means of existence to a limited number of people in the county. Between October 1846 and June 1847, the daily average number employed on the public works was 29,221, although it was also estimated in this period that 400,000 in the county were destitute.<sup>27</sup> In spite of the high level of demand for a place on the scheme, nation-wide riots against the introduction of task work commenced in Westport in August 1846 when a 'mob' of between, 3,000 to 4,000 disrupted ongoing works. The situation was defused by the intervention of a Catholic priest.<sup>28</sup>

As the severe winter began to take its toll accounts of grievous affliction, just as elsewhere, began to emanate from the county. Among the many stories of starvation which were carried by the Mayo newspaper *The Telegraph*, was that of a Westport woman seen lying in despair over the body of her dead husband whose face had been devoured by rats, at the gates of landlord demesne. Another told of a boy of six from Foxford who was found attending to all eight of his fever ridden family members, who were all confined to bed.<sup>29</sup> Reports too of crime in the county were on the increase at this time. Such occurrences included that of a gang overpowering a night watchman and plundering several barrels of flour from a merchants store in Westport<sup>30</sup> while towards the end of the year one of a

number of infamous piracy incidents saw the crew of eleven currachs attempting to plunder the cargo of a corn laden freight vessel in Blacksod Bay, off the coast of the Mullet peninsula.<sup>31</sup>

While the government soup kitchens came to be established, the endeavour was particularly protracted in Mayo as poor infrastructure and incompetent administration led to lengthy delays. Although the relief work had been almost completely scaled back, distressed districts such as Cong in Mayo still had no soup kitchen by June 1847.<sup>32</sup> Initially Mayo contained five unions: Ballina, Ballinrobe, Castlebar, Swinford and Westport. At 509,154 acres, Ballina was the largest, and subsequently most difficult union to administer in the country.<sup>33</sup> Under the 1849 re-designation, four new ones – Belmullet, Claremorris, Killala and Newport – were created.<sup>34</sup> The workhouse at Ballinrobe had by this time been ravaged by disease. A description in the *Illustrated London News* stated:

‘This building is nothing other than one horrible charnel house, the unfortunate paupers being nearly all the victims of the fearful fever – the dying and the dead, one might say, huddled together. The master has become the victim of this dread disease; the clerk has been added to the victims; the matron too is dead; and the respected, regretted and esteemed physician, has fallen before the ravages of the pestilence, in his constant attendance upon the diseased inmates. The Roman Catholic chaplain is also dangerously ill of the same epidemic’.<sup>35</sup>

The void left by the sluggish opening of the government’s soup kitchens was partly filled in Mayo by those of the Society of Friends. Their benevolence in the county additionally involved the establishment of self-sufficiency projects such as a fisheries enterprise in Erris, and spade cultivation farms, which encouraged the growing of ‘alternative’ produce such as turnips, green crops and flax in the environs of Ballina. The Society also distributed over 22,500 kilograms of seed throughout Mayo, by far the most for any county.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the reports from the fact-finding tours of James H. Tuke and William Forster in 1846 and 1847, did much in the way of highlighting as well as chronicling the plight of the distressed people of Mayo and further afield. Their descriptions of squalid and primitive conditions in the Erris region are particularly revealing. In an area devastated by death and emigration they found large numbers on the verge of starvation living in makeshift dwellings, which were cut into the bog. The occupants who were subsisting on turnip tops, sand eels and seaweed were ‘wild and all but naked, scarcely human in appearance’, a situation which according to Tuke was doubly

shocking because it existed 'within forty-eight hours journey of the metropolis of the world.'<sup>37</sup> Another person to provide detailed accounts of the Famine in Mayo was free-trade advocate and journalist for the *Manchester Examiner*, Alexander Somerville. In the summer of 1847 he wrote of Mayo as being 'at once the most magnificent and the most mean of Irish shires', yet described its population as 'the most wretched, and in the present season of the famine, the most destitute of any people I have yet seen in Ireland.'<sup>38</sup>

When the government's soup kitchens finally became operational, demand for assistance in Mayo was again particularly acute. Of the unions which had the maximum number of people dependent on rations as a percentage of its population, all five of Mayo's were in the top ten nationally, with Ballinrobe topping the league at 94.41%.<sup>39</sup> The financial pressure on such straitened unions became intense, and following the amendment to the Poor Law which placed local relief on local revenue, all five of Mayo's unions were included in the 22 nationwide which were officially declared as distressed, while at over 10 shillings in the pound, Ballina, Ballinrobe and Westport carried among them some of the highest rates for ordinary relief in the country.<sup>40</sup> This concept of 'making Irish property support Irish poverty' was censured by the Inspector of the Ballina union who believed that such an experiment in the west of Ireland, 'must ultimately fail'.<sup>41</sup> Despite the obvious inequity of the system, newly installed vice-guardians in the unions of Ballinrobe, Castlebar and Westport were informed that it was crucial 'to the interests of the Empire' that sufficient rates should be collected for the alleviation of local destitution even within impoverished unions.<sup>42</sup>

In 1847, as the Gregory Clause of the new Extension Act began to take hold, Mayo saw a marked rise in the number of evictions taking place. The clearance of smallholders was exacerbated by the fact that 75% of holdings in the county were valued under the £4 threshold.<sup>43</sup> Correspondingly, between 1849 and 1854, County Mayo accounted for 10% of all permanent evictions officially recorded in the country.<sup>44</sup> Particularly unscrupulous landlords such as the Marquess of Sligo in Westport and Lord Lucan of Castlebar gained enduring notoriety at this time. Having claimed that he 'would not breed paupers to pay priests', Lucan was responsible for the clearance of 2,000 people from his land and the destruction of 300 houses in Ballinrobe parish alone between 1846 and 1849.<sup>45</sup> Despite the numbers who fled from the land, emigration from Mayo at 8% of the population was not especially high. This has largely been attributed to the fact that people in more distressed

areas were less likely to have the financial means as well as 'the necessary will, motivation, information and health to move'.<sup>46</sup> The outward flow from the county, however, continued long in to the next century.

The scaling back of government relief and charitable donations following the subsiding of the 1847 harvest had profound consequences on impoverished counties such as Mayo. A particular blow was the winding up of a British Association scheme which had been piloted in the Westport union by Count Srezlecki and which by the time of its termination was providing relief to 200,000 children daily in the west of Ireland.<sup>47</sup> As masses continued to flock to Mayo's urban centres, the *Mayo Constitution* reported that 'the streets of every town in the county are overrun by stalking skeletons'.<sup>48</sup> The repeated destruction of the crop in autumn 1848 coupled with the decline in relief led to another devastating winter in Mayo in 1848-1849. The fact that all unions in the county were virtually bankrupt made matters more desperate and stories of extreme deprivation continued unabated. Reporting from Westport, Asenath Nicholson wrote:

'A cabin was seen closed one day a little out of the town, when a man had the curiosity to open it, and in the dark corner he found a family of the father, mother and two children lying in close compact. The father was considerably decomposed; the mother, it appeared, had died last, and probably fastened the door, which was always the custom when all hope was extinguished, to get into the darkest corner and die, where passers-by could not see them. Such family scenes was quite common, and the cabin was generally pulled down around them for a grave...In all my former walks over the island, by day or night, no shrinking or fear of danger ever retarded in the least of my progress; but now, the horror of meeting living walking ghosts, or stumbling on the dead in my path at night, inclined me to keep within when necessity did not call'.<sup>49</sup>

Though emigration and evictions stayed high and workhouses remained full over the next number of years, the harvest of 1849 marked something of a turnaround in the fortunes of Mayo. With a 'new spirit of activity' apparent in the county which led to the 'reinvestment of capital in the land'<sup>50</sup>, Mayo and the rest of the country emerged from the shadow of such a damaging catastrophe over the next few years. As families and communities struggled to regain a sense of normality, however, the Famine left a bitter memory which would take some time to address.

## History of Famine Commemorations

### *The Great Famine Questionnaire*

It was 100 years after the event before any formal commemoration of the Great Famine was to take place. Even then, with the calamity having just passed from living memory, the two concepts dedicated to commemorating the Famine which had state approval, were designed to be low key and largely esoteric. The Famine, had for the most part, been silenced by those who lived through it, and its recent memory was seen as too raw and too painful to be openly discussed or debated. By the time the Irish Folklore Commission conducted its centenary Famine survey in 1945, – a so called ‘act of national institutional commemoration’<sup>51</sup> – memory of the event had passed to another generation and while certain aspects of the Famine remained unspoken of, a great deal of information was recounted by people who were obviously acutely aware of its historical significance.

The Irish Folklore Commission was established in 1935 under the directorship of James Delargy and had responsibility for the ‘collection, preservation, classification, study and exposition of all aspects of Irish folk traditions’.<sup>52</sup> It had previously conducted a number of general folklore collections undertaken by its full and part time collectors, and the 1937-38 *Bailiúchán na Scol* (the Schools’ Collection) – a pre-scripted survey of elderly people conducted largely by schoolchildren interviewing family and neighbours. Famine-related material had previously been gathered through these modes. The 1945 survey, entitled *The Great Famine Questionnaire*, was devised by historian Thomas P. O’Neil and centred on six themes. It yielded over 3,500 pages of material from over 500 respondents. Alone, it comprised roughly half the total Famine-related material gathered in the 1930s and 1940s. Collectors were mainly school teachers and the average age of informants was 73-74, meaning that most of their parents at least, would have witnessed the event. One in four informants lived in Connacht, nearly two in five in Munster and one in five each in Leinster and Ulster.<sup>53</sup> Although the implied theory contained in some of the questions, as well as the uniform nature and administration of the questionnaire has latterly come in for criticism,<sup>54</sup> the legacy of the Famine folklore has come to be re-evaluated as an important mode of engagement with the past.

The first appraisal of the material gathered in *The Great Famine Questionnaire* was provided by Roger McHugh in 1957 in his contribution to Edwards and Williams’s *The*

*Great Famine*.<sup>55</sup> McHugh recounts the testimonies provided in the survey under sections, which included the blight, Famine food, relief works, disease, death and burial and post-Famine changes in the Irish countryside – a great deal of which came from Mayo respondents. Although he was more interested in the Famine folklore as a source of evidence rather than a guide to the construction of Famine memory, McHugh's chapter has been described as by Ó Grada as 'by far the most evocative in Edwards and Williams's self-consciously dry collection of essays'. It is certainly true that the evocation of personal testament (albeit second-hand) engenders a pathos, which is in stark contrast to the methodical and statistical data provided elsewhere in the book. In a shift from the 'value free history' of the publication, McHugh wrote that the oral tradition of the Famine 'by the way it relates experience to daily life, can play its part in adding something human and vivid to our understanding of the past...one cannot ignore the contribution, both factual and psychological, which it has to offer' and concluded that the testimony he has recounted is 'the truth heard from afar, of the men and women, who were caught up, uncomprehending and frantic in that disaster'.<sup>56</sup> Over the following decades the folklore recorded was largely disregarded by historians. The reason for this was centred on 'the idea that myth and fact are arch-enemies; what the Folklore Commission collected was myth and what the historians sought to find was fact'.<sup>57</sup> More recently, calls for the Famine folklore document to be given greater attention, have been voiced by a number of commentators. While admitting this record can be 'selective, evasive and apologetic', Ó Grada also makes the point that:

'Though memories recounted much later may fail to reveal the true feelings of those at risk, they may capture them much better than the standard documentary sources. Moreover, folklore is also about the normative beliefs and semi-public attitudes, as exchanged between people – an important topic for famine historiography...At its best the record is vivid, eloquent and compelling'.<sup>58</sup>

Again, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Famine fuelled interest in the folk legacy of the event. The broadcaster Cathal Póirtéir, who compiled a radio series and publication based on the folklore record, argued that a methodology should be worked out, as is the case in other countries, for the greater integration of folklore into historical studies.<sup>59</sup> Póirtéir also maintained that the folk history of the Famine had previously been played down due to

fears that its emotive content may have been ‘open to exploitation by nationalist propagandists’.<sup>60</sup>

Replies to the *Great Famine Questionnaire* reveal a strong sense of detachment from those who died or were dispossessed throughout its course. Frequently there is, as Quinlan describes, a ‘perceptible “othering”’ of the victims by depicting them as ‘strangers’ or people who died in ‘other places’. As with horrific historic episodes such as the Holocaust, she concludes, such a sense of detachment may well be ‘the result of the inability of survivors to articulate the magnitude of the disaster’.<sup>61</sup> Both Quinlan and O’Grada bring to light a number of recurrent themes, which portray the psychological legacy left by the Famine. This ‘othering’ of Famine victims is evident in the testimony of an informant from Doohooma in Northwest Mayo, who claimed that ‘the Famine did not affect people as much as it did elsewhere’, yet according to census data the population of Doohooma fell from 455 (1841) to 218 (1851).<sup>62</sup> As well as the suppression of personal trauma, Quinlan contends that the belief that one’s locality escaped lightly can also be put down to an unwillingness by those who profited from the decimation of an entire area to enlighten succeeding generations about local death and starvation: ‘A version of the Famine in which only strangers, who wandered in from outside the area died, is less likely to damage a community’s image of itself than stories of starving indigenous people’.<sup>63</sup>

For the most part the testimony of Mayo informants corresponds with the general national narrative and anecdotes from Mayo regarding the cruelty as well as the benevolence of certain landlords, the selfishness of gombeenmen, crimes committed in a bid for food and alternative Famine foods are similarly recalled across the country. There is, however, a strong body of material from Mayo which relates to stories of proselytising. One such tradition, which is largely confined to Mayo, concerns priests warning people against planting potato seed in 1847. Those who ignored this advice, however, received a good crop and thus converted to the Protestant faith.<sup>64</sup> While it not clear whether such stories aim to exonerate those who converted religion, the propensity for ‘proselytising stories’ was most likely inspired by the county containing the noted mission of the Rev. Edward Nangle which consistently engaged in such practices. Mayo informants also provide unique specifics regarding Famine-related placenames. Instances of these relate to locations where livestock were bled for food ingredients, while others refer to particular burial sites.<sup>65</sup>

Commonly referred to *An Drochsaol* (The Bad Times) as opposed to the 'The Famine', the 1945 informants provided a wealth of detail on the burial practices of victims. There are numerous stories of people being collected for burial while still alive and many more relate to bodies lying in fields or houses being pulled down around fevered corpses. Mayo informants too retold of the inability through weakness, of communities to bury their dead<sup>66</sup>; a powerlessness which 'obviously leaves a deep scar on the imagination of the people'.<sup>67</sup> Other accounts of burials from the county referred to bodies interred at night so the victim is not struck off the ration list;<sup>68</sup> while another burial story which was common to Donegal and Galway as well as Mayo referred to the burying of dead adults in what were hitherto children's burial grounds.<sup>69</sup> Another recurring theme from not only Mayo, but also elsewhere, was that of miraculous reward. Stories were frequently told of those who were overcompensated for their generosity in sharing food or drink with others more destitute.<sup>70</sup> Such supernatural rescue has been described as 'the corollary of adducing a supernatural cause for scarcity or calamity'<sup>71</sup> but has been more moderately viewed as reflecting the cultural norms and aspirations of the community. Such 'legends' writes Póirtéir, 'give us a picture of how people would have liked it to be, express moral and religious values, and are a mechanism which helped communities deal with the horror that surrounded them'.<sup>72</sup>

While arguments over the validity of folklore as an authentic means of communicating the past will undoubtedly continue, the centenary Famine questionnaire remains an important source for understanding the processes involved in the construction of memory. As Quinlan points out, 'the importance of oral testimony "often lies not in adherence to facts, but rather its divergence from them, where imagination, symbolism, desire break in"'.<sup>73</sup> *The Great Famine 1845-1852 Questionnaire*, while widening 'the range of historical perspective originating with the people themselves'<sup>74</sup> should also be seen as an invaluable corpus representative of popular beliefs and attitudes concerning the Famine in the mid-twentieth century. There is also an engaging opportunity for the oral record to inform and complement local historical studies.

*The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History 1845-52*

Although not published until 1956, *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History 1845-52* had originally been conceived as a project to mark the centenary of the Famine.



The study had stemmed from a conversation between then Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera and James Delargy, Director of the Irish Folklore Commission. De Valera who was influenced as a boy by his grandmother's recounting of Famine lore,<sup>75</sup> had forwarded the idea of a book on the Great Famine, which he proposed would be ready 'for publication, if possible in 1945'.<sup>76</sup>

The proposition was brought before the recently-constituted Irish Committee of Historical Sciences who proposed that rather than a single author, the publication be based largely on a series of essays on various aspects of the Famine by a number of authors. Professor Theodore W. Moody (Trinity College, Dublin), Professor Robert Dudley Edwards (University College, Dublin) and Dr. David B. Quinn (Queens University, Belfast) were chosen to act as joint editors, 1946 was suggested as the date of publication and £1,500 was agreed on as the fee for what was proposed to be a work of 1,000 pages. The editors set about identifying and recruiting potential contributors but the overall work became severely protracted. Despite repeated pressure from de Valera's office, wrangling over payment, content, progress and printing of the book all ensued over the next numbers of years. Quinn dropped out of the editorial staff due to work commitments while Moody resigned, his position ultimately being taken over by T. Desmond Williams of University College Dublin. The management of the project seems to have somewhat slipshod. No joint meetings of the entire group ever took place and 'the mechanical yoking together of a series of specialist contributions on such subjects as politics, relief, agriculture, emigration and folklore'<sup>77</sup> did not provide the comprehensive history, which had been envisaged in 1944. The final version was half the original intended length and Edwards would later convey his concern over the level of emphasis on 'revisionism' contained in the book.<sup>78</sup>

Although a most thoroughly researched work, and of lasting value, *The Great Famine* is let down by its over-rigorous adherence to 'value-free history' which renders the book as 'an administrative history of the period, with core chapters... dwelling on the tragedy mainly from the standpoint of the politician, the poor law administrator, those who controlled passenger movements and the medical practitioner'.<sup>79</sup> With regards to research pertaining to Mayo, E. R. R. Green in his chapter on agriculture noted that the county was the only one in Ireland where the rundale system of tenure was still predominant in 1845, and also provided some interesting information on agricultural practices in the area at the time.<sup>80</sup> As already noted, McHugh also recounts a number of the accounts from Mayo

informants in his contribution on the folklore of the Famine.<sup>81</sup> Further examples from Mayo, which are frequently used throughout the book, however, convey the overall clinical tone of the work. In summarising the overall defectiveness of such writing, Ó Grada again concludes:

‘That the Irish Historians of the 1950s should have sought to rid Irish history of its undue emphasis on the tragic is understandable; but the appalling catastrophe of the 1840s was an unhappy choice for that campaign’.<sup>82</sup>

Despite its shortcomings, *The Great Irish Famine* was favourably reviewed and sold well. Having been sent a complimentary copy of the book, de Valera (then in opposition) thanked the editors, but also reminded them in his reply, of the conditions which had been endured by the ‘ordinary people’ of Bruree (the Limerick village in which he had spent his childhood). Later he would express disappointment with the book ‘presumably because it seemed to downplay those aspects of the tragedy that had been etched in his own memory’.<sup>83</sup> De Valera much preferred Cecil Woodham-Smith’s *The Great Hunger* which was published in 1962 and he attended a lecture of hers which was organised by the Dublin Mayomen’s Association in aid of a ‘Freedom from Hunger Campaign’ as well as hosting a lunch in her honour in Arás an Uachtarain upon her conferral with an honorary doctorate from the National University of Ireland. Indeed Woodham-Smith had strong links with Mayo and it was there that her interest in the Famine was prompted, having been introduced to Mayo workhouse material while studying (whilst in Castlebar) the papers of Lord Lucan’s involvement in the Crimean War.<sup>84</sup>

The 1960s also saw the unveiling of a state-commissioned Famine memorial in Dublin’s St. Stephen’s Green. The piece, an elongated bronze casting of a Famine group or family is a roughly textured installation of the type favoured by sculptor Edward Delaney who was incidentally born in Mayo. The sculpture unveiled in 1967 as part of a twin commissioning with the adjoining Wolfe Tone monument, marked a radical departure from the prevailing form of commemorative monuments. Not only was it abstract in form but because it was set at ground level, those viewing it ‘were effectively asked to respond to the work as they would in a gallery, individually, meditatively, rather than as they had traditionally done, looking up together at exemplary men’.<sup>85</sup> As such this type of monument signified a transition from the conventional memorial to what is commonly

regarded as public art. This coincided with an 'upsurge in the commissioning of visual art in Ireland' in the 1960s and was also 'directly related to the changing economic and cultural climate of the Lemass era'.<sup>86</sup> It was close to the end of the twentieth century, however, before the Famine was openly and collectively commemorated at national and local level. A number of these remembrances attracted varying degrees of brickbats.

### **Famine Commemorations in the 1990s**

#### *Disputed Commemorations*

For the most part, the Famine commemorative events held during the 1990s were sombre, understated affairs, many of which were conducted uncontentiously and quietly by local groups in deference to events which had happened in their area. Some of the more high-profile events, debates and comments, did, as would be expected, garner criticism and controversy. The tour of America by Minister of State, Avril Doyle, T.D. along with a number of historians and academics was reviewed as 'amounting to a Famine roadshow'<sup>87</sup>. Roy Foster points to the 'luridly jolly brochure' of the Cashel Heritage Society which promised to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary 'of this dark period of our past' with a 'colourful Pageant of Music, Song, Dance and Drama', and to a pledge from the handout at the 200 acre Famine 'Theme Park' in Knockfierna, Co. Limerick, that 'it will be possible to experience first hand in this remote area how 1,000 people struggled for survival at the height of the Famine'.<sup>88</sup> Luke Dodd of the Irish Famine Museum too spoke of his disapproval of local pageants 'where very white, very well fed, late twentieth-century, mud-daubed bodies are "dressed up" as famine victims and buried in makeshift graves'<sup>89</sup>. Foster also savaged what he described as the replacement of historical analysis with the 'language of popular psycho-therapy', which he accredited, among others, to the 'populist journalist' as well as the 'erratic rock stars'. Such criticism was aimed, in part at any rate, at singer-songwriter, Sinead O'Connor, whose song 'Famine' described the shipping of foodstuffs to England under armed guard and the suffering of the people in Ireland. O'Connor concluded that memory of the event continued to have untold effects: 'this is what I think is still hurting me'.<sup>90</sup> John Waters also, it would seem, filled the remit of 'populist journalist' and indeed his 1997 'Confronting the Ghosts of our Past' essay, in which he connected the ignoring of the Irish past with problems in the present, was widely debated. In it, Waters writes of the reluctance of Irish society to face up to the 'trauma' of its colonial past and the resultant ills of emigration, unemployment, alcoholism and mental illness.<sup>91</sup>

Eoghan Harris' scathing assertions on RTÉ's *Davis* television programme, did, on the other hand, place any notion of 'survivor guilt' squarely at the door of large tracts of Irish society whom he believed profited from the Famine. Harris was also adamant in his pronouncement that the IRA was manipulating the Famine to incite anti-English sentiment.<sup>92</sup> Although the commemorations of the Famine may not have provided the militants with the 'ideological bullets' which Harris had predicted, the link between the Famine, English oppression and notions of separatism and republicanism did raise its head at the time. A case in point is a nationalist Belfast wall mural, which upon the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event, depicted scenes of Famine despair and announced 'When the potato crop failed causing 'the Great Hunger' people watched in despair as shiploads of food were escorted away by British troops'.<sup>93</sup> Such representations hark back to John Mitchel's motif of 'a government ship sailing into any harbour was sure to meet half a dozen sailing out with Irish wheat and cattle',<sup>94</sup> while also denouncing the British Army (both past and by extension the present) as accomplices to the crime. Indeed, much of Mitchel's writing became the original anti-establishment historiography of the Famine, and his abiding claim that 'a million and a half men, women and children were carefully, prudently and peacefully slain by the English government'<sup>95</sup> was to serve as the propaganda for succeeding generations of nationalists who saw themselves as successors to the ideals of the United Irishmen and the Young Irelanders.

Perhaps one of the most highly censured events of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations was a 'homecoming' pop/rock concert held at Millstreet, Cork, on the June Bank Holiday weekend, 1997. The concert, which featured artists from Ireland and America was billed as 'one great big party' and designed as 'a celebration of triumph over disaster'. Featuring an apology from English Prime Minister, Tony Blair (read by actor Gabriel Byrne), for the insufficiency of the measures implemented by Peel and Russell's Government during the Famine, the event also included a symbolic candle lighting exercise by President Mary Robinson and, via video link-up, by U.S President, Bill Clinton. John Waters wrote of how he was offended by the crass commercialisation of the concert in an *Irish Times* article entitled 'Famine Dead are Offered at the Altar of Tourism' while human rights agency AFri (Action From Ireland) described it as 'dancing on the graves of the Famine'.<sup>96</sup> AFri was also vociferous in its objections to a call for commercial sponsorship from the Irish Famine Commemoration Fund, whereby individuals and

companies could have their names engraved in plaques, which would adorn the cobblestone surrounds of Rowan Gillespie's Famine statue commission on Customs House Quay, Dublin. To date only politicians and figures from the entertainment industry have had their name inscribed on the memorial. Roy Foster again, acerbically noted the 'Payment Plan Option' designed for those who wished to spread the cost, and journalist Fintan O'Toole labelled the solicitation as 'Turning the Famine into a Corporate Celebration'.<sup>97</sup> The Commemoration Fund latterly drew further criticisms for its high level of administrative costs and its failure to meet its philanthropic commitments.<sup>98</sup> Internationally, the teaching of the Famine on the 'Holocaust Studies' curriculum of New York schools, following political lobbying by the 'Irish Famine Genocide Committee' also came in for derision.

With regard to the disputations which Famine Commemorations can provoke, the following section of this chapter examines individually the most significant events, which have constituted Famine commemorations in County Mayo to date. The earliest of these, it would appear, did not occur until the 1980s.

### **Famine Commemoration in Mayo**

#### *AFrI Famine/Peace Walk*

Locally, as well as nationally, there seems to have been little attention granted to the Great Famine throughout the 1970s and most of the 1980s. Indeed, it is quite possible that the domain of commemorations in general was largely seen as the preserve of republican paramilitaries during this period. In the late 1980s, with a view to the impending 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Famine and also in light of contemporary world Famine issues, the non-governmental agency, AFrI, established a commemorative Famine walk between Doolough and Louisburgh in west Mayo. Founded in 1975, AFrI's original remit was to support poverty alleviation projects in Africa and Asia. In the early 1980s the group refocused its *raison d'être* from a charity to a justice perspective. In describing itself and its role, the organisation declared:

'AFrI decided to focus on some of the major causes of poverty. We identified unfair distribution of wealth, wastage of resources on the arms trade, Majority World debt, unfair trade and environmental destruction, as some of the major causes. AFrI work to promote justice, peace and human rights in Ireland and worldwide'.<sup>99</sup>

The walk was initiated by Afri director, Don Mullan as part of Afri's 'Great Famine Project' of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The project, a series of events such as walks, conferences and publications, was designed to commemorate the Irish Famine whilst also focusing attention on current global issues. As the walks became a permanent fixture on the calendar, the Louisburgh Community Project were prompted to dedicate a section of its Gráinne Uaile centre, opened in 1995, to an exhibition on the Famine. The small display which otherwise comprises mostly documentary evidence, has as its centrepiece a open-bottomed coffin and a soup kitchen pot.



**Fig. 6. Participants in the AFri Doolough-Louisburgh Famine Walk, 2004**

*Source: Author*

The basis for the annual walk derives from the account of a tragedy, which was colourfully put into writing by local storyteller, James Berry, in his regular slot in the *Mayo News* newspaper in the early 1900s, some 60 years after its purported occurrence. The story was given fresh impetus when it appeared in an edited collection of Berry's stories, which was first published in 1966 and subsequently in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>100</sup> It concerns a group of 600 starving people who gathered in Louisburgh town in the spring of 1847 to seek food or a ticket for admission to the workhouse from the relieving officer. According to Berry, the official refused them aid and referred them to the guardians who

were staying at a fishing lodge at Delphi, ten miles past Doolough, the Black Lake. Many of the group succumbed to hunger and cold that night while waiting in Louisburgh. The following day some 400 of the remainder set out for Delphi, a journey that involved passing through mountainous terrain, a deep river crossing and a hazardous mountain pass. Having reached the lodge and waited for the guardians to finish their lunch, the group were turned away empty handed. On the journey back many of the group died of starvation while many more were swept into the lake at the treacherous gap as a severe storm raged.<sup>101</sup>

The next day men were sent out along the corpse-strewn trail to bury the bodies of those who had perished. Conjuring up images of a repressed Celtic people, the author further contended that:

‘This was a deliberate trap set up by the Government of the day in order to decoy the starving Celts out to this wild region in order to slaughter them... There is nothing in history to equal this horrible butchery, nor is there anything in the history of Europe to equal it in horror, save the tragic retreat of Napoleon’s army from Moscow’.<sup>102</sup>

Berry’s firm blame laying and anti-English fervour should be viewed in its temporal context. At the time of the tale’s narration, c. 1910, the struggle for independence was gathering momentum and such folk-related propaganda was commonplace. Although he did not provide a death toll, his suggestion was that none of the 400 who set out on the journey to Delphi returned. Whether Berry’s story was based on family lore, local myth or historical investigation is unclear. What is interesting, however, is that despite the exaggeration of the numbers who died, Berry’s recall of one of the names of the guardians at Delphi – Colonel Hograve – is correct. This information comes from two contemporary letters to the *Mayo Constitution* newspaper concerning the tragedy, the only historical reference by which Berry’s story can be judged, and one which refutes the scale of the disaster. According to the facts contained therein the occurrence took place in March 1849, not 1847. The appalled author of the letters (signed A Ratepayer) described a group of emaciated paupers having to needlessly travel to Delphi for inspection by the Vice-Guardian of the Westport union and the Poor Law inspector. The author goes on to express with disgust the horror of five bodies being found along the route. In a further letter a week later the author, who appeared to have intimate knowledge of the occurrence, and indeed named the deceased and notes their addresses, informed the newspaper that the death toll had risen to seven and that nine or ten more ‘never reached their homes’.<sup>103</sup> Despite the

obvious distortion of the facts in Berry's account, there is no doubt, however, that on the whole the Louisburgh area suffered greatly during the Famine years. In late 1846, and with extreme want in the area, a request for the establishment of a food depot in the town by the local relief committee was flatly refused by the central administration.<sup>104</sup> A few months later in January 1847 between 'ten and twenty deaths daily' were reported from the town.<sup>105</sup>

Berry's magnified version of the tragedy is possibly one which he heard 'already inflated by local legend', and then 'embellished it a bit and added a few political flourishes'.<sup>106</sup> The myth, although not nearly as exaggerated as a mid 1990s *London Independent* article which amplified the numbers involved to 20,000<sup>107</sup>, is one which AFRi seen happy to perpetuate. Although it is claimed that 'Today's walkers are aware that the scale of the Doolough tragedy is in doubt'<sup>108</sup>, organisers of the walk continue to brief participants on the walk that 'up to 600 people may have lost their lives'<sup>109</sup>.

Following the initial walks in the late 1980s, which were designed to focus attention on general world issues, the AFRi Doolough-Louisburgh walk began to base each walk around a specific international or domestic theme or problem area. Each year the walks are led by a number of leaders usually made up of overseas aid workers, international representatives of disenfranchised peoples and Irish personalities with interests in human rights and poverty issues. Some of the themes to date have focused on refugees, the legacy of colonialism, land and fair trade, and unemployment. In 2006 the Rossport Five who campaigned for the re-routing of a Shell gas pipeline in Northwest Mayo led the walk which carried the theme 'Land for People not Profits'. Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, and Kim Phuc, whose photograph as a distraught seven-year-old child became an enduring image of the Vietnam War, have previously acted as walk leaders. Representatives from the Maya people of Guatemala, Colombian refugees and members of the Native American Choctaw tribe have also taken part in the walk. The association between the Choctaw and the Delphi tragedy seems, however, to be misguided. It has been widely held that the tribe – who themselves were forced to undertake an arduous and lengthy trek after having been displaced from their own lands – donated \$710 for distribution among the local Doolough people, after hearing of their misfortune.<sup>110</sup> This story is somewhat erroneous, however, given that such a contribution was made in 1847, two years before the Mayo incident.<sup>111</sup>



Noted Irish personalities who have addressed the walk to date include actor Gabriel Byrne, broadcaster Joe Duffy and musician Christy Moore. Numbers on the walk are usually between 300 and 500, while the best-attended walk was the one led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his wife Leah, the international patrons of AFrI, which attracted approximately 1,400 people in 1991.<sup>112</sup> In 1994, AFrI commissioned two simple memorials along the route (see app. 5.1 and 5.2.). While the backing of well-known personalities is a practice utilised by many charities, the notion of what is essentially a commemorative event becoming a *cause celebré* may in the future become problematic for AFrI. The fluctuation in numbers participating in the walk already bears witness to this. The over-politicisation of walk ‘themes’ is also a sensitive area. Such a concern was voiced, albeit by a small minority, in responses to a questionnaire, which was distributed by this writer to participants in the 2004 walk.<sup>113</sup> These respondents believed that that year’s theme, ‘Land Freedom and Occupation – Ireland, Palestine and Iraq’, represented the ‘hijacking’ of the walk. It is fair to say that while justification can be given to the commemoration of the Famine being utilised to draw attention to contemporary global issues, the politicisation of the walk is a worrying trend.

The questionnaire (see app. 5.5.) was designed to gain an insight into those who participate in such an event to commemorate the Famine. From approximately 300 walkers, 62 were provided with questionnaires and 51 were returned. Although not representative of all walkers, the questionnaire did help to build a general profile of the typical walker. While participants covered a broad age range and occupation type, there was a bias towards females in the 45-59-age bracket. White collared workers from both sexes predominated, with teachers making up a large percentage, and many participants resided in urban centres such as Dublin or Galway. Such a make up may indicate a desire to acknowledge harder times by a relatively affluent current section of society. Although almost half of respondents had connections with Mayo, in that they had been born, raised or currently reside there, it seemed however that there was a distinct lack of people, particularly of the older generations, from the immediate Louisburgh/Doolough area, perhaps suggesting that such a commemoration is seen locally as being for outsiders. On the other hand, those residing in close proximity to the scene of the tragedy may be infused with a more everyday sense of connectedness with the event.

Awareness of the walk seems to stem from word-of-mouth contact, and roughly half of respondents had completed at least one of the walks in previous years. In response to what they thought the walk achieves, the majority of respondents noted that the walk helped to raise awareness of current causes while also commemorating and linking global and Irish Famine events. Nora,<sup>114</sup> a community worker aged 45-59, who was participating in her fifth walk, felt that 'awareness of issues, camaraderie and solidarity' as well as the 'challenge to act' were what the walk achieves. Other respondents also commonly mooted such notions of 'solidarity'. In response to what was gained personally from the walk, Laura, a therapist aged 45-59, proposed 'a sense of peaceful action'. Ciara, an 18-24 year old student on her first walk, stressed the importance of 'knowing that people still remember the way people were treated years ago' and was proud of the fact that the walk's organisers were 'making efforts in preventing it from happening again'. Deirdre, a teacher from Mayo offered: 'a feeling of compassion towards those who walked that road'. Other common responses to this question included the benefits of friendship, interaction with like-minded people, exercise, and the opportunity to engage with such a scenic landscape. (More light-heartedly, a number of participants forwarded answers of 'tiredness' and 'sore-feet'!)

When asked to describe the personal emotions evoked by taking part in the walk, individuals commonly expressed contradictory sentiments such as happiness and sadness. Maura, a 35-44 year old teacher from the local area, was a typical respondent in this category, expressing 'thankfulness, sadness, anger, joy' as the sentiments which participating in the walk induced in her. Similarly, Maureen, a writer/radio producer from Dublin, replied: 'Sadness for the victims of the Famine; anger that people still suffer injustice; pleasure and joy in the walk and the scenery'. Feelings of empathy, frustration tranquillity, sorrow and thankfulness were also articulated. With regard to the general knowledge of the Doolough tragedy, the majority of respondents were aware of the historical basis for the walk. However, those who postulated on the number of people to have lost their lives in 1849, were, it would seem, influenced by AFRI rhetoric. Tony, a logistics manger from County Clare who was participating in his second walk, proposed that 'a few hundred people died trying to get food vouchers or entrance to the workhouse'. Other suggestions forwarded included: 'several hundred', '180', 'a lot' and 'an entire village'.

Few respondents were aware of any family members being directly affected by the Famine, although most seemed to have strong awareness of the history of the event. Quite a number had conducted reading or research into the Famine and a third had taken part in an event to mark its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Approximately half were able to point to another commemorative site or event relating to the Famine in County Mayo; the majority of those mentioning the National Famine Memorial at nearby Murrisk. Finally, when asked if the government had done enough to commemorate the Famine, approximately 20% agreed, 40% neither agreed nor disagreed and 40% disagreed strongly. A small number expressed the view that either it was not necessarily the responsibility of the government to commemorate the Famine or that it was more important for the government to focus on present-day Famines.

Although based on something of a falsehood, the Doolough Famine walk is an important means of expression and commemoration for those who wish to perpetuate their remembrance of the Famine outside of the confines of the typical 50-year anniversary period, by which such major historical events have commonly come to be remembered. The fact that the walk involves a degree of hardship, that it retraces a particular historic route and that it takes place through a landscape which resonates the adversity of the time, bolster the event as a sincere form of commemoration. As mentioned the politicisation of the event and its endorsements by celebrities, while possibly problematic, do not seem to be matters that particularly concern participants on the walk. Instead, it would seem that these issues are subordinate to the main thrust of the walk – the opportunity to contemplate and commemorate victims of the Famine in an organised and communal, yet individual and personal way.

#### *National Famine Memorial*

The siting of the National Famine Memorial at the foot of Croagh Patrick in the townland of Murrisk, near Westport in County Mayo owes its genesis to an open invitation in 1995 from the government's Famine Commemoration Committee to suggest locations suitable for such a monument. Subsequently, a committee naming itself the 'Westport Famine Commemoration Group' and representing community interests in the Murrisk and wider Westport area, was established with the aim of bringing the monument to a site near Croagh Patrick. A submission was made to the governmental committee, which was headed by Minister for State, Avril Doyle T.D. In it, the Westport group forwarded the

notion that any National Famine Memorial should be located in the west of Ireland – the scene of so much devastation during the event.<sup>115</sup> They also pointed out that Westport town had a notable Famine history – and was the location of an old workhouse, a quay from which large numbers departed during the Famine, the stately home of a benevolent landlord and a marked Famine graveyard. Villages and townlands in the immediate orbit of Croagh Patrick, such as Murrisk, Lecanvey and Louisburgh, also suffered much during the Famine. The submission further noted that the Tochar Phadraig, a 26 mile pilgrimage path from the historic Ballintuber Abbey to Croagh Patrick, was ‘littered with deserted villages emptied by the Famine’ and that the foothills of the mountain ‘still bear the scars’ of the Famine in the shape of ‘lazy bed’ potato cultivation ridges.<sup>116</sup> The proposal drew attention to the vast numbers who visit Croagh Patrick on an annual basis and its significance as a place of pilgrimage, peace and reflection ‘which identifies with all Christian faiths’. Finally, the presence of existing car-parking and toilet facilities in the vicinity was highlighted.

Following a meeting between the Westport group and Minister Doyle in November 1995, Mayo County Council set about purchasing a suitable site at the foot of Croagh Patrick and in July, 1996, the official announcement was made that out of 72 nationwide proposals, the National Famine Memorial was to be located at the Murrisk site. The memorial entitled ‘Coffin Ship’ was to consist of a bronze Famine ship sculpture, designed by the prominent sculptor and former Galway RTC lecturer, Mr. John Behan. At a press launch to mark the event, Minister Doyle reaffirmed the government’s commitment to commemorating the Famine in a ‘serious and dignified manner’<sup>117</sup> and censured those who had suggested that the government was ‘less than wholeheartedly’ behind its remembrance. She also rounded on ‘certain trendy, if outmoded opinion makers’ who sought to downplay or ignore the tragedy. Doyle’s speech drew attention to the devastation caused by the Famine in Mayo and further afield but also focused on the flow of emigration, which had been exacerbated by, and continued since, the Famine. ‘Behan’s sculpture’ she said, ‘is very much a ship of death and it is entirely appropriate that it should be so, given the appalling figure of over one million who died in the Famine. We cannot evade or diminish the human costs hidden in that chilling statistic’. She reiterated however, that the ship motif of the memorial also renewed ‘our historical and contemporary links with our diaspora’. In referring to this ‘umbilical culture chord’, Doyle spoke of the government’s contention that the Famine commemoration would keep open the ‘vital arteries of contact

and communication' between people of Irish decent worldwide. She went on to reference Seamus Heaney's belief, that owing to the duality created by the role of emigration, Irish people had an ability 'to live in two places at one time and in two times at one place'. Thus she asserted:

'Current Irish culture is capable of blending the best of the vernacular and the cosmopolitan, of the indigenous and the international, without strain or vexation. The bog bank of an Irish summer can sit quite easily with the memory bank of the internet'.<sup>118</sup>

In concluding, Doyle proposed a contemporary understanding of the Famine, which sought a balance between issues such as the 'trauma recovery' espousals of commentators such as John Waters, nationalist rhetoric and revisionist historiography:

'In commemorating the Famine then, we do not wish to look merely backwards, or to seek a lost coherence and identity. We seek to acknowledge the pain and hurt, but not to wield it as a weapon in modern culture wars. We look to create a mature relationship with our past, neither handcuffed to our history or heedlessly fugitive from it'.<sup>119</sup>

Despite Doyle's profound words, some political mileage was typically sought out of the monument. Her Fine Gael party colleague, Mayo's Deputy Michael Ring expressed his joy at the selection of the Murrisk site, 'following my strong representation to the Government on the matter'. In reducing the monument to that on a sight-seer's check list, Ring further asserted that the monument 'will generate further tourism in the Westport area adding further attractions which will prove beneficial in Mayo'.<sup>120</sup> The notion of the monument acting as an alternative tourist attraction may not, however, have been lost on the people of Westport. Despite what appears to be concerted efforts to assist his tenants, Duffy notes how the ultimate evictions which the Marquis of Sligo imposed on them has meant that even in present times, 'a great many locals will not set foot inside Lord Altamount's [Sligo's successor] house and demesne – which is daily advertised as the biggest tourist attraction in the west of Ireland'.<sup>121</sup>

When Behan's 'Coffin Ship' was unveiled in July 1997, it marked the last official event in the government's calendar of Famine commemorations. Bronze, with a green patina, the piece measures 8 metres long and 6 metres high and stands on a patio of cement slabs. It has three masts in the shape of crucifixes, while the rigging section of its bodyframe is made up of a number of skeleton sculptures. Constructed under Behan's guidance at the Bronze Foundry in Dublin, the ship is a scaled-up version of his original

maquette. It weighs six tons, represents the largest ever casting of a piece of sculpture in Ireland.<sup>122</sup> Behan's previous works had been described as being characterised by 'a certain roughness and raw sincerity' and of embodying an art form in which 'personal awareness, personal observation and even personal experience have a large part...what seems to concern him most is the charge of expressive and emotional energy which he seeks to inject into his subject.'<sup>123</sup> Indeed, Behan admits that his approach was an intimate one. Having felt in youth that the scale of the Famine was beyond his comprehension, he was inspired in adulthood by Tom Murphy's play 'Famine' in the 1980s, and was also influenced by the imagery at the Museum of the Holocaust on his travels to Israel.<sup>124</sup> The sculptor outlined his research for the National Famine Memorial in the television and video documentary *Famine Ship*. His ideas were formulated through engagement with Famine remains in visits to lazy beds and potato fields, workhouse buildings and deserted villages and cottages.<sup>125</sup> He also collected folk memories from exponents such as Mayo author, Michael Mullins. In designing the piece, Behan sought the skeletal figures to be representative of the 'anonymous millions'; the ridged surface and rough texture of the ship was to reflect the scarred countryside, and the general theme was that of a journey of life and death. Later Behan wrote:

'My own approach was an emotional one, a response to the suffering of the people involved and the cataclysmic decimation of two million and the massive emigration of millions in the post famine period. Out of that vision, I attempted to combine the themes of pestilence, death and mass emigration using the image of the coffin ship as an artistic vehicle of expression'.<sup>126</sup>



**Fig. 6. National Famine Memorial, Murrisk, Westport (see also app. 5.3.)**

*Source:* Author

Interestingly the ‘coffin ship’ had a recorded history and resonance within County Mayo. The infamous *Elizabeth and Sarah* which, having delayed its passengers at port for almost four weeks set sail from Killala in May 1846. On board, 36 berths were provided for 260 persons and no provisions other than a little putrid water were provided to passengers whose own provisions had been exhausted waiting for the ship to set sail. As contagion began to rage 22 passengers perished, and the Captain – whose decomposing body was kept on board – also succumbed to disease. Seventy-two days after departure, the ship landed at Grosse Île where another seven passengers died and many more remained in ‘a very precarious state.’<sup>127</sup>

The ship’s iconography also had further associations within the Westport area. A commonly quoted recollection from the Famine oral record is that of Martin Manning who, echoing Mitchel’s motif, asserted:

'In the year 1847 fourteen schooners of about 200 tons each left Westport quay laden with wheat and oats to feed the English people while the Irish people were starving. This happened one morning on one tide and was repeated several times during the Famine'.<sup>128</sup>

Following the unveiling of Behan's memorial, the sculptor expressed his opinion that the public response to the piece had been largely positive, although he did concede, however, that in representing 'a holocaust of horror...universal acceptance is unlikely.'<sup>129</sup> Notwithstanding, the sculpture is certainly both a provocative and evocative monument, which conjures up a very real sense of the cruelty of the Famine. Due to the popularity of the location which compliments the piece to a large degree, visitors may find it difficult to engage on a personal level with it during the busy months of the tourist season.

President Mary Robinson unveiled the sculpture on 20 July 1997 in front of an unexpectedly large turnout of over 2,000 people. Present was a strong political representation, as well as a diplomatic corps representing famine-stricken countries and the Deputy Executive of the World Food Programme. An interdenominational service conducted by representatives of the Catholic Church, Religious Society of Friends, Methodist Church, Church of Ireland and Presbyterian Church also formed part of the ceremony while the President laid a wreath at the base of the monument to an uileann pipe lament. In an unscripted address, Robinson drew parallels between the Irish Famine and current world famines, and also spoke of Ireland's culture of emigration.<sup>130</sup> Given her well-publicised commitment to the cause of Irish emigrants and the attention she received following a high-profile visit to famine-stricken Somalia in 1992, Robinson's involvement in the unveiling of the Murrisk memorial was well received by the Irish public and media alike. She later spoke of her involvement with the Famine commemorations of the mid 1990s thus:

'As President I could tell the story, I could shape the story to include the Irish diaspora, to analyse the profound implications of the famine for both us and our scattered family, and to make the connection with modern famine hunger'.<sup>131</sup>

The Murrisk event also marked President Robinson's last official engagement in Famine commemorations. Previously, she had opened the Famine Museum at Strokestown House, Co. Roscommon in 1994 and penned an introduction to the museum's guidebook. In 1994 she also visited the graves of Irish Famine victims at Grosse Île in Quebec,



Canada, which was incidentally the site of the first Famine memorial (a 14 metre high Celtic cross, erected by the Ancient Order of Hibernians in 1909).<sup>132</sup> There she described the failure of the potato in the mid nineteenth century as a ‘natural disaster’ across Europe, but, ‘in Ireland it took place in a political, economic and social framework which was unjust.’<sup>133</sup> Referring to this trip in her Famine-themed address to the House of the Oireachtas in 1995, Robinson spoke of ‘being struck by the sheer power of commemoration’ evoked by the site.<sup>134</sup> Also in 1997, President Robinson launched a Famine memorial in Cambridge, near Boston. In 2000 the National Famine Monument and surrounding green-field area was awarded a further grant and designated as the Murrisk Millennium Peace Park under the government’s Millennium Projects Programme.

### *Famine Memorial Mass*

The best attended event to mark the Famine commemorations in the mid 1990s in Mayo was undoubtedly the ‘Mass in Remembrance for the Dead of the Great Famine in the West of Ireland’, which was held in the Basilica of Our Lady in Knock on 16 November, 1997. Attended by approximately 5,000 people,<sup>135</sup> the mass – initiated and celebrated by Archbishop of Tuam, Dr. Michael Neary – was one of a number to commemorate the Famine across the archdiocese of Tuam in November of that year. Also present was the Papal Nuncio to Ireland, Archbishop Storero, Cardinal Cathal Daly, a number of bishops and a large gathering of priests from the west of Ireland as well as representatives from political and charitable organisations. Monsignor Denis Faul, a cleric well known for his involvement in the Northern Ireland peace process, provided the sermon at the mass. In a robust homily he reviewed the main issues of the Famine and spoke of the ‘woefully inadequate relief’ provided by the English as well as the apathy of the landlord classes.<sup>136</sup> The Famine, said Monsignor Faul ‘could have been prevented’ but instead the land ‘was cleared in a ruthless way’. Conscious perhaps of something of a ‘centralising’ of Famine history and commemorative events in the west, the cleric also referred to a ‘myth going around’ that there was no Famine in Ulster, and duly spoke of its effects in Armagh and Monaghan as well as parts of County Down. Monsignor Faul concluded his address with reference to the wider context of remembrance: ‘The poppies and lilies of the field can be used by some as memorials to conflict’ but in a call for accord he urged that ‘whether remembering 1690, 1798, 1847, 1916, 1969’ it should be done in a spirit ‘of respect for others’.<sup>137</sup>

Throughout the mass atmospheric singing and music was performed by the monks of Glenstal Abbey and by a traditional group Cós Charna from Carna in Connemara. A poignant part of the ceremony involved the lighting of six candles – each representing a diocese of the west of Ireland – which were then set placed either side of a replica of Behan’s Famine Ship at the front of the altar. The mainstay of the mass however, was the powerful speech given by guest speaker Lord David Alton of Liverpool, a former M.P and subsequent independent crossbencher in the House of Lords who was introduced by Archbishop Neary as a ‘defender of Catholic and Christian values’. Alton, whose mother was from Tourmakeady in Mayo – where he first became aware of the effects of the Famine on boyhood holidays – remains an outspoken observer on global human rights issues. His address, which panned the British administration’s policies to Ireland at the time of the Famine, brought attention to the continuation of regressive British population policies to Africa, India and China. Alton also spoke of the need to be ‘radically and consistently pro-life’, his address earning him a standing ovation from the congregation.

The mass represented the obvious desire of a large number of people to reflect on the atrocities of the Famine in a communal and spiritual manner. Alton’s speech, however, along with the homily of Monsignor Faul, in which both held the British administration responsible for the calamity of the Famine, negated any onus, which may have otherwise fallen on the church to acknowledge its own shortcomings at the time. The further desire for British accountability was evident in the headline of a Mayo newspaper, which under an account of mass ran: ‘Irish Famine was deliberate act of depopulation claims British politician’.<sup>138</sup>

#### *Commemorative Publications*

Compiled and edited by the Senior Assistant at the Mayo County Library, Ivor Hamrock, *The Famine in Mayo* is the only example of what can be described as ‘commemorative literature’ which dealt with the Famine on a countywide basis to emerge in Mayo throughout the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the calamity. The publication was originally put together in the form of an exhibition in 1996, as part of Mayo County Council’s contribution to the Famine commemorations of the time. Its material was drawn entirely from contemporary sources – eyewitness accounts, official records, letters and local newspaper reports, and it was illustrated with prints, photographs and maps. The County Council was itself prompted into action by a request from the Great Famine

Commemoration Committee who was seeking to produce an atlas of maps of each of the 32 counties with Famine sites identified on them. The Committee was administering the project in the Republic of Ireland through county library services, who in turn were expected to distribute local maps to be filled in by national school children and teachers and other interested parties. In some respects this undertaking had echoes of the *Bailiúchán na Scol* initiative of the late 1930s. According to the remit of the project sites were to be still visible and were to include locations such as ‘workhouse buildings, soup kitchens, graves, potato-ridges (lazy beds)’.<sup>139</sup> The project in Mayo, as elsewhere, met with a poor response, and plans for the atlas were dropped by the national committee.

Mayo County Council then decided to pursue the alternative undertaking of a contemporary sourced display, which toured the county visiting schools, libraries and community halls. In 1997 the exhibition was shown in the House of Commons in London as part of the backdrop to the launch of an unrelated book. Due to ongoing requests from various groups to have the exhibition on loan, it was decided to make the material available in book form. Hamrock again edited the original material, structured it in chapter form under headings such as, ‘The Hungry Years’, ‘Charity’, ‘Response from Landlords’, ‘Burials’, ‘Evictions’, and also wrote linking notes. Published in 1998, *The Famine in Mayo* had an original print run of 2,000 copies which and sold quickly, and owing to its popularity was reprinted in 2004. There still remains however an exigency for a comprehensive history of the Famine in the county, which was arguably most affected by the catastrophe. As attested to on its own cover, the book was well received by such prominent reviewers as the *Sunday Times* and *Books Ireland*. Its success perhaps lies in its ability to convey a very real and immediate sense of the horrors of the period yet avoiding the temptation to be either sensationalist or maudlin. Hamrock’s linking material is also commendable for being concise and factual without ever becoming dry or detached.

#### *Proposed Establishment of a ‘Famine Interpretive Centre’ at Slievemore Abandoned Village*

Though no explicit act of commemoration has yet taken place at the ‘Deserted Village’ at Slievemore on Achill Island, it is worth noting in that preliminary plans have been made for the development of the site as a visitor attraction. The village is one of the most recognisable and evocative reminders of the Famine within County Mayo and beyond. Its representation as a site of Famine memory is evident in it featuring as the cover

photograph on *The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America*,<sup>140</sup> and as mentioned, was the inspiration for Tolle's cottage in the *Irish Hunger Memorial*.



**Fig. 7. Slievemore 'abandoned village', Achill Island**  
*Source: Author*

The village, which contains – in three distinct settlements – the ruins of some 74 roofless, dry walled buildings, stretches out for almost a mile on the silently atmospheric lower slopes of Slievemore Mountain. In use from the 1700s right up until the 1930s when some of its buildings continued to be used as 'booley houses', it is thought that the Great Famine was the major catalyst for the abandonment of the village; its people moving *en masse* to nearby Dooagh, in order to eke out a diet from its shores and rockpools.<sup>141</sup> Nowadays, the settlement (which is only indicated from the island's main road by a signpost reading 'abandoned village'), attracts up to 15,000 visitors a year;<sup>142</sup> a figure likely to increase given the sites current promotion as part of an Ireland West advertising campaign. In 1995, following a request from the then Minister for Tourism, Mr Enda Kenny TD, Bord Fáilte appointed Deloitte and Touche Consultants to complete a feasibility study on developing a visitor centre at the village. Although never acted upon, the consultant's recommendations were to develop a 'dual centre' – to consist of a main centre in the village area of Dooagh, which would comprise ticket office, interpretive components, café/retail area, etc. The plan advocated that visitors would then be transferred by mini-bus to a guided tour of the Slievemore site. The Slievemore site itself

was intended to host a minor centre consisting of reception/assembly area and ancillary features such as toilets and parking facilities.

The report also recommended that the deserted village area remain untouched apart from stabilisation work on the cottages and basic site maintenance in light of safety concerns.<sup>143</sup> As with the Céide Fields Centre, the proposed centre at Slievemore again raises issues and concerns over the commodification of remembrance of the past. It must also be remembered, however, that the village is constantly deteriorating due not only to natural elements but also to the presence of grazing sheep and cattle and to the carelessness of visitors. This again though begs the question as to whether the justification to secure the site and control visitor numbers should necessarily involve commercialisation and the by now, obligatory accompanying interpretation. Input from the local population would again seem to be clearly lacking in the decision making process regarding the site and indeed the people of Achill – the location for a major proselytising centre – may not wish to have what is undoubtedly a contentious and traumatic local history so readily exhibited and ‘interpreted’. As Kinealy has pointed out, in places where souperism did occur, ‘it tarnished the reputation of those providing the relief and left a legacy of enduring bitterness.’<sup>144</sup>

In fact, Slievemore lies only a short distance from the site of what was the infamous Achill mission of the Rev. Edward Nangle and the architectural layout of the site is still a curious feature of the landscape. The evangelical Protestant missionary colony was established at Dugort Achill, Co. Mayo in 1834. The settlement, complete with cottages, schools, dispensary and hotel, published its own journal, *The Achill Missionary Herald*, which claimed that the Famine was divine retribution for the 1845 Maynooth Act which had provided a grant ‘to endow a college for training [Catholic] priests to defend and practice and perpetuate this corrupt and damnable worship in this realm’.<sup>145</sup> The missionary boasted a huge number of converts throughout the Famine period and in 1848 was thought to have had 1,000 local Catholic children attending its school – an immense source of grievance to the local Catholic clergy.<sup>146</sup> The divisive legacy of proselytising was still very much in evidence in Mayo in the *Famine Centenary Questionnaire*, and should such a centre be imposed on the community the potential for old wounds to be reopened is imaginable.

Ownership of the Slievemore site, which is located on commonage, remains ambiguous and ongoing archaeological excavation, albeit minor ones, take place each year there under the guidance of the Achill Archaeological Summer School that is run by archaeologist, Therese McDonald. This raises further questions as to the integrity of intense archaeological research at such sites. It has been argued that the archaeology of Famine sites may be valuable in bringing new information to hand and enhancing understanding of the historic event.<sup>147</sup> Charles E. Orser, whose interests lie in the archaeology of disenfranchised people, believes that just as in the case of excavated African-American slave huts in America, archaeology of the Famine can unearth hidden facts. Thus, he makes the case for shedding light 'on men and women who seldom wrote about themselves and who were seldom written about by their contemporaries'.<sup>148</sup> Orser has already carried out excavation at a settlement in Gorttoose, part of the Strokestown House estate of Major Denis Mahon. The Slievemore village it would appear would be an ideal location for such archaeology. Just as the possible interpretive centre, should such wholesale excavation be granted at the site concerns over local sensitivities and broader issues would certainly need to be addressed.

#### *Other Famine Commemorations in County Mayo*

Over the past number of years, but again particularly around the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Famine, a further range of localised events have taken place in Mayo in remembrance of the event. In the late 1980s a girls National School erected a simple cross in the otherwise unmarked Famine burial ground known locally in Westport as the 'Rocky'. In 1994, AFrI commissioned another memorial, this time on the burial ground of the former Swinford workhouse, which was unveiled by Arun Ghandi, grandson of Mahatma Ghandi. Over the course of the 'anniversary years', the George Moore Society ran a programme of commemorative events in its Claremorris-based annual Summer School, including lectures, readings, and visits to Famine sites. Nineteen ninety-five saw the unveiling of a memorial at the location of workhouses in Ballina by the U.S. ambassador to Ireland, Jean Kennedy, as well as the publication of the Swinford local Famine history.<sup>149</sup> In the summer of 1997, the Westport library held an exhibition entitled 'Mayo Landlords and the Great Famine' while towards the end of the year commemorative Famine masses also took place in locations such as Mayo Abbey and Westport among others. More recently a further memorial was erected in the historic Teampall Maol Cemetery near Foxford in 2004, in memory of those in unmarked graves, many of whom

are thought to have been buried in Famine times. Heritage centres and museums which make reference to the Famine and to farming life in Mayo in the 19<sup>th</sup> century include the Michael Davitt museum in Straide, Hennigan's heritage centre in Killaser, Swinford, the Eviction Cottage, Belcarra and the National Museum of Country Life, Castlebar.

### **Mayo's links to Exported Commemorations**

Since 2000, two monuments were erected in New York to commemorate the Great Irish Famine. While the storylines surrounding their construction stray somewhat from the theme of Mayo based commemorations, the two monuments do have tangible Mayo associations and are therefore relevant to the principal remit of this study. The *Arrival* sculpture was designed to compliment the National Famine Memorial while the *Irish Hunger Memorial* was inspired by the ruined houses at Slievemore on Achill Island, and itself is made up of a 'Famine cottage' that was transported from the village of Attymass in Mayo.

#### *The Arrival Sculpture and Irish Hunger Memorial*

On 1 December 2000, a companion piece to Behan's *Coffin Ship* memorial was unveiled at the United Nations' headquarters in New York. Entitled *Arrival*, the sculpture was commissioned by the Office of Public Works on behalf of the Irish government as a gift to the United Nations. In place of the heavily symbolic skeletal rigging on the Murrisk piece, the human element in the United Nations sculpture is represented by survivors of the trip disembarking in the United States of America. A total of 150 human figures were cast in bronze; the majority located on deck and a small number descending the gangplanks to the awaiting American soil. Commenting on the gift which was presented by the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern to Deputy Secretary of the United Nations Louise Frchette, Minister of State at the OPW, Martin Cullen said,

'this gift celebrates the contribution of the Irish people to America and to all nations of the world represented in the United Nations. But it is also a symbol of the passage, real and metaphoric, from adversity and catastrophe to safety, assistance and solace.'<sup>150</sup>

The *Arrival*, is undoubtedly a forceful symbol in New York for Irish-Americans who can trace their arrival in the United States back to the Famine era. Indeed, Nash has

drawn attention to the fluid nature of Irish identity and the way in which ‘national genealogy’ can transcend the borders of states and territories.<sup>151</sup> The sculptures counterpart in Mayo adds a special weight to its potent symbolism for those who can point to Mayo as the place of embarkation or indeed whose descendants hailed from the county. The associations between the American piece and its Irish counterpart echoed the unveiling of the Annie Moore statues in both the Cobh Heritage centre in Cork and in Ellis Island, New York in 1993. The poignancy of the *Arrival* sculpture for the diaspora in the United States was not an issue which given due concern back in Mayo, where its unveiling provoked familiar comments on how the county could benefit from the increased tourism which the monument might elicit.<sup>152</sup> Less than two years later an even more perceptible recognition of Ireland’s Famine was manifest in New York.

The concept for the establishment of the *Irish Hunger Memorial*, located at Battery Park, Manhattan, New York, came about on a shared trip to Ireland by Governor of New York, George Pataki and CEO of the Battery Park authority, Timothy S. Carey, both of Irish descent. Pataki had previously come to prominence with regards to Famine remembrance when in 1996, he signed a law requiring New York State schools to teach about the Famine on a curriculum which included the Holocaust and genocide. Pataki’s move was made in response to the lobbying of ‘Irish Famine Genocide Committee’ whose position held that the Irish experience during the Famine years ‘was marked by acts and omissions on the part of the imperial British government that today would be termed genocide as that term is defined in modern international conventions.’<sup>153</sup> The signing of the Act earned Pataki criticisms, not least from within academic circles, which accused him of pursuing a mandate ‘which reflect the efforts of a small number of Irish American leaders who have pushed this line for ideological reasons.’<sup>154</sup>

The two men began to discuss what they felt they could do to raise awareness of the Great Irish Famine in America, and a half-acre site in Battery Park was decided upon as a suitable location for a memorial to the event. Upon the formation of the ‘Irish Hunger Memorial executive committee’ in 2000, an international competition was initiated for the design of such a memorial – with the remit that it should be a contemplative space, retain the harbour view and incorporate text. The eventual winner was Brian Tolle, a New York artist and a graduate of the Yale School who collaborated with an architect and a landscape designer. His design was to incorporate a ruined fieldstone cottage as the centrepiece of an



abandoned field of overgrown potato furrows. The decision was made that in so far as possible all materials for the memorial, including the cottage, would be brought from Ireland. Tolle travelled to Ireland to find a suitable cottage and took his inspiration from the remains of the noted abandoned vernacular house village, at Slievemore in Achill, Co. Mayo.<sup>155</sup> The desertion of the settlement is thought to have been due in large part to the effects of the Famine. He then came upon his ideal structure, located in the small townland Carradoogan in Attymass in Mayo. The cottage belonged to the Slack family of Tolle's partner's grandmother – herself an emigrant to the U.S – who agreed to donate the building to the New York memorial in memory of their family members of previous generations, who had immigrated to America. The two-roomed cottage, which had previously been thatched, was built from surrounding fieldstones in the 1820s and having been lived in by seven generations of the Slack family, was inhabited up until its abandonment in the 1960s. The Attymass area also, it would appear, seemed to have suffered extensively during the Famine; in the *Centenary Famine Questionnaire* it was recorded that a stretch of road in the area, came to be known as *Bearna na gcorp* (the gap of the bodies) as at every few yards it contained a Famine grave.<sup>156</sup>

A highly coordinated project was put in place whereby each stone of the cottage was disassembled, numbered and cleansed (the dangers of foot and mouth disease being prevalent at the time). In all 150,000kg of stone was shipped to the U.S. In 2002, work was suspended on the site following the terrorist attacks on the nearby World Trade Centre and in the immediate aftermath of the event, machinery and building materials were requisitioned by rescue workers. The memorial was eventually opened on the 16 July 2003 at a cost of \$5 million, funded by the Battery Park City Authority, which comprises a sizeable number of affluent Irish-American members.<sup>157</sup>



**Fig. 8. Section of the Attymass cottage, Irish Hunger Memorial, Battery Park Memorial, New York**  
 Source: Caitriona Herron

The field in which the cottage is situated is constructed on a giant concrete slab that is raised up on a huge wedge shape base. It slopes upward from street level to a height of 7.5 metres. Girded around the base of the monument from top to bottom are almost two miles of text which source information on the Irish Famine from contemporary reports, newspaper editorials and parliamentary debates. Historic advisor to the project was Professor Maureen Murphy of the Hofstra University, a respected writer on nineteenth-century Ireland and editor of Asneath Nicholson's *Annals of the Famine in Ireland*. Mindful of the debates surrounding English culpability and genocide theories, Tolle believes a balanced narrative has been provided 'We'll put it all out there and let the visitor decide' he declared.<sup>158</sup>

At the *Irish Hunger Memorial* the visitor can walk in from street level onto the sloping field and up an uneven dirt path. There are 62 species of vegetation in the field including grasses, reeds, heathers and wildflowers, all of which were imported from around the cottage site in Attymass. The corrugated terrain is suggestive of the grassed over furrows of a potato field. The quarter-acre size of the cultivated area of the memorial is designed as a poignant reminder of the infamous Gregory Clause of 1847. Dotted along

the sloped meandering path are 32 stones, each of which is inscribed with the name of the Irish county from where it came while a large cross-inscribed standing stone sits in the corner of the field which overlooks Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty – themselves synonymous with emigration to the U.S. The pathway culminates upon entering the two-roomed Famine era cottage from Mayo, in which the hearth-place is still intact. In Tolle's view, it is 'an extraordinary humble place, the interior of a ruined field-stone cottage now emptied of the family life it once sheltered'. The visitor can then pass through a tomb-like exit, which contains further bands of text relating not only to the Irish Famine but also providing facts on current world hunger. An audio instillation uses actors' voices to bear similar witness. The text and audio features of the memorial were designed to be renewed and updated to provide fresh quotations or bring attention to new tragedies. As such, Tolle refers to the structure as 'an ever changing memorial, an acknowledgement of the past that can be a catalyst for the future. It lives both as a piece of nature and an evolving, constantly updated commentary and call to consciousness on the Famine.'<sup>159</sup>

The official unveiling ceremony was carried out by President Mary McAlesse at a time when New York was still coming to terms with the devastation of 9/11. This theme permeated many of the speeches on the day and it has been noted that the memorial 'is likely to be embraced by many as symbol of the hundreds of firefighters, police officers, rescue personnel and office workers of Irish descent who died in the attack'.<sup>160</sup> McAlesse also referred to the responsibilities, which stem from Ireland being 'a First World country with a Third World memory'.<sup>161</sup> In his address, New York Governor Pataki contended that the memorial 'will serve as a reminder to millions of New Yorkers and Americans who trace their heritage to Ireland of those who were forced to emigrate during one of the most heartbreaking tragedies in the history of the world.' The 'Mayo Society of New York' was strongly represented at the unveiling. Indeed the society was originally established as the 'Mayo Men's Patriotic and Benevolent Association of the City of New York' to 'help meet the needs' of immigrants to New York from the county as well as families living in Mayo who had been affected by the repeated failure to the potato crop in 1879, and 'most likely the founding members were survivors of the devastating Famine of 1847'.<sup>162</sup> Mayo associations from Boston and Philadelphia were also represented while prominent Irish-American broadcaster Adrian Flannelly – himself a native of Attymass – was Master of Ceremonies on what was described by a Mayo emigrant to New York in his column for the *Western People* as a 'special sad day'.<sup>163</sup> The Bofield Ceilí Band, from the Attymass

area, provide music at the ceremony, and ‘many of the audience were visibly moved’ as they performed an eviction scene ‘which told the story of the story of the Famine through mime, music song and dance.’<sup>164</sup> The story of the bands visit to New York and the reasons behind it were captured in the documentary *From Bofield to Battery*, which was later screened by RTÉ.

The memorial received a rave review in the *New York Times*, with critic Roberta Smith declaring that it ‘could be New York City’s equivalent to the Vietnam War memorial in Washington, an unconventional work of public art that strikes a deep emotional chord, sums up its artistic moment for a broad audience, and expands the understanding of what a public memorial can be.’<sup>165</sup> This unconventionality was something which Tolle had sought, ‘a memorial like this, incorporating landscape, architecture and sculpture has never been tried before; it is redefining what a monument is’. This redefining is certainly true, and Tolle’s memorial brings the visitor on a journey, real and imagined, in which he/she becomes enveloped by the site. Such engagement with a memorial is indeed very different from the traditional direct viewing of a single sturdy obelisk or statue of concrete or marble. The reconstructed and simulated aspects of the Irish Hunger Memorial as well as its general scale, may leave it and a possible future genre of remembrance sites, open to accusations of bordering between memorial and theme-park. Tolle however, does point out that too many memorials and monuments become mute because ‘they contain so little information about the events they commemorate’. To date, the monument has been warmly welcomed both in both the U.S and Ireland; the physical affirmation of the connection between the Famine and the diaspora being most timely. In 2004, those behind the project unveiled a memorial at the site of the cottage in Attymass (see app. 5.4.).

## Conclusion

Famine commemorations in Mayo, as elsewhere, were largely unheard of up until the mid 1980s. The stark images of destitute Ethiopian Famine victims broadcast into Irish homes at this time perhaps awakened a latent Irish consciousness and showed that the Great Famine, rather than being a distant and shameful Irish episode, was in fact actually relevant to an ongoing global issue. The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Famine, coinciding with Ireland’s new found economic and cultural confidence on a world stage, gave further poignancy to the suffering of past generations, and an event which could not be spoken of

only 50 years previously for a variety of reasons; fear, distress, humiliation and superstition. As Lowenthal has commented: 'Forgetting what displeases us is not only normal but necessary; heritage decorum rightly demands concealing the unspeakable.'<sup>166</sup>

While Mayo is obviously representative of the 'worst case scenario' of Famine malady, the plethora of commemorative events centred on the county may have the effect of undermining the suffering caused by the Famine in other areas. The proliferation of these events in Mayo, may also give rise, or add to, what has come to be known as, a MOPE mentality. MOPE, an acronym coined by Liam Kennedy, reads as the 'Most Oppressed People Ever', and represents a mindset invoked by a presentation of the Irish national past which symbolises 'an almost palpable sense of victimhood and exceptionalism.'<sup>167</sup> Whether instigated by authorities, local groups or outside interests, the means by which the Famine has been remembered in Mayo (and also by which the Famine in Mayo has been remembered overseas), has largely been dignified and uncontentious. Overall, it seems that the numerous Famine commemorations in Mayo avoided any accusations of tasteless commercialisation, maudlin sentimentality, or gaudy display. The three monuments with Mayo connections; *The Coffin Ship*, *the Arrival*, and *the Irish Hunger Memorial*, are all potent present-day reminders of times less fortunate, and are particularly pertinent to the diaspora which the Famine helped to create. The form of the latter monument does perhaps raise questions that may only be answered, however, as future styles and genres of monuments reveal themselves in time.

As far back as 1993, a feasibility study for a Kiltimagh development organisation pointed out the possibility of developing a 'theme famine village' locally.<sup>168</sup> As the catharsis of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, inevitably perhaps gives way to commercial exploitation, the commodification of Famine remembrance under the all-encompassing and legitimising term of 'commemorative heritage' may well become more widespread. Indeed the Mayo County Council recently granted €130,000 for the restoration of a 'Famine Church' in the Mayo Abbey area 'for its utilisation as a central element in the Mayo Abbey Heritage Tourism Project.'<sup>169</sup> Thus the future of Famine remembrance at sites such as Slievemore – unless taken control of by local interests – would seem to be at the mercy of political whim and the ongoing preoccupation with a neat and formulaic packaging of the past.

The history of the *Famine in Mayo* exhibition is well researched and balanced, and is a welcome addition to what is a paucity of local Famine scholarship, while the Knock memorial mass along with others is indicative of a popular and common desire to commemorate the victims of the calamity through the medium of ecumenical observance. The AFri Famine walk has proven itself to be a quite remarkable form of active commemoration within the county. The walk constitutes a sense of reflection which is both personal and collective, and which involves an engagement with a specific Famine landscape and specific (albeit exaggerated) Famine occurrence. Such a commemoration is, as we are often reminded about the Famine itself, people focused. While memorials might stand mute and unvisited, such a long running and uncommercialised mode of remembrance can only be sustained by those who seek to remember and renew such memories.

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- <sup>127</sup> Quoted in Hamrock, *op. cit.*, p. 73-75. See also O. MacDonagh, 'Irish Emigration to the United States of America and the British Colonies during the Famine' in R. D. Edwards and T. D. Williams, (Eds.), *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History 1845-52* (Browne and Nolan, Dublin, 1956), pp. 364-365.
- <sup>128</sup> Quoted in Póirtéir, *op. cit.* (1995a), p. 210.
- <sup>129</sup> *Sculptors' Society of Ireland, Newsletter* (January/February, 1998).
- <sup>130</sup> *Mayo News* 23 July 1997.
- <sup>131</sup> O. O'Leary, and H. Burke, *Mary Robinson: The Authorised Biography* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1998), p. 204.
- <sup>132</sup> M. Quigley, 'Grosse Île: Canada's Famine Memorial', in A. Gribben, (Ed.), *The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America* (University of Massachusetts, Massachusetts, 1999), p. 150.

- <sup>133</sup> Address by President Mary Robinson at Grosse Île, Quebec, dated 21 August 1994.  
<http://www.irishemigrant/canada/alg.score> Accessed 15 December 2004.
- <sup>134</sup> President Robinson's address to the Oireachtas, dated 2 February 1995  
<http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/addresses/2Feb1995.htm> Accessed 24 November 2005.
- <sup>135</sup> *Connaught Telegraph* 26 November 1997.
- <sup>136</sup> Details regarding speeches are taken from a video recording of the event entitled *An Gorta Mór* which was provided by the Mayo Film and Video Club.
- <sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>138</sup> *Connaught Telegraph* 26 November 1997.
- <sup>139</sup> Mayo County Library. Letter from Mayo County Librarian, Mr. Pat McMahon re: information on Famine sites. Dated January 1995.
- <sup>140</sup> A. Gribben, (Ed.), *The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America* (University of Massachusetts, Massachusetts, 1999)
- <sup>141</sup> B. Kingston, *The Deserted Village at Slievemore, Achill Island* (Achill, 1990), p. 9.
- <sup>142</sup> T. Denver, *The Deserted Village, Achill Island: A Case Study Examining the Tourism Potential of The Proposed Interpretative Centre, Slievemore, Achill, Co. Mayo* (Unpublished Thesis, Dept. of Economics, National University of Ireland, Galway, 1999), p. 90.
- <sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67-70.
- <sup>144</sup> Kinealy, *op. cit.* (1994), p. 142.
- <sup>145</sup> Donnelly, *op. cit.* (2001), p. 235.
- <sup>146</sup> I. Whelan 'The Stigma of Souperism' in C. Póirtéir, *The Great Irish Famine* (Mercier Press, Cork, 1995), p. 148.
- <sup>147</sup> T. G. Fewer, 'The Archaeology of the Great Famine: Time for a Beginning?', *Group for the Study of Irish Historic Settlement Newsletter* No. 8, (1997), p. 12.
- <sup>148</sup> C. E. Orser, 'Can there be Archaeology of the Great Famine?', in C. Morash and R. Hayes, (Eds.), *Fearful Realities: New perspectives on the Famine* (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1996), pp. 77-90.
- <sup>149</sup> P. Walsh, *An Gorta Mór: Famine in the Swinford Union* (Swinford Historical Society, Swinford, 1995).
- <sup>150</sup> <http://www.opw.ie> Accessed 26 May 2005.
- <sup>151</sup> C. Nash, 'Genealogical Identities', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* Vol. 20, (2002), p. 34.
- <sup>152</sup> *Western People* 5 April 2000.
- <sup>153</sup> McLean, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
- <sup>154</sup> Article by Timothy Guinnane, Associate Professor of Economics at Yale University, to the *Washington Post* 17 July 1997, Quoted in Tóibín and Ferriter, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
- <sup>155</sup> [http://www.carradoogan.com/slack\\_history.html](http://www.carradoogan.com/slack_history.html) Accessed 26 May 2004.
- <sup>156</sup> McHugh, *op. cit.*, pp. 426-427.
- <sup>157</sup> <http://www.irishcultureandcustoms.com/arlisc/faminememor.html> Accessed 20 January 2005.
- <sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>159</sup> *Irish Times* 20 July 2002.
- <sup>160</sup> *New York Times* 16 July 2002.
- <sup>161</sup> *Irish Times* 20 July 2002.
- <sup>162</sup> <http://www.mayosocietyofny.org/html/about.html> Accessed 20 January 2005.
- <sup>163</sup> *Western People* 8 August 2002.
- <sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>165</sup> *New York Times* 16 July 2002.
- <sup>166</sup> D. Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Penguin, London, 1996), p. 161.
- <sup>167</sup> L. Kennedy, *Colonialism, Religion and Nationalism in Ireland* (Queens University of Belfast, Belfast, 1996), p. 217.
- <sup>168</sup> *Western People* 21 April 1993.
- <sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 June 2004.

## **Chapter Six**

### **The Memorialisation of the 1798 Rebellion**

## **Introduction**

From placenames to monuments, and tourist trails to public houses, the visitor to Mayo would be hard pressed to pass through the county and avoid reference to the 1798 Rebellion. Indeed, the Rebellion and its subsequent remembrance provide the ideal opportunity to view the changing modes of commemoration with regards to a single event, over space and through time. Such changing modes are more often than not indicative of shifting contemporary concerns and preoccupations that inevitably infuse the rituals which surround historic anniversaries. The various commemorations of 1798 also provide scope to explore the relationship between formal national commemoration and the unique form of localised commemorative heritages that have manifested themselves on a county level.

In this chapter it is thus intended to investigate the commemorative events which centred on the key anniversaries of the 1798 Rebellion in 1848, 1898, 1948 and 1998. With regards to each, details of events at national level will form a backdrop to the examination of the commemorations which have taken place in Mayo. In examining these localised commemorations, the chapter will focus on the remembrance of events and personalities of the Rebellion, which were specific to Mayo. This investigation will focus on the way in which historical consciousness of 1798 has been shaped and structured not only by various historiographies, but also by gatherings, ceremonies, re-enactments and particularly the plethora of monuments, which its memory has spawned within the cultural landscape.

In order to again contextualise details of subsequent remembrances, the chapter will commence with a brief account of the initially successful yet ultimately doomed Franco-Irish campaign of 1798. Taking a chronological view and systematic sample, the major 50-year junctures at which the Rebellion has been commemorated will then be critically charted with regards to principal events and players in Mayo and at a more macro level. Particular attention will be given to the centenary of the Rebellion in 1898 when commemoration of the event became a key battleground between opposing political factions. Other intermittent acts of remembrance which have taken place in the county outside of the principal commemorative periods will also be examined. Finally, the chapter will conclude by surmising the evolution of commemorative practices regarding the Rebellion of 1798.

### The Rebellion of 1798

The 1798 Rebellion was predicated by the American War of Independence (1775-83) and the French revolution of 1789, but was more immediately precipitated by a determined campaign of counter-insurgency by Crown forces. While eighteenth-century Western Europe was awash with new thinking on the Rights of Man, democracy and republicanism, as well as an increasing disenchantment with tyranny and royalism, such Enlightenment ideas were slow to take root in Ireland – lacking as it did a universal system of education.

Anonymously published in 1791 by a young Protestant barrister, Theobald Wolfe Tone's *An Argument on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, called for Catholics and Protestants to unite in mutual respect and esteem, to fight for Irish independence.<sup>1</sup> Tone's views led to an invitation later that year to establish the Society of United Irishmen in Belfast with Samuel Neilson and Thomas Russell. Tone quickly established a Dublin society and smaller clubs soon sprang up in other urban centres. Membership was largely made up of liberal, educated and wealthy gentlemen of Catholic, Protestant and Presbyterian backgrounds. The aims of the society included parliamentary reform and the dismissal of English control over Irish affairs. Originally operating as more of a debating club than anything else, the society was outlawed in 1794 and Tone – accused of treasonable activities, was forced into exile.<sup>2</sup> In response, Samuel Neilson established the society as a secret oath-bound organisation whose objectives now leant themselves to physical force rebellion.

With France and England having gone to war in 1793, the French were eager to make contact with Republican sympathisers in Ireland with a view that an insurrection there would engage the enemy on two fronts. Tone travelled to France in 1796 and drew up plans with the ruling post-revolution Directory for a military expedition to Ireland. Meanwhile the United Irishmen, motivated by the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, had forged an unlikely alliance with the Defenders – a secret agrarian society with sectarian tendencies whose membership was steadily increasing owing to ongoing unrest over land ownership.<sup>3</sup>

In December 1796 the French dispatched 15,000 troops on 35 vessels under the command of General Lazare Hoche to Ireland.<sup>4</sup> Disastrous weather conditions meant that a number of ships were forced to turn back and those which did arrive at Bantry Bay, Co. Cork, were unable to land. Although the French were disillusioned at the lack of popular response to their imminent arrival, the potential of the failed mission galvanised the United Irishmen and Defenders and their numbers swelled. Shocked by the attempted invasion, the British authorities instigated a brutal reign of terror and suppression in Ulster under General Lake which destroyed much of the United Irish network there. The campaign spread throughout the country and in early 1798, with plans for a rebellion to commence on 23 May, the United Irish leadership was decimated when a number of its key members including Thomas Addis Emmet, Oliver Bond and Lord Edward Fitzgerald were arrested. The remaining leaders, however, risked all on one cast, and following the rising of individual units in Wicklow, Carlow, Kildare and Meath, Oulart Hill in Wexford was the location of the first major engagement of the Rebellion on 26 May.<sup>5</sup>

With communications links to France tenuous at best, news of the Rebellion was slow in filtering through. By the time Tone could point to the insurrection and appeal for a new campaign, the Rebellion in Ireland had all but been crushed. With France now engaged in Egypt, Bonaparte was reluctant to commit an expedition to Ireland, particularly with the memory of the apathetic response to Bantry Bay still fresh. Eventually, however, an order for assistance to Ireland, with the aim of reigniting the Rebellion, was given.<sup>6</sup>

### **The French Campaign in the West**

On 22 August 1798, the French frigates *Concorde Franchise* and *Mèdeè* arrived at Kilcummin Head on the western shores of Killala Bay, Co. Mayo having set sail from La Rochelle 16 days earlier. The flotilla was designed as part of a larger armada; a separate mission from Brest, however, did not set sail until some time later and was captured off Lough Swilly, Co. Donegal in October, while plans for another larger expedition under the Irish born General Kilmaine were abandoned. The forces, which did arrive, comprised 888 infantry, 42 inexperienced artillerymen, 57 cavalry and a staff of 35 officers.<sup>7</sup> Accompanying them were a handful of Irish men, among them, Bartholomew Teeling, the radical son of a Lisburn linen draper, Wolfe Tone's brother Mathew and Henry O'Keon, an ex-priest from Mayo who was fluent in French, Irish and English. The expeditionaries brought with them enough arms to equip 5,000 Irish men, and besides the infantry's

flintlock muskets, bayonets and swords, the cavalry was further equipped with sabres pistols and carbines. Three four-pounder field guns were also brought ashore.<sup>8</sup> In command of the French forces was General Jean Joseph–Amable Humbert, a 31-year-old veteran of the military campaign against the insurgents of the Vendée.<sup>9</sup>

Having read a proclamation which announced their commitment to the ideals of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Union' on Irish soil and reminded their hosts of their previous endeavours to Bantry Bay, the landing party marched to, and secured the nearby village of Killala where they occupied the castle of Church of Ireland Bishop, Joseph Stock and established a base headquarters. With word quickly spreading of the French arrival throughout the region, motley bands of Irish peasants began to descend on Killala to join the campaign. There, between 600-700 volunteers who enlisted with the French were drilled into parties and provided with weaponry and uniforms.<sup>10</sup> A broad network of United Irishmen does not appear to have existed in Mayo; although two associates did come to Humbert's aid, namely James McDonnell and George Blake.<sup>11</sup> Despite the obvious enthusiasm of the peasant brigades, the French were taken aback by the unorganised and undisciplined nature of their charges.

The first military engagement of the joint forces was at Ballina, 20 kilometres south of Killala, where some 500 French and Irish troops under French Colonels Fontaine and Sarrazin, managed to take the garrison town in a two-pronged movement on 24 August. Humbert now set his sights on the strategic and commercial centre of Castlebar. There, General Hutchinson and 1,700 soldiers made up of the Warwickshire Regiment, Fraser Fencibles, Longford and Kilkenny Militias, Galway Volunteers, Lord Roden's Fencible Dragoons and Carbineers were joined by General Lake – the victorious leader of Wexford – in wait for the rebels.<sup>12</sup> In what turned out to be a bold and decisive move, Humbert marched his army of 800 French and the same number of Irish, overnight across a secluded track that ran to the west of Lough Conn. This route provided an alternative to their expected march through Foxford and although highly laborious, provided the allies with an element of surprise on reaching Castlebar (despite the fact that some artillery had to be abandoned.) Arriving at early morning on the outskirts of the town, the rebels attacked with the Irish in the centre flanked by the French on either side. Repelled at first by loyalist fire, the combined forces regrouped and were rallied by Sarrazin who led a group to attack the flank of the government line. Charging forward with fixed bayonets, Sarrazin's men

caused the opposing cavalry to scatter. The inexperienced militia without cover were thus frightened into retreat. With the Loyalists in disarray the French pressed home their advantage and following some running street battles and despite a number of strongholds being staunchly defended by small groups of Loyalists, the government forces were forced to flee the town in a humiliating evacuation which came to be known as the 'Races of Castlebar'.<sup>13</sup>

With almost the entire county now falling to the rebels, looting and rowdiness became widespread. Humbert dispatched officers to various towns in a bid to organise and restore social order under local leaderships. In Castlebar, a 12 man provisional government for Connaught was established, and presided over by John Moore – a member of a wealthy local landowning Catholic family – who had been educated in France.<sup>14</sup> Humbert spent a week in Castlebar where, initially buoyed by his success, he began to realise that there was not as strong appetite for further concerted engagements as he had anticipated. Finances for such hostilities were in any case not available.

As news of the French victory reached Dublin, Lord Cornwallis, Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief, decided to take personal charge of the situation. A blockade was established at Enniskillen to prevent any advance by Humbert into Ulster. Soldiers in Leinster were ordered to fixed stations and a force of 2,500 advanced from the East under General Lake while Cornwallis himself moved from Tuam in the South with a troop of 7,000. Upon realising that the expected reinforcements from France were not to arrive, Humbert decided to push out of Mayo, through the northwest and on to Dublin. Departing Castlebar on 3 September with a band of only 600 Irishmen under McDonnell, Humbert and his army marched onward through Swinford and managed to sidestep General Lake – who had advanced to Ballaghaderreen – as he pushed his charges into Sligo.<sup>15</sup>

Fighting off a minor attack by local yeomanry at Tubbercurry, Humbert's men were engaged by the Limerick militia at Cooloney whom they easily overwhelmed with their superior numbers and tactical manoeuvring. With Lake's men having turned, and now in pursuit from the West, and Cornwallis closing in from the South, the Franco-Irish army embarked on a last ditch effort to join up with insurgents who had staged minor uprisings in Longford and north Westmeath. Their progress was finally halted at Ballinamuck on 8 September by Cornwallis's and Lake's contingents. Having engaged in an increasingly



futile confrontation, Humbert finally surrendered. While the French were taken as prisoners of war and eventually repatriated, several hundred Irish were slaughtered on the battlefield or as they attempted to flee; others including Mathew Tone and Bartholemew Teeling were captured and hanged at the location.<sup>16</sup>

In the wake of Ballinamuck, a bitter campaign of suppression was waged against the remaining insurgents in Mayo. John Moore was apprehended in Castlebar and brought to Waterford where he later died while awaiting trial. Many were charged with treason and hanged, and Killala was brutally recaptured with 300 rebels slain to death by the cavalry on 23 September. Along the north coast of the county, houses and villages were destroyed as suspected rebels and abettors were captured, tried and executed.<sup>17</sup>

The 'Year of the French' left a legacy of human suffering and divisiveness. Those who took up arms were mostly poor and uneducated peasants who were by no means fighting for the broad and inclusive ideals of the United Irishmen – who for their part did not have a strong foothold in that part of the country. No Protestants joined Humbert's campaign while the Catholics who did join did so more out of atavistic economic and agrarian dissatisfaction than anything else. Looting was widespread and only Wexford and Wicklow surpassed Mayo in the amount of compensation paid out to 'suffering Loyalists'.<sup>18</sup> Sectarianism was not a motivating factor and no Protestants were killed other than on the battlefield – a circumstance attributed by Bishop Stock to the restraint, exercised at times, by the French over their Irish recruits.<sup>19</sup> Protestants on suspicion of being Orangemen were, however, apprehended by rebels in Ballina and a number of Presbyterian meeting-houses were vandalised.

That the French and the Irish made for precarious brothers-in-arms is certainly true. Cultural differences were often explicitly evident, none more so than in the anti-clerical French suspicion of the deep-rooted religious presence among their hosts. The unruliness of the Irish, who seemed quite content with immediate profit or gain, was at odds too with the wider aims of French republicanism. With regards to military peculiarities, it has been noted by Freyer that at least one French colonel was loathe to witness the Irish employment of pikes against regular troops.<sup>20</sup>

Although the French campaign of late summer 1798 has been moulded into a heroic historic narrative, ambivalence still surrounds both the operation and its leader, Humbert. That Humbert's appointment was frowned upon by other French generals and that his impetuosity in putting to sea may have precipitated the capture of the overall commander, Hardy, off Donegal, has been documented, yet never fully explored.<sup>21</sup> Humbert's aloofness from his Irish troops may have been due to his host's lack of political awareness, but perhaps too, to a mistrust of Catholics engendered by his campaign in the Vendee. It has also been noted that Humbert had to quell a near mutiny *en route* to Ireland and was later to bear the criticisms of his subordinate commanders, particularly General Sarrazin – a man credited with much of the French tactical success.<sup>22</sup> There have also been suggestions that the French brought about the slaughter of their allies at Ballinamuck by pushing them to the front of the battle.<sup>23</sup> Described as a 'foolhardy adventure, too late and far too little', the success of Humbert's offensive has also been put down to Cornwallis's excessive caution in engaging the rebels in a second whole-scale engagement.<sup>24</sup> It is further of note that upon his return to France, Humbert was never to receive a further promotion and after some undistinguished postings was forced into exile in America. Despite such uncertainties, the French expedition has been constructed, particularly in its area of occurrence, as one of the greatest 'What Ifs?' in Irish history.

In the aftermath of the failed 1798 Rebellion there was an obvious retreat from the principles and ideologies of the United Irishmen by many who had formerly been loyal to their cause. Such withdrawal was due in part to fear of retribution but also simply to the deflated spirits of those involved. This void was largely filled by what would become the seminal loyalist historiography of 1798, Sir Richard Musgrave's *Memoirs of the Various Rebellions* that was published in 1801. Musgrave's account sought to establish wholly sectarian motives as the grounds for action and linked the Rebellion with those of 1690 and 1641, presenting each as a phase in a sustained attempt by Catholics to depose Protestant authority. A half a century after 1798 however, a new generation of Irish nationalists were identifying with the United Irishmen and beginning to rehabilitate the memory of the Rebellion.

### Commemoration of the Rebellion in 1848

Although described as ‘an act of utmost commemoration’,<sup>25</sup> the attempted rising of the Young Irelanders 50 years after the Rebellion of 1798, owed more to the political climate of the day than to any direct anniversary relationship. Despite this, the Young Ireland movement was highly influenced by the heroism, and to a lesser extent, the ideology of the United Irishmen. Although a rare reference to 1798, the Young Ireland newspaper, *The Nation* published in 1843 what was to become its most popular and notorious ballad: ‘The Memory of the Dead’, more popularly known by its opening line ‘Who fears to speak of ’98?’ While avoiding a direct call to arms or espousing a specific ideological programme, the poem displays obvious continuing sympathies for the ‘brave’ ‘patriots’ of 1798. Written by John Kells Ingram, son of a Church of Ireland rector, while studying at Trinity College, Dublin, ‘The Memory of the Dead’ would become the anthem of subsequent ’98 commemorations:

The Memory of the Dead  
 Who fears to speak of ‘98?  
 Who blushes at the name?  
 When cowards mock the patriot’s fate,  
 Who hangs his head in shame?  
 He’s all a knave and half a slave  
 Who slights his country thus,  
 But a true man, like you, man,  
 Will fill your glass with us.<sup>26</sup>

The otherwise notable avoidance of 1798 in the pages of *The Nation* is a clear indication of the attempts of nationalist politics to steer away from association with revolutionary republicanism and to be seen following a strictly constitutionalist agenda. Ryder has attributed this to not only to a psychological repression of memory of ‘a very divisive and slaughterous series of events’, but also, to simply a fear of prosecution.<sup>27</sup> Indeed ‘The Memory of the Dead’ was produced as evidence against Charles Gavan Duffy, co-founder of *The Nation*, during his trial and conviction for seditious conspiracy in 1844. Such reticence also belies the strong personal links between many of the leaders of the Young Irelanders and the United Irishmen. John Blake Dillon and John Mitchel’s respective fathers were United Irishmen and Gavan Duffy recorded the specific United Irishmen who had a formative political influence upon him.<sup>28</sup> Following on from nationalist historian Dr. R. R. Madden’s positive portrayal of the leadership of the 1798 Rebellion in *United Irishmen, Their Life and Times* (published in 1842), which had

identified Wolfe Tone's grave at Bodenstown, Co. Kildare, Thomas Davis made it a focal point of commemoration. In 1843 he published an heroic memorialisation of the United Irish leader in the form of a poetic homily entitled 'Tone's Grave'. A year later the Young Irelanders erected a black marble memorial to Tone at Bodenstown, although no formal ceremony was conducted in order to avoid embarrassing O'Connell in his dealings with the government, again indicating the ongoing sensitivities surrounding the memory of 1798. At the time of his death in 1845, Davis was also engaged in a biography of Tone.

A further homage to the memory of 1798 can be seen in the establishment of the many Confederate Clubs across Ireland in the twelve months leading up to the Young Ireland Rebellion in 1848. Backed by the Young Irelanders who had become disillusioned with a perceived sense of inertia in the O'Connellite movement, the Confederation numbered 200 clubs at their peak and boasted a combined membership of over 40,000 people. According to their leader Thomas Meagher, they had as their overall aim, 'to destroy English interest in this country root and branch, to institute a national government...and, by our laws and arms, to restore the country in its full integrity and glory to its own brave people'.<sup>29</sup> Although largely confining themselves to social and cultural activities (visits to Tone's grave being a popular pilgrimage for respective clubs), the Confederation took on a slightly more assertive tone following the arrests of Young Ireland leaders, John Mitchel, William Smith O'Brien and Meagher on charges of sedition in March 1848. Militant lectures such as 'Popular Power in Revolutions' and 'The Pike: Its History and Use' were now being given in Confederate Clubs, while, in a bid to align themselves with Ireland's revolutionary past, new clubs began to adopt names such as 'Wolfe Tone', '1798' and 'Lord Edward Fitzgerald'. A newly established club in Ballina (one of two in Mayo) named itself the 'O'Dowda Club' after the ancient hereditary chieftains of the area, whose descendant, 'Baron' James O'Dowda, played a major part in leading Irish rebels in Humbert's campaign.<sup>30</sup> As one of their activities, the Ballina club conducted an audit of English goods being sold in the town, with a view to promoting indigenous manufactures.<sup>31</sup> In Dublin, the members of at least one club adopted what it referred to as 'the Irish Marseilles', namely Kells Ingram's 'The Memory of the Dead' to be sung at the close of meetings, and several others began to gather arms and compete in rifle practice.<sup>32</sup>

Of the Young Ireland leaders it was John Mitchel who did most to propagate the memory of 1798 as a tool for inflaming and galvanising nationalist sentiment. In his

newspaper, boldly and provocatively titled the *United Irishman*, first published in February 1848, Mitchel wrote numerous articles on the virtues of the ideals of the men of 1798, thus using the legacy of the Rebellion as a contemporary call to arms. In a radical shift from previous Young Ireland stances, Mitchel openly praised the republican principles of the United Irishmen and not just their moral and physical courage.<sup>33</sup> The total radicalisation of the Confederate Clubs which Mitchel had predicted, failed to materialise, and, following his arrest and subsequent transportation in the summer of 1848, the Young Irelanders embarked upon a poorly supported and ill-fated insurrection.

Aside from the Mayo Confederate Club's salute of acknowledgement to the Rebellion of 1798 there was little else to mark the Golden Jubilee of the event. With the effects of the Famine still ravaging the county and beyond, preoccupations were very much with the present rather than the past. A predictably gloomy editorial of Mayo newspaper *The Telegraph*, did remind its readers that, 'Tis fifty years past since England dyed her red flag redder still in Irish blood, and, planting it upon the ruins of a once glorious Nation, left it to float in triumph over a vanquished and down trodden race'. Citing the Famine as the culmination of tyrannical reign since the defeat of the Rebellion, the newspaper also pondered whether 'we can discover a gleam of sunshine breaking in upon that terrible darkness which envelopes the Island and hangs like the black pall of death over our terror-stricken people'.<sup>34</sup>

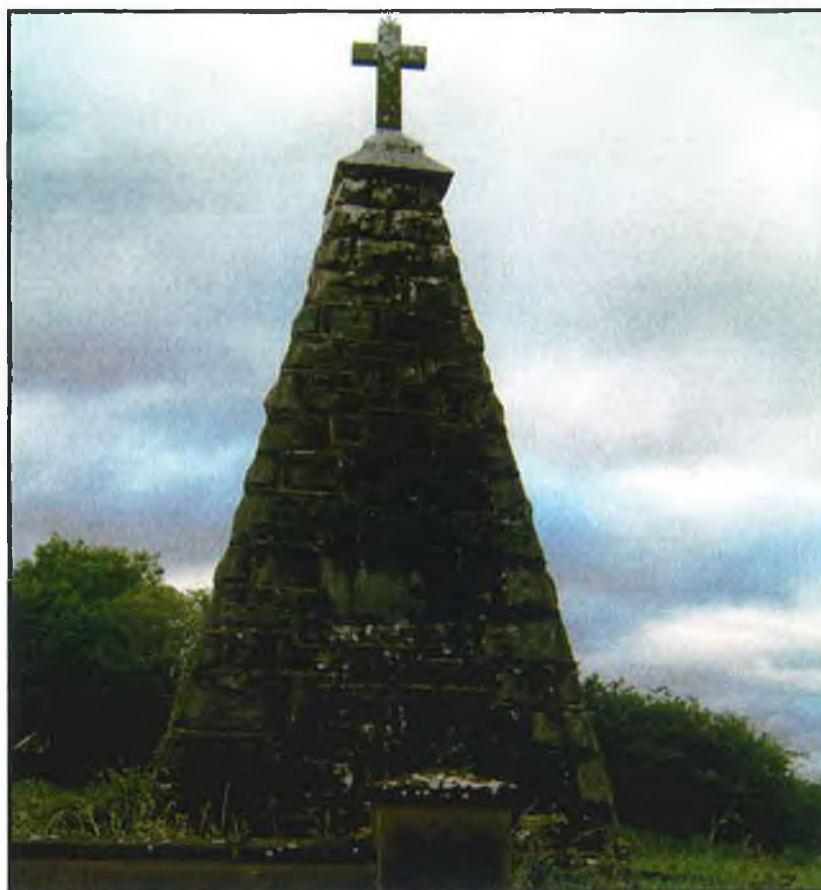
### **The Centenary**

The centenary of the Rebellion was marked by a bitter, and at times, underhanded dispute by nationalist factions to usurp control of the commemorations. While events in Mayo were conducted away from the central wranglings in Dublin, there were echoes of the discord in the county where those who advocated a physical force tradition held a strong position. The period is also notable for the profound sense of nation-building which manifested itself in the many memorials to 1798 which the centenary gave rise to. Such a phenomenon has aptly been described by Johnson as the 'sculpting of heroic histories'.<sup>35</sup>

#### *The National Perspective*

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, prior to the centenary of the 1798 Rebellion, a small number of monuments were erected by nationalists in memory of 1798. The first of these was unveiled in St. Mary's cemetery, Bunclody, Co. Wexford in 1875,<sup>36</sup>

while a year later another was installed at Frenchill outside Castlebar to commemorate the memory of fallen French soldiers. The Mayo monument was initiated by Mr. James Daly, editor of the *Connaught Telegraph* and co-founder of the Land League of Mayo in 1879, and was constructed through subscriptions from around the county and beyond. Designed as a cross mounted on a 9-metre limestone pyramidal base, it sought to commemorate the death of four French dragoons who were killed at that location while pursuing English soldiers from the town following the ‘Races of Castlebar’. The story and location of their deaths had been held since in folk memory and astoundingly, when the foundation of the monument was being dug, the remains of bodies in French uniforms as well as several buttons and eighteenth century French coins were excavated.<sup>37</sup> While the uniforms disintegrated on being exposed to light, the coins were passed on and some are presently held by Mr. Daly of Mulranny, Co. Mayo.<sup>38</sup> The inscription on the monument reads: ‘In grateful remembrance of the brave French Soldiers who were killed here in 1798 fighting for Ireland’s freedom’. The ashes of the fallen soldiers were enclosed in the monument, which was visited in August 1877 by Humbert’s grandnephew, Mr. Louis Joule, as part of a research tour for his biography of the General.<sup>39</sup>



**Fig. 9. Frenchill monument near Castlebar erected in 1876**

Source: Author

Shortly after, in 1878, another stone Celtic cross was commissioned by the Fenian-dominated Dublin '98 Club. The monument, which bore carved crossed pikes and was dedicated to Fr. John Murphy, caused controversy upon its unveiling at Boolavogue, Co. Wexford. Originally it was due to be installed in the graveyard of the local church, but because of hostility to such commemoration, it was refused by the Church and placed outside. The parish priest of Ferns described the '98 club as a den 'of Communists and Freemasons', while the local parish priest enforced the closure of pubs in the area and forbade parishioners from attending the unveiling ceremony.<sup>40</sup> Such condemnation of the Rebellion and the secret societies, which upheld its principles, was in line with the Catholic Church's continued stance since 1798. Supporting the Union which it envisaged would introduce Catholic Emancipation, and fearful of the anti-clerical republican ideals propagated by the revolutionaries, the Church sought to distance itself from the involvement of its clerics in the Rebellion – branding them as 'excommunicated priests, drunken and profligate couple beggars, the very faeces of the Church'.<sup>41</sup>

By the time of the centenary of 1798, modern Irish nationalism was reaching its zenith, but was also experiencing a profound fragmentation. As a clamour for proprietorship of memory of the Rebellion ensued, it seemed no one now was afraid to speak of '98. Early in 1897 an Irish Republican Brotherhood-initiated 1798 National Commemoration Committee, was inaugurated in Dublin with the veteran Fenian/Young Irelander, John O'Leary as its President. Such an establishment and appointment was by and large seen as a natural progression, with the Fenians and their successors, the IRB, having previously participated in 1798 commemorative events at the Fr. Murphy monument at Boolavogue and at a procession and gathering in Enniscorthy in 1894 in remembrance of the Battle of Vinegar Hill. The formation of such a movement with a potential for mass popularity and harbouring political overtones as it did, began to raise the awareness of constitutional nationalists whose Irish Parliamentary Party had split into two distinct and opposing groups: the Parnellite faction under John Redmond and the anti-Parnellites led by John Dillon. The party, who, by their very definition were opposed to armed insurrection and had initially disregarded the centenary celebrations, soon came realise the currency to be held in associating themselves with such a commemoration.

Since the 1870s, Fr. Patrick Kavanagh's *Popular History of the Insurrection of 1798* had radically shifted popular nationalist perception of the Rebellion to that of

'defence of faith and fatherland' by a 'morally pure' Catholic peasantry in reaction to sustained loyalist provocation. Giving the rebellion an overtly religious slant, Kavanagh sought to establish that 'there was no conflict between Irish Nationalism and Catholicism, and that in the hour of need it was the priest who stood by the Irish people'.<sup>42</sup> The Wexford Priest laid the blame for the Rebellion squarely at the door of the politically motivated Orange Order, who, with state blessing, had left a downtrodden Catholic populace with no other alternative. In furthering his thesis, Kavanagh also set out to distance the Wexford Rebellion 'from the planned revolution of the United Irish Society'.<sup>43</sup> Such an account of 1798 was quickly absorbed into Catholic and nationalist consciousness, and Kavanagh's book received a number of reprints after its original publication in 1870. Its popularity and influence is reflected in the fact that by the time of the centennial of 1798, the hitherto disapproved of memorial to Fr. Murphy, was granted access by the Church to the church grounds in Boolavogue.<sup>44</sup> This renewed historical perspective coupled with the stagnant political atmosphere of the period, in which the opposing Irish Parliamentary Party factions seemed more content with denigrating each other than with forwarding the cause of Home Rule, ensured that nationalists were thus set to indulge themselves in a public celebration – 'one of the few effective methods available to the Irish majority of expressing its national convictions'.<sup>45</sup>

Despite being hard pressed by Redmond and Dillon, O'Leary – determined to preserve IRB control of the commemorations – refused admittance to the Centenary Committee of any sitting parliamentarian on the pretext that it should not become the preserve of any political party. In April, letters to local press were published on behalf of the organisation, calling on nationalists to establish '98 clubs in their areas over the next two weeks. In the following months, however, as the parliamentarians brought pressure on O'Leary, the central committee was forced to broaden its own membership to include nationalist mayors and other regional officials as well as representatives from sporting, cultural and labour movements with a nationalist ethos.

With the centenary celebrations commencing on New Years Eve 1897, the struggle to gain control of the commemorations intensified. By then Redmond and Dillon, who had gained respective footholds in the influential '98 clubs of Wexford and Ulster, undertook a policy of openly criticising O'Leary's organisation while still maintaining their willingness to work together. Just as plans were being drawn up for alternative independent



celebrations, a compromise was agreed and a new amalgamated committee inclusive of all nationalist opinions convened for the first time in May 1898. The expanded and, on the surface, unified committee now undertook the arrangement of some regional activities, but more importantly the arrangement of the pinnacle of the year's celebrations – a major patriotic demonstration in Dublin which was to culminate in the laying of a foundation stone of a memorial to Wolfe Tone at the end of Grafton Street near St. Stephen's Green.

The foundation stone had been hewn from MacArt's fort in Belfast, thus providing Belfast with a shared sense of ownership in the monument at a time when it would have been impossible for Northern nationalists to erect their own memorial. The stone, followed by a huge throng, was paraded through the streets of Belfast before being solemnly loaded onto a train for Dublin where it was met by an official party. There it lay in state for two nights in Newgate Prison – the site of the execution of a number of United Irishmen. Such funerary associations were, according to Gary Owens, an instinctive return by the IRB 'to the symbols and rituals they knew best: those of burial and bereavement'.<sup>46</sup>

On Monday 15 August (Wolfe Tone Day by popular ascription), Dublin came to a standstill for the dedication ceremony. The massive procession, which followed the foundation stone, included numerous dignitaries, up to 80 marching bands, costumed figures and thousands of marchers, many of whom bore banners depicting patriotic paintings and slogans of 1798 events. Participants and spectators alike wore badges of green white and orange, while heather from Cave Hill or ivy from Tone's graveside was also commonly sported. With flags, banners and decorations lining the public route the mass procession 'represented the greatest public celebration of revolutionary nationalism that Ireland had ever seen'.<sup>47</sup> It must also be remembered, however, that the centenary celebrations had been partly designed to counter the unionist fervour, which had been created through Queen Victoria's jubilee year in 1897. The parade took three hours to cover the 5 kilometre route, specially chosen for its association with places relating to Tone's life. Upon reaching its destination at the northwest corner of St. Stephen's Green – chosen as a 'deliberate assertion of nationalist territorial imperative, in the unionist heartland of Dublin'<sup>48</sup> – the procession's numbers swelled to a reported 100,000, as it merged with the group already assembled there.<sup>49</sup>

Flanked by Dillon and Redmond, it was O'Leary who conducted the symbolically laden proceedings. With William Butler Yeats and William Rooney also addressing the crowd, the rostrum represented a broad spectrum of nationalist opinion and ideologies. Although soured somewhat by Maud Gonne's refusal to share a platform with the constitutionalists, this brief show of solidarity by the political leaders of the day, was enthusiastically received by those present. Having been handed an ornate trowel which had been touched by as many of Tone's descendants as possible, O'Leary tapped the foundation six times to represent the four provinces of Ireland, America, and France. Despite the cult of Tone appearing to be at its peak, his ideals were for the most part either brushed over or distorted by contemporary leaders. As Ollivier has pointed out: 'Tone's great idea of Irish brotherhood played no part in the commemoration. His dream of uniting Protestants and Catholics was consigned to oblivion'.<sup>50</sup> The ceremony was concluded with the band striking up the familiar 'Memory of the Dead'.

The initial enthusiasm that had sought to establish the Dublin Wolfe Tone monument was mirrored in the erection of many other 1798 memorials around Mayo and the rest of the country at this time. These erections were part of a wider glorification of the national past evident across Europe in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Although such a process was 'predicated on the assumption that heroic histories would articulate and legitimise present-day political circumstances or the future aspirations',<sup>51</sup> Ireland differed from many other places in Western Europe at the time in that it was not an independent nation. For nationalists, the imposition of their iconography was designed to usurp that of the unionist community, which it had built up throughout the nineteenth century whilst simultaneously staking claim to the broader landscape on which their monuments stood. While images which enforced the bonds of union were commonplace in Irish towns and cities, Dublin's Nelson's Column (1805) and the Wellington Testimonial (1820) being two of the more pronounced examples, the huge crowds which attended the laying of the foundation of the O'Connell Monument in the capital's Sackville Street (O'Connell Street) in 1864, were testament to the popular desire for patriotic statuary.<sup>52</sup> In 1870, a monument was raised to William Smith O'Brien, a leader of the 1848 uprising, thus marking the first memorial to honour a representative of armed resistance to British rule since the Act of Union. The Henry Grattan memorial of 1876 marked further homage to nationalist heroes.<sup>53</sup>

The reason for the fervent bout of ‘statuemia’ that was witnessed across Ireland in 1898 was explained by Thomas Esmonde, MP, at a stone laying ceremony in Wexford town in 1898, when he told the assembled crowd:

‘...while there are monuments in plenty to the alien representatives of English misrule in Ireland, the monuments commemorative of great Irishmen, of great events in Irish history are few and far between’.<sup>54</sup>

The greatest concentration of memorials was in the southeastern counties of Wexford and Wicklow – the areas that had seen much of the action in 1798. Notable locations of memorials in the region include Wexford town, New Ross, Wicklow town and Gorey. A number of these were designed by Oliver Shepard, a sculptor who became synonymous with the nationalist iconography relating to the memorialisation of the Rebellion, and later with the remembrance of the 1916 Rising through his Death of Cúchulainn’ memorial in Dublin’s G.P.O. Drawing heavily on Fr. Kavanagh’s interpretation of a clerically-led *jaquerie* revolt, Shepard’s monuments commonly presented masculine pike-wielding peasants or local leaders coupled with allegorical emblems such as high crosses, wolfhounds and round towers.<sup>55</sup> Such representations married images of both the *en vogue* Gaelic and Celtic revivals and stood in direct contrast to the many Romanesque columns and obelisks of imperial memorials.<sup>56</sup>

Altogether the centenary produced some 30 memorials in various locations across the country which ranged from simple plaques to Celtic crosses to imposing statues perched on vast pedestals.<sup>57</sup> Outside of the Southeast, prominent memorials were erected at this time, in Thurles, Cork, Skibereen Collooney, Sligo town and Dundalk. The nature of the memorial often depended on the enthusiasm of the organising committee and the funds available to them. The erection of monuments was usually conducted in two stages. Firstly, a foundation stone was dedicated in a large public ceremony. As well as being a devout act of consecration, such an event was designed to drum up support and money for the proposed monument. Local contributions were commonly augmented by petitions for donations from Irish–American emigrants. Once paid for and built – a process which could take anything up to two decades – a second ceremony was held by the community to unveil the sculpture.

The quasi-religious reverence which was afforded to monuments, also had a commercial dimension. Left over chips from the Wolfe Tone foundation piece were carved and mounted onto various jewellery pieces by a Belfast jeweller and sold nationwide. Postcards and photographs of nationalist monuments, akin to those of shrines, cathedrals and churches, were put on sale. Further commemorative merchandising, which might today be described as kitsch was also marketed. These included a range of centenary perfumes, decorated handkerchiefs, ceramics, posters and novels, while a northern distillery, not normally known for honouring nationalist sympathies proclaimed in an advertising slogan, 'True patriots drank Bushmills in 1798'.<sup>58</sup>

On the whole, centenary events in the south of Ireland passed off in a celebratory and unchallenged fashion. In Ulster however, they were met with a degree of unionist antipathy, which although by no means as volatile as that engendered during the recent Home Rule campaigns, did give rise to a number of flashpoints. Although the Rebellion in Ulster had been a predominately Presbyterian event, it had by now, as in the South, been appropriated as a Catholic affair. With Presbyterians believing that political and religious equality had been improved (as well as the tenant rights for which their United Irish forbearers had taken up arms), the community saw no reason to participate in the year's festivities. Furthermore, the religious hostility between Protestants (with whom Presbyterians had forged political and theological links since the Act of Union), and Catholics had continued unabated over the course of the nineteenth century.

As the year's celebrations proceeded apace, unionist newspapers which had at first remained detached from the centennial events, began to question the rationale behind commemorating a failed Rebellion. One periodical claimed to have the answer:

'The pathetic delight with which the Irish peoples love to indulge in the dreary recollection of their abortive past is no new feature in their character. Unfortunately for themselves, they are unable to forget as unwilling to forgive, and the contemplation of their own sufferings and misfortunes has continually a morbid interest for them'.<sup>59</sup>

In the aftermath of the centenary fervour, the Constitutionalists who had fought so hard to be part of the celebrations abandoned the completion of the Tone memorial in Dublin. Instead it was left in the hands of the IRB, who through a mixture of incompetence and corruption failed to see the estimated £14,000 project to fruition. Although it acted as focal point for nationalist wreath-laying ceremonies and as a starting

point for parades for a number of years, the planned site of the monument was eventually appropriated by a monument to the Dublin Fusiliers participation in the Boer War, known to Republicans as 'Traitors Arch'. It was 1967 before a Wolfe Tone memorial was erected, along another section of St. Stephens Green.

### *The 1798 Centenary in Mayo*

Following the national notices in April 1897 by O'Leary's central committee for the establishment of local '98 clubs, two were founded shortly afterwards in County Mayo. An IRB-dominated committee was established in Ballina, while in Castlebar, James Daly, who had been responsible for the erection of the Frenchill monument 20 years previously, presided over the 'Castlebar and Central Barony of Carra '98 Association'. Aware of the simmering dispute which threatened to cloud the overall centenary, the Castlebar Association added its opinion that such a movement 'must be non-sectarian, non-political (from the standpoint of the wretched politics of to-day) and altogether aloof from the paltriness of modern "isms".<sup>60</sup>

As the summer progressed and O'Leary was forced to widen the membership of the Central Executive, the move was welcomed in Mayo. There however, the press objectively observed that despite 'the bickering of miserable sectionists' in the capital, plans were rightly moving ahead for 'county celebrations independent of any outside influence'. The Central Executive, it argued, 'have enough to do in arranging for the reception of '98 pilgrims in Dublin' and should leave 'local receptions to local committees'.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, in Castlebar plans were drawn up by its committee for a mass gathering at the Frenchill monument at the start of 1898, to be attended by Maud Gonne. However, it discouraged any 'polite, fashionable West Britons' from joining their ranks.<sup>62</sup> In Ballina, where it had been decided to erect a 1798 monument, the tones of the IRB-influenced '98 committee were openly more radical. There it questioned: 'up to this point what have we done here at home to keep alive the memory of the men whose life blood sprinkled our streets and whose bodies dangled from the tree stumps along the roadside after the return of the English from Ballinamuck?'<sup>63</sup>

The objective of using the centenary year commemorations as an inspiration for a push towards independence was clearly reflected in the New Year editorial of the *Connaught Telegraph* which pronounced:

'How far the spirit of Irish Nationality, operating through a fitting celebration of the memories of the heroes of 1798, this year will influence our people at home to a due sense of their responsibility as Irish citizens is a matter of concern to every Irishman'.<sup>64</sup>

Attended by an estimated 10,000 people from around the county the gathering at Frenchill in January was the first event to mark the centenary calendar in Mayo. Amidst numerous commemorative banners as well as fife and drum bands, James Daly told the assembly that their lack of national freedom was not a reflection on themselves but on 'the want of leadership' who were currently 'divided into six or seven factions'. To a rapturous response, Daly introduced Ms. Maud Gonne whom he referred to as 'the modern Maid of Orleans, the Joan of Arc'. Her 'stirring address' was enthusiastically received. Mr. William Rooney of the Gaelic League, who had memorialised events of 1798 in the West through song and verse, also provided an oration.<sup>65</sup>

As Redmond and Dillon began to take control of '98 clubs in the southeast and north of the country respectively, O'Leary responded by seeking to consolidate the Executive Council's position in the West. In Claremorris, a convention of Connaught '98 clubs at which he presided, passed a resolution of confidence in the Council's authority.<sup>66</sup> As the competing groups claimed a desire for unity and harmony above all, yet simultaneously sought to scupper each others claim as the true harbingers of the memory of the United Irishmen, the so-called celebrations of the 1798 Rebellion were in danger of fragmenting into separate regional events.

Unfettered by the political manoeuvring of the predominant parties, '98 clubs continued to be established and grow in the towns and villages of County Mayo along broadly democratic lines in early 1898. In March, Gonne returned to Mayo where she delivered a lecture in Ballina, followed by an address to a 'Monster Public Meeting' in the town's market square.<sup>67</sup> In private correspondence at the time, Gonne expressed her suspicion that a convention of the nationwide committees to be held in Dublin was deliberately rescheduled to clash with her commitments in Ballina and thus deny her any influence over the voting intentions of 'neutral country delegates'. She was also of the belief that personal politics were partly to blame. O'Leary's cohort on the central committee, Frederick Allen, had, according to Gonne, conspired the clash of meetings in order to 'snub Connaught where he has been able to get no foothold'.<sup>68</sup>

Following the coalition of the nationalist representatives (Gonne excepted), for the Tone memorial foundation stone ceremony in Dublin, the week after saw the laying of another foundation stone, this time for the General Humbert Memorial in Ballina. While the Dublin nationalists may have joined forces to present a united front, the Ballina Committee, headed by Thomas B. Kelly, remained resolutely in the grasp of republicans who eschewed the involvement of both Church and Constitutionalists.<sup>69</sup> Again a mass crowd assembled to welcome Maud Gonne, who, following a familiarly jingoistic address, formally laid the foundation stone on 21 August. Irish, French and American flags decorated the streets and numerous dignitaries including a strong French delegation were in attendance, along with a number of expatriates. While Gonne's particular brand of patriotism held resonance for nationalists throughout Ireland, her stock was especially high in Mayo having involved herself in philanthropic activities in Belmullet and Ballycastle. According to Gonne herself, some of those who had walked the long distance from that northwestern part of Mayo to attend the Ballina event, had come under the apprehension that a second Franco-Irish insurrection was in the offing.<sup>70</sup> The following day Gonne and her entourage visited Killala and then Kilcummin, where later a plaque was inscribed: 'I came here today to stand on this historic spot in order to commemorate the landing of my countrymen here one hundred years ago. Maud Gonne MacBride 22 Aug 1898' (see appendix 6.1.).

A week later on 28 August a further mass gathering was held, again at the Frenchhill monument outside Castlebar, where according to a local newspaper such numbers had not been witnessed since an O'Connellite 'monster meeting' over 50 years previously.<sup>71</sup> Despite her aversion to sharing a platform with constitutionalists in Dublin only days earlier, Gonne was this time forced to share the limelight with John Dillon and his political confidant, former MP William O'Brien. While the two men's presence was presumably at the behest of the Castlebar Committee, Dillon – having been spurned by the Ballina body – would no doubt have striven to address such a commemorative gathering, in what was his native county. The need for political representation in Mayo was made all the more urgent by the ongoing land agitation movement which was often intertwined with 1798 events there. In a bid to attend as many commemorative events as possible, Dillon suffered exhaustion from the strain of his efforts.<sup>72</sup> Tapping in to the militant rhetoric, common at such localised events, he told the crowd that their purpose was

‘to continue the struggle which has been handed down to us by the efforts of the ancestors who have gone before us, until on the green fields, the beautiful green fields, of our native land is planted securely a free and self-governing people’.<sup>73</sup>

Dillon, and other Parliamentarians, were indeed adept at pandering to their nationalist audiences throughout the commemorative period. Such exaggerated addresses were, according to O’Keefe ‘directed towards a temporarily disaffected electorate, who, through continual repetition of patriotic orthodoxy, had become jaded to all but the boldest statements’. O’Keefe further notes that while the ‘parliamentary factions ascended daring rhetorical heights for the mandatory year’, they then ‘returned to pragmatic politics as usual’.<sup>74</sup> For his troubles in the West, however, Dillon incurred the wrath of Ulster unionists who accused ‘the sad faced Machiavelli from East Mayo’ of holding a dual mandate, by inciting young nationalists to violence.<sup>75</sup>

Having established the provocatively named United Irish League land movement in Westport earlier in the year, William O’Brien was also afforded an enthusiastic reception on the day. The retired anti-Parnellite had also garnered popular opinion for his essay ‘Who fears to speak of ’98?’, a fierce indictment of the English government which was widely circulated in Ireland in the centenary year. In his address, the idea of a 1798 memorial for Castlebar was first publicly mooted. This, proposed O’Brien, would happen ‘the moment the County Council gives us the right of placing our National monuments where we please’, which, he suggested to cheers, should be ‘right in the middle of Lord Lucan’s green’.<sup>76</sup>

In fact, 1898 did see the Local Government Act handing over control to mostly nationalist-dominated councils, thus ensuring that ’98 monuments were often located in the busiest parts of towns. Consequently, ‘the ideas they represented received the widest possible exposure’ within the arena of public space.<sup>77</sup> Although involved in a number of stone-laying and unveiling ceremonies, Maud Gonne concurred with Yeats that the Ballina monument and others erected at this time were of poor art. This she believed was due to the influence on monument sponsors of cemetery memorials and cheap Italian plaster statues, found in churches throughout the country. Despite her reservations, Gonne held fast to the educational and propaganda values, which she believed such monuments held.<sup>78</sup>





Fig. 10. Humbert Memorial, Ballina, erected in 1899. (See also app. 6.2. & 6.3.)  
*Source: Author*

Dedicated in the year after the centenary, the Ballina monument, although in memory of Humbert, was a representation of Virgin Erin. Such symbolic figures of Ireland, which may also be seen as having religious associations, were popularised as memorials to the Manchester Martyrs.<sup>79</sup> Instead of a mourning figure however, the '98 examples were portrayals of purity and gentleness, whose accoutrements in the shape of Celtic crosses, harps, wolfhounds and inscribed banners suggest the inspiration of Young Ireland literature and beliefs.<sup>80</sup> The IRB influence is also evident in the Ballina monument; Erin, accompanied by a wolfhound, holds a sword (though as noted, it is at rest and held in such a way that it resembles a cross) and below her are two pikes 'draped in flags in the manner of a military display'.<sup>81</sup> A more triumphal variation of this allegory – Liberty Erin – also became a common '98 memorial at this time, particularly in areas where there was no specific battles to commemorate. The use of both figures represents a gendering of the landscape and as Nash has noted, 'the symbolic representation of Ireland as female derives from the sovereignty goddess figure of early Irish tradition, the personification of this goddess in the figures of Irish medieval literature, and the allegorization of Ireland as

woman in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century classical poetic genre, the *aisling*, following colonial censorship of the expression of direct political dissent'.<sup>82</sup>

In the wake of the centenary celebrations, a number of Mayo communities were inspired to substantiate their contribution to the Rebellion through localised acts of commemoration. By mid 1899 the active '98 Knock Martyr's Monument Committee' had been co-opted by Mr. Henry Taaffe of Edenpark with the express aim of constructing a memorial monument to the 'Knock heroes and martyrs of '98'. Taaffe had been raised in a household where a weighty folk memory of the Rebellion existed. He spoke of once witnessing three local heroes who had 'escaped the horrors of '98 in my father's house, and it is worthy to remark that each of them lived to a great old age'.<sup>83</sup> The committee engaged in energetic press campaigns for donations, which were often accompanied by folk-based accounts of the heroic involvement of Knock locals in the Rebellion. With press coverage from the *Connaught Telegraph*, *Mayo News*, *Weekly Freeman* and *Irish World*, domestic contributions were supplemented by those from Irish communities in England, America and Australia.<sup>84</sup>

The monument in the form of a Celtic cross was erected in the main street of the town in 1904. Engraved on it are the names of the Knock protagonists, Captain Richard Jordan, James O'Malley, Geoffrey Cunniffe and Tom Flatelly, along with the legend: 'May their actions tend to stimulate us to do something to throw off the yoke of the stranger'. The establishment of the Knock memorial can be seen as a solidification of a community based folk memory into a more official and discernable realm of public memory.

Another commemorative project of the early twentieth century, which benefited from donations from the Irish diaspora, was the Fr. Manus Sweeney memorial hall in Newport. The construction of the building, which acted as the town hall for the people of Newport (until it was demolished in 1918 to make way for a new church), was due in part to the subscription and collection of funds by Mr. Martin J. Berry of Chicago.<sup>85</sup> Extolled in song and folklore, Fr. Sweeney had assumed in Mayo a similar the mantle to that of Fr. Murphy in Wexford. In meeting with a French general close to Newport (presumably owing to his ability to translate French orders to his parishioners), Fr. Sweeney was spotted by English forces and forced to go on the run. Following a period of hiding out in the hills and various homesteads of Achill, the priest was eventually caught and brought to

Castlebar for trial. Following sentencing and according to the folk narrative, Fr. Sweeney was marched to Newport and was duly hanged amidst scenes which echoed the passion of Christ.<sup>86</sup>

Following another fund raising campaign, a Celtic cross was erected on Fr. Sweeney's grave at Burrishoole Friary, a few miles outside Newport in June 1912 (see app. 6.4.). With pike heads forming the grave surround railing, the monument which holds a carved chalice, berretta and missal, bears the inscription:

This cross was erected by the people of Burrishoole in memory of Father Manus Sweeney a holy patriot priest hanged in Newport June 8<sup>th</sup> 1799, for co-operating with his fellow countrymen in the Rebellion of 1798. His name will be respected from generation to generation.  
May he rest in Peace  
Kindness wisdom devotion  
Gentleness joy generosity  
Humility liberality nobility  
Are alas! Under this mound.

The unveiling was attended by an estimated 5,000 people, who, procession-like, made their way back to Newport where they enthusiastically listened to a hagiographical lecture delivered by Fr. Martin O'Donnell, Professor of Irish at St. Jarlath's College, Tuam, based largely on folkloric accounts. With Catholic assumption of the rebellion now complete, the cult of the patriot priest was now consolidated in Mayo through public commemoration. By the next remembrances of the Rebellion, Ireland had gained independence and the Catholic slant on commemorations was not just accepted, but moreover, had state endorsement.

### **The mid-Twentieth Century and the Commemorations of 1948**

In 1937, a further monument was erected to another patriot priest of Mayo, this time in the village of Lahardane (see app. 6.5.). By this time Ireland's political landscape had recently undergone momentous changes, as the country witnessed the Easter Rising of 1916, the War of Independence from 1919-21, the gaining of independence in 1922 and the bitter Civil War from 1922-23. The monument to Fr. Andrew Conroy was financed entirely by Mr. Michael Timoney, an 84-year-old native of the area, who had emigrated to Australia. Timoney was an avid folklorist and Irish language enthusiast who had compiled a number of Irish poetry and song publications and had presented much of his local work to the Irish Folklore Commission. His interest in, and desire to memorialise Fr. Conroy had

obviously been influenced by local accounts, which emphasised the priest's significance to the early successes of the Franco-Irish alliance.

Although conflicting folk accounts exist of his involvement in the Rebellion survive, Fr. Conroy is said to have welcomed the French party upon landing, to have halted a British soldier who was carrying news of the French arrival to Castlebar, to have provided food and shelter in his Lahardane home to the marching army, but most notably to have advised Humbert to travel along the alternative unobserved route known as *Bearna na Gaoithe* (The Windy Gap), thus providing the element of surprise which assisted in the capture of Castlebar. The Catholic Church – without ever having borne arms – now held the accolade of being central to one of the most celebrated victories over its foreign oppressor. It must be remembered however, that the memorialised deeds of Fr. Conroy, as with those of Fr. Sweeney had their roots in oral folk transference. Whether such accounts were inspired by reports by Wexford clerical participation, perpetuated by Church–community ties or based entirely on fact remains a point of conjecture. Whatever his level of involvement, Fr. Conroy was subsequently captured and hanged in the Mall in Castlebar.<sup>87</sup>

At the unveiling ceremony, the local Parish Priest listed the names of ten other Mayo priests whom he claimed had suffered at the hands of English authority in relation to the Rebellion. Referring to the large Celtic cross memorial, Fr. Harte expressed his wish that

‘it will stand as monument not only to Father Conroy but also to the fidelity of the Irish priesthood to its people when all the might of England tried in vain to corrupt the Irish priesthood and to separate the Irish priests from their people’.<sup>88</sup>

On view at the ceremony was a small cross, which had been carved from the tree on which Fr. Conroy was hanged. The tree had been blown down in a storm in 1918. At a later time it became a common belief that the tree had been struck by lightning. Referring to this incident on a visit to Castlebar, Eamon De Valera was reported to have said: ‘this tree was a symbol of tyranny and its destruction was a portend of the downfall of tyranny’.<sup>89</sup>

Timoney's fervid inscription in Irish on the memorial is something of a tribute to himself and the Irish language as well as to Fr. Conroy. A free translation of it runs as follows:

'In enduring memory of Father Andrew Conroy, Parish Priest of Addergoole, the beloved Shepard of his truly Irish flock and fluent speaker of sweet sounding Gaelic. It was he who baptised Archbishop John MacHale and implanted and nourished in his heart a great love and affection for the melodious tongue of the Gael. After the French landing at Killala in 1798 this holy priest was hanged by the English on the Mall in Castlebar. Michael Timoney, a true Irishman, has had this beautiful monument erected, and he asks the passerby to say a Pater and Creed for the soul of this patriotic priest and for that of every other Gael who fell at the 'gap of danger'.<sup>90</sup>

While receiving credit in the local press, the Fr. Conroy monument prompted a *Connaught Telegraph* editorial to remind readers that, 'it is difficult to believe, but it is true, that there is nothing in the County town, Castlebar of the Races, to commemorate the great moral victory Father Conroy won, nothing to perpetuate the memory of as staunch a Mayo priest as ever lived'.<sup>91</sup>

The next mass commemoration of 1798 occurred in 1938 and was organised by Fr. Patrick Murphy of Glynn, Co. Wexford in the belief that he would not live to see the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rebellion.<sup>92</sup> With the 'faith and fatherland' version of events now firmly embedded in public consciousness, the priest became synonymous with commemoration of the Rebellion, so much so, that he was accorded the epithet "'98'. Events were largely centred on the battle sites of Wexford, but spread to include areas such as Wicklow and Carlow.<sup>93</sup> Pikemen marches and public processions followed by monument unveilings and speeches from political representatives and members of the clergy were, as often, the norm. At Oulart in May of the same year, a robust speech by Secretary of the Wexford Board of Health, Mr. J.D. Sinnott (presumably in the response to some criticism of the event), claimed that 'no stain has sullied the banner of the '98 men' and that 'the man who said they should not honour them was not an Irishman'.<sup>94</sup> An exhibition held in Enniscorthy in the same year included a sword, bayonet, pistol and blunderbuss, which had belonged to various leaders of the Rebellion in the Southeast. Furthermore, the silver trowel, which had formerly been used at the laying of foundation stones at Gorey and Enniscorthy, was also put on display. Such an exhibit was perhaps suggestive of the intertwining between the eminence of previous commemorations and the Rebellion itself.

Despite requests from the Committee of the National '98 Commemoration Association to the various clubs and organisations of the county 'to hold local commemorations' the Leinster-based celebrations of 1938 did not spread as far west as

Mayo.<sup>95</sup> The calls of one *Connaught Telegraph* reader to have children from Mayo and Wexford bear imitation pikes and sing patriotic anthems, prior to a Gaelic football match between the two counties in Castlebar, failed to take shape.<sup>96</sup> A motion to change street names in Castlebar to those of 1798 patriots which had first been mooted in 1920 arose again in this year, but once more failed to materialise.<sup>97</sup> On St. Patrick's Day, Dr. Richard Hayes (Director of the National Library of Ireland from 1940-1967), whose book, *The Last Invasion of Ireland*, dealing with Humbert's campaign, had recently been published, gave a lecture to a large and enthusiastic attendance in Castlebar. Hayes' romanticised, nationalist-heroic version of the events of 1798 in the West was warmly accepted there, and the author himself was something of a celebrity in Mayo circles. Indulging his audience, Dr. Hayes pronounced:

'...if there was any Irish county where man would, when the opportunity offered, rise up and die for the national creed, it was surely in the county of Mayo, which was bound by so many links while he was alive, with Ireland's patron saint'.<sup>98</sup>

Stung into action by the author's observations that

'it is almost an anomaly that there is nothing in that town [Castlebar] to commemorate that brilliant victory, and one can only hope that a resurgent Ireland will soon raise a fitting memorial there',<sup>99</sup>

the lecture was designed as the inauguration of an additional monument to Fr. Conroy, which it was envisaged would hold a prominent position in the town. Further highlighting the obvious general concern at the lack of memorials to Mayo's patriot priests, an anxious proponent of the (proposed) monument told the audience that 'the people of Castlebar now had an opportunity of redeeming their name by co-operating in this plan for the erection of a suitable monument to the memory of Fr. Conroy and the great cause for which he fell'.<sup>100</sup>

Despite the avidity of the March gathering, no further immediate progress was made on the monument nor was any public commemorative event planned to mark the year. By August such inactivity prompted a letter writer to the *Connaught Telegraph* – signed 'Gael' – to ask: 'what on earth has become of the '98 enthusiasts? They started off in great guns in Castlebar and fired firm brases [sic] all around them but they have run short of words and now everything is peace and calm.'<sup>101</sup> Indeed it was to be the sesquicentennial of the rebellion before the monument received any further concerted attention.

Prior to this national remembrance, however, another monument to Fr. Sweeney was erected in Mayo. Having had a memorial erected in his place of death (Newport) and place of burial (Burrishoole), the people of Achill decided to erect a monument at his place of birth in Dookinella, Achill Island in 1944. There, a large obelisk carved with religious icons was unveiled. Its inscription reads:

‘To the Glory and Honour of Ireland  
This memorial was erected in loving memory of the birthplace  
Of the brave holy priest Father Manus Sweeney  
Son of Denis Sweeney, who was born in this place  
‘Site of Denis’s house in the year 1763,  
and who was hanged for Ireland in the flower  
of his youth in Newport on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May  
in the year 1799’.

Shortly afterwards, it was noted by folklorist Pádraig Ó Moghráin that the site was not in fact the birthplace of Fr. Sweeney (County Donegal was the likely location). He acquiesced however that ‘anything that helps to preserve for ever the names and deeds of our patriot dead in the public memory is worthy of praise.’<sup>102</sup>



**Fig. 11. Fr. Sweeney Memorial, Dookinella, Achill Island, erected in 1944**  
*Source: Author*

Another example of a peripheral community staking its claim to the Rebellion whilst also seeking to grant permanency to local lore can be seen in the erection of a memorial plaque to those who lost their lives at Poll na Seantóine, in Erris. Here in the aftermath of the rebellion's defeat, Yeomanry hunted down those who had played a part on the rebel side. Subsequently, it is held that 70 young people were lowered by ropes to hide in a cliff hole at Downpatrick Head. When those in charge of the ropes were captured, all of the fugitives were drowned by the rising tide (see app. 6.6 & 6.7.).

### *National Events in 1948*

The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the rebellion witnessed a further resurgence in commemorative observances across nationalist Ireland. Fr. Patrick Murphy did in fact live to see and take part in a number of events. In Wexford the ubiquitous rallies, parades and bonfires took place, while one of the largest events was a church and state led observation at the Hill of Tara sponsored by the inter-party government of John Costello. In Dublin, the highlights of a week long celebrations in November included a parade of 10,000 people through the city centre, the opening of a 1798 commemorative exhibition at the National Museum, and a children's march from St. Stephen's Green to Collins Barracks, in which 20,000 participated. The period will however be more remembered for the passing of the *Republic of Ireland Bill* by Costello's government; leading the *Irish Times* to question 'whether by design or accident' such legislation was passed 'in an air of republican rejoicing.'<sup>103</sup>

In Northern Ireland the sesquicentenary commemorations took place against a backdrop of growing sectarian hostilities. Following the banning of a planned rally by city authorities in mid-September, the Belfast Commemoration Committee, which was made up of Nationalists and ex-internees as well as a number of Protestant anti-partition Socialists, participated in a march to Cave Hill. A few days later, the unionist-dominated Belfast Corporation turned down permission for the Ulster Hall's use for commemorative '98 céilí. The decision, however, was successfully challenged in the High Court. Commemorations of '98 had by now in the North become 'an expression of nationalist defiance in the face unionist repression'<sup>104</sup> and on 22 September, a mass march along the Falls Road, which saw banners from the centenary raised again, culminated in a rally attended by some 30,000 persons.



*Mayo Events in 1948*

The ‘concelebrations’, which were mirrored in Mayo and other parts, typified the union between government and the Catholic hierarchy in the youthful state. In Castlebar, plans for celebrations were mooted in early 1947. Objecting, however, to plans for a formal event in the town, Rev. Fr. Kearney, a member of the local Gaelic League, asserted that ‘the present generation had lost its national spirit. What they wanted was a little oration to show the world what use the ideals, Ireland free, Gaelic and Christian, were.’<sup>105</sup> Castigating young people for neglecting St. Patrick’s Day and failing to stand to attention for the national anthem in cinemas, the priest contended:

‘Before we can start talking about monuments let us first of all put our own house in order. At the moment we are approaching a centenary and why wake up the dead? We should wake up the living, and make them live according to the ideals which those dead, died for.’<sup>106</sup>

Those present, however, failed to reach agreement on a number of issues and the meeting was postponed until the following October.

Meetings regarding the commemorations did not resume until the following spring, by which time Fr. Kearney had assumed a leading organisational role. The church, it was stated, would endorse the proposed 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration provided it did not coincide with any of the traditional Summer carnival weeks, as such an event would be ‘out of place’ during a ‘time of gaiety and dancing’.<sup>107</sup> At a number of well-attended meetings it was decided that the commemoration would be a county-based, high profile event, to be held in Castlebar in early August. A ’98 county commemoration working committee, chaired by the Rev. Fr. W. Nohilly, was put in place with strong input from the Castlebar Development Association. As another milestone anniversary approached, and Hayes’ criticism of the lack of formal memorial in the county town resurfaced, the erection of a 1798 monument was once again firmly back on the agenda. A range of monument locations, styles and representations came up for discussion. It was widely held that the centrally located Mall in Castlebar – formerly the cricket pitch of Lord Lucan, and now a public park, should host any monument. As mentioned earlier, the area was also significant as the place in which Fr. Conroy was hanged. One zealous advocate went so far as to suggest that the entire arena be ‘laid out with statuary’, and have “98 Memorial Park” arches marking the entrances to the area.<sup>108</sup> During lengthy debates on what form the

monument should take, various proposals including, 'Christ the King', 'Eire weeping' and a pikeman figure were put forward. With a perceptible bias towards a clerical representation being included on the monument, one delegate affirmed his and his associate's belief that the committee 'are definitely right to stress the Catholic motif.' In a clear reminder of how entrenched the 'faith and fatherland' version of the rebellion had become, the speaker went on to say:

'We are living in queer times when the Catholic motif needs to be stressed, but quite apart from that, we both think that the '98 Rising could be described as a Catholic up-rising although a number of North of Ireland Presbyterians took part in it'.<sup>109</sup>

In a lone attack on the French involvement in the rebellion, Senator S. T. Ruane proposed that no recognition should be given to the French forces that he claimed had 'stood by while the Irish were being butchered'.<sup>110</sup> Another suggestion was for a series of road markings to be put in place between Killala and Ballinamuck. It was conceded, however, that any final decision on a monument should wait until such time as subscriptions to cover its cost were taken up at each parish in the county. In the meantime, a number of artists were invited to submit proposals, while local newspapers carried a number of editorials on the need for the establishment of a fitting memorial as well as pleas for generous personal subscriptions in order to meet the IR£2,000 target.

Attended by the Taoiseach, John A. Costello, President Sean T. O'Kelly and opposition leader, Eamon De Valera, the Mayo commemorations of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1798 took place on 1 August 1948. Other diplomats present included cabinet representatives, Northern nationalist MPs and the French Ambassador to Ireland. The activity filled, carefully choreographed day commenced with a Solemn Memorial mass, presided over by the Bishop of Galway and the Archbishop of Tuam, which was broadcast on national radio.



**Fig. 12. President Sean T. O'Kelly inspects the guard of honour outside Castlebar Church of the Holy Rosary, 1948**

*Source: Wynne Collection*

The Rev. T. Canon Gunnigan of Ballinrobe utilised his sermon to return to a familiar Church line of the day:

'If the young men and women of '98 and the centuries that preceded it had the Ireland that we, thank God can call our own, would they turn their backs on it as so many of the young people are doing here today? Easy living, excitement, pleasure seeking have too strong a hold on our youth'.<sup>111</sup>

A march-past which included local military corps, FCA and Old IRA members, army bands and representatives of each parish in the county marching behind their respective banners, then preceded speeches from the various political delegates. The reiterated theme of the day from all sides was that the Rebellion of 1798 had paved the way for the freedom, which the people of the South of Ireland currently enjoyed. Linking legitimate efforts and armed struggles, Costello informed the assembled crowd that in the wake of the uprising:

'...there followed the efforts of Young Ireland in 1848, the movement of Isaac Butt, the strivings of Michael Davitt and the Land League to secure the land of Ireland for the people of Ireland, the Fenians in 1867, the Irish Party under the great leaders: Parnell, Redmond, Dillon and Devlin. All these are permanent reminders that although 1798 was a military failure, its spiritual significance sustained and fortified those who carried the torch of Irish nationality throughout the long and terrible years until the men of 1916 brandished it in a movement from which liberation and independence for this part of the country finally emerged'.<sup>112</sup>

Avoiding any reference to the religious make up of the United Irishmen, the Taoiseach went on to pronounce to loud applause that:

‘The prospect of an Ireland united spiritually, politically and economically, dedicated to the cause of peace and prepared to undertake the obligations necessary to preserve it, should offer an inducement for the abolition of the Partition which our fellow-countrymen in the six counties can hardly resist...If this generation of Irishmen can do their part in securing an Ireland in which all our people North and South can work together in harmony and friendship we shall be following in the path traced by the men of 1798 who came from the north as well as the south, and erecting to their memory a monument more enduring than stone or precious metal’.<sup>113</sup>

A deputation then travelled the two miles from the town to the Frenchhill monument where wreaths were laid by the French Ambassador and by the Minister for External Affairs, Mr. Séan MacBride (son of Maud Gonne). There, a volley of shots was fired as the Last Post was sounded. The grand finale of the celebrations took place that evening in the grounds of the military barracks in the form of a large military display by the State Army, who had been encamped in the barracks, practising their manoeuvres over the previous three weeks. The centrepiece of the pageant was a costumed display of the ‘Races of Castlebar’ – complete with English cavalry – loud canon boomed and explosives were detonated in the distance at sights of engagements, which were floodlit by Army searchlights. The proceedings were designed by the Army Engineering Corps and were narrated via loudspeaker by a commandant from Custume Barracks, Athlone. After the impressive display, a military parade was held comprising uniformed soldiers from ‘the early Celts, Finn and the Fianna, Sarsfield and the United Irishmen up to the mechanical units of the present day’.<sup>114</sup> In participating in such a show of military history the Army possibly sought to substantiate their own lineage.

In addition, an exhibition of 1798 artefacts was also on show at the military barracks. Included in the display were military paraphernalia and historical documents, while pride of place went to the crucifix, which had been carved, from the tree on which Fr. Conroy had been hanged. A small booklet on the history of Humbert’s campaign including ’98 songs was also circulated on the day.

An estimated 20,000 people descended on Castlebar by special busses and trains for the day’s events, which was an immense source of civic pride to the

townspeople. The town was ornately decorated, and Irish and French tricolours flew from many windows. With hostelries including the still extant 'Humbert Inn' overflowing, and with a special exemption on post-war food rationing for the day, householders provided catering to the visiting crowds. For the organisers the day was soured somewhat by the GAA's Connaught Council, who, despite repeated petitions from the Commemorative Committee, 'unpatriotically' refused to postpone the Connaught football final replay between Mayo and Galway fixed for Roscommon on the same day. Buoyed by the enthusiasm which had greeted the county celebration, and the community pride it had engendered, Ballina and Killala decided to respectively put on smaller-scale '98 commemorations later in the summer, consisting of parades, orations and wreath-layings. In Ballina, the Humbert memorial was the focal point of the ceremonies while in Killala, pilgrimages were made the short distance to the landing place of the French at Kilcummin. As the immediacy of the commemorations dissipated in the months after its occurrence so again did the ardent plans for the county memorial in Castlebar.

Five years later in 1953 however, the town staged another day of commemorative celebrations when the monument was finally unveiled. As before, a church ceremony, parade of clubs and associations, and various orations surrounded the unveiling, while the President of Ireland, the Archbishop of Tuam and the French Ambassador were again present. Householders were urged to 'help pay Mayo's 155 years' old debt' by attending the ceremonies and flying Irish and French flags from their houses.<sup>115</sup> A specially commissioned coat of arms for Castlebar was also displayed for the first time on the day. The emblem, which is still in use, incorporates two crossed pikes into its design.

The memorial itself which was unveiled by President O'Kelly and subsequently blessed by Archbishop Dr. Walsh had been designed by Mr. F.X Hourigan (Associate of the National College of Art) of Castlebar and was a representation of Catholic selfhood. Consisting of a sixteen feet high concrete column of imitation cut stone, the monument is set on a three-stepped plinth. A cross is surmounted on the column, and underneath reads the simple inscription: 'I gCuimhne 1798' ('In Memory of 1798'). Below the inscription is a bronze plaque depicting a pikeman receiving a blessing from

a priest before going in to battle, while the plaque on the opposite side features the Virgin Mary. Either side of the front facing plaque is an emblem of a harp and a *fleur de lis* - the presence of the latter impelling a letter writer to the *Irish Independent* to question why an emblem with French royalist associations rather than a republican symbol should be employed.<sup>116</sup>



**Fig. 13. 1798 Memorial, Castlebar, erected in 1953**

*Source: Author*

The location of the monument is also noteworthy. Although located in the public park, which is 'The Mall', it is located some distance from the hanging place of Fr. Conroy and makes no direct reference to the priest as had originally been intended. Instead, it faces directly across the road to Christchurch Protestant Church, the site of what was in essence the first memorial to persons who lost their lives in the rebellion in the West. There, not long after the events of Castlebar in 1798, the Loyalist Colonel Simon Fraser incorporated a limestone panel into the walling of the grounds of the church, in memory of six members of his detachment who had been killed in the battle. The inscription reads:

'ERECTED TO the Memory of James Beaty Angus McDonald George Munro Donald Urquhart William Ross And Dougald Cameron Privates in the FRASER HIGHLANDERS who were killed in action at CASTLEBAR with the FRENCH invaders on the 27<sup>th</sup> Aug 1798 as a small tribute to their Gallant Conduct and Honourable DEATH' <sup>117</sup>

Another grandiose commemoration took place at the site of the '98 monument in Castlebar in August 1961 when the remains of John Moore were re-interred beside the memorial, (see app. 6.8.). Moore, who had been appointed President of Connaught following Humbert's capture of the town, had been taken prisoner following its re-seizure, died in Waterford in December before his trial could be heard. Born in Spain in 1763 Moore's appointment was due to the fact that he was from an educated and wealthy Catholic Mayo family and thus inspired the respect and trust of the rebelling population. Well travelled and fluent in French, Moore had qualified as a Barrister of Law upon his family's return to Mayo from the continent following the Repeal Acts of 1782 which entitled Catholics to greater land owning rights. Moore's Spanish citizenship spared him execution although it is believed that he died from the hardships of incarceration while awaiting a probable sentence of transportation.

The event was instigated and organised by the Castlebar-based 'John Moore Commemoration Committee' with the backing of Moore's living descendants. Upon exhumation, Moore's body was placed in a polished oak casket and brought to Waterford Cathedral. The event was deemed as being of 'great importance' to the people of Waterford and an estimated 20,000 lined the route between Ballyglunnin Cemetery and the cathedral in which the remains lay in state overnight. The following day his body was transported by military and official cavalcade to Castlebar, having been afforded military salutes in Limerick and Galway. Having again laid in state overnight in Castlebar's Catholic Church of the Holy Rosary, Moore's funeral was given full military honours and was attended again by President, Eamon De Valera and by Taoiseach, Sean Lemass as well as government and opposition members, high-ranking military officials, the French and Spanish Ambassadors and descendants of John Moore. Following a Requiem High Mass, the cortege that comprised Moore's casket drawn on a gun carriage (as well as an army band, escort platoon and colour and firing party) made its way through the town to the Mall burial place. The proximity of the '98 monument and Moore's grave was obviously designed to infuse a certain gravitas in the other, in what remains a central civic public space. Graveside orations

were provided by many of the dignitaries present, with the most prominent speech given by Dr. John M. Langan, chairman of the John Moore Committee. In it he spoke of his:

‘...gratitude to God in that He has granted it to us to see, as it were, the full circle and to witness the triumphant return to Castlebar of him who was once driven from the town in chains.’<sup>118</sup>

The apotheosis of Moore, fuelled it would seem by folk accounts, belies the documented reality in which Moore pleaded upon his arrest that he was not a United Irishman and had only been acting under duress from Humbert.<sup>119</sup> Having alluded to the historical connections between Ireland and both France and Spain, Mr. Langan assured the crowd that homage to Moore and his ilk rather than the evocation of past grievances was the aim of such a memorial:

‘We do not hold commemorations as this to re-awaken old animosities nor to brood over past wrongs. God Forbid. Far better if we never held them were they to have such an effect as that. No, no. We hold them simply to honour those men of our nation who by their deeds and sacrifices merited commemoration and by recalling to mind, the lessons of their own duty as it behoves us should the necessity ever rise’.<sup>120</sup>

The ceremony was attended by Mr. Maurice Moore of California, who also erected a memorial plaque to his great granduncle at the remains of the Moore ancestral home, Moore Hall, on the shores of Lough Carra near the village of Ballintubber.

### **The Late Twentieth Century**

By the 1980s Humbert’s campaign received popular public attention again when it was announced that the 1798 Rebellion was to be commemorated on celluloid rather than in stone with the screening by RTÉs ‘The Year of the French’ television series. Based on the 1979 novel of the same name by Thomas Flanagan, the six hour-long episodes were a quasi-historical dramatisation of events in the West as seen through the eyes of a number of fictitious characters. In what was both a major financial and logistical undertaking for the national broadcaster, ‘The Year of the French’ was partly shot on location in Killala and other parts of Mayo, over a two-month period. With the help of Department of Post and Telegraphs, the Electricity Supply Board and Mayo County Council, the town of Killala was transformed into a replica of its appearance almost two hundred years previously.<sup>121</sup> Hundreds of locals also took part as extras in the adaptation. Scripted by Eugene McCabe, directed by



Michael Garvey and comprising Irish, French and English actors, 'The Year of the French' was screened in the autumn of 1982.

Also inspired by Flanagan's novel, The General Humbert Summer School was established in 1987 by journalist, author and broadcaster, Mr. John Cooney.<sup>122</sup> The school, which has run annually in Ballina and Kilcummin since, has as one of its primary commitments, 'to promote the knowledge of the 1798 expedition to Ireland of General Jean Joseph Amable Humbert.'<sup>123</sup> Such subject matter has gradually lent itself to a predilection towards European socio-political themes. Recently the school has come in for criticism from *Irish Times* journalist Kevin Myers, who questioned the judgement of honouring a summer school to a man whose campaign against the Catholic peasantry in the Vendée during the French Revolution, was he claimed, 'a pioneering exercise in genocide in Europe.'<sup>124</sup> Such an indictment was vigorously refuted by Mr. Cooney.

The school and its supporters (such as the American-Irish fund) have facilitated the erection of a number of monuments in Kilcummin and Killala. Bizarrely, two of these – almost identical busts of General Humbert –, which were commissioned to the same sculptor, to mark the bi-centennial of the French Revolution, are located beside each other in Killala (see app. 6.9. & 6.10.).

### *National Commemorations of the Bicentenary*

Throughout Ireland the bi-centenary commemorations of the 1798 Rebellion were marked, as with other temporal milestones, by the contemporary concerns of the day. As such, the overall theme of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary was strongly influenced by the ongoing peace process negotiations and many commemorative programmes and events were assisted by the government's Commemoration Committee – a continuation of the body set up to commemorate the Famine. Academics connected to the governments programme such as Tom Bartlett, David Dickson, Daire Keogh and Kevin Whelan played a major role in the years events. As well as lecturing at home and abroad, these historians were largely responsible for the production of state sponsored publications, the content and theme of official exhibitions and the direction of key conferences. Advanced planning underpinned the government's position on the form the bi-centenary should adopt. Reiterating plans which had been forwarded as far back as

November 1995,<sup>125</sup> Fine Gael Minister of State and Chairperson of the 1798 Committee, Avril Doyle TD, announced the following 'mission statement' points at the official launch of the programme of events in April, 1997:

- (1) To commemorate the ideals of the United Irishmen and the 'Fellowship of Freedom' that inspired them in 1798.
- (2) The recognition of the 1798 Rebellion as a forward looking popular movement aspiring to unity; acknowledging that what happened in Dublin and Wexford was part of what happened in Antrim and Down.
- (3) Attention should shift away from the military aspect of 1798 and be directed towards the principles of democracy and pluralism, which the United Irishmen advocated.
- (4) A focus on the international perspectives of the United Irishmen and the enduring links which 1798 forged with America, France and Australia.
- (5) To acknowledge the Ulster dimension and particularly the contribution of the Presbyterian tradition, with its emphasis on justice, equality and civil liberty.
- (6) To focus attention on the ideals of the leaders of 1798 which still live in Irish history.

Thus the government sought openly to reclaim the rebellion from the narrowness of its previous nationalist/Catholic confines which itself had helped to foster half a century earlier. That the succeeding Fianna Fáil government (in power by the start of the bi-centenary year) should perfectly replicate its predecessor's commemorative ideology was a further measure of the perceived importance attached to how remembrance of 1798 presented opportunities for negotiating a lasting peace in Northern Ireland in 1998. As 'one side's commemoration' were invariably seen 'as triumphalism or coat-trailing by the other'<sup>126</sup> and given that previous loyalist responses to '98 commemoration had been to blow up Wolfe Tone memorials in Bodenstown and Dublin, the official bi-centenary emphasis was very much on the pluralist principles of the Rebellion. As Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern stated in January 1998:

'The way is open to negotiate a political settlement peacefully and on a footing of equality and under the auspices of not only the British Government but of a sovereign Irish Government, that can trace its political lineage back to 1798, when the first Republics in Wexford and Connaught were declared. But we should also acknowledge that there were many of the Unionist and even the present-day Orange tradition, whose ancestors were members of the United Irishmen'.<sup>127</sup>

In the North, as the South, a plethora of events were organised to mark the year. The Orange Order entered the commemorative fold in holding a 1798 exhibition in Comber, Co. Down, and also engaged in conferences and debates with other groups on the legacy and contemporary relevance of the United Irishmen's ideologies. The Ulster Heritage Museum Committee, which has noted links with the Orange Order, performed a commended re-enactment of the Battle of Antrim.

Events in the North were formulated by the United Irishmen Commemoration Society, an apolitical society which had its roots in the bi-centennial commemoration of the establishment of the United Irishmen in 1991. The Northern Ireland Community Relations Council provided funding for many of these events and through educational projects many unionists and even some hardline loyalists such as long-term U.V.F prisoner, Billy Mitchell, found themselves reintroduced to political identification with the leadership of the United Irishmen.<sup>128</sup> Another worthy programme, which peaked in 1998, was cross-community visits by schools to sites of United Irish significance. Tours, lectures walks and stage productions all constituted events in the North. Altogether, a total of 19 out of 26 District Councils (both Nationalist and Unionist controlled) mounted commemorative events. Also of note is that unlike the 100<sup>th</sup> and 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1798, no major '98 parade took place on the Falls Road, and in total relatively few commemorative events were organised by Republicans.

One of the most lauded events in the North was the 1798 'Up in Arms' exhibition in the Ulster museum which sponsored an 'outreach officer' to promote community involvement.<sup>129</sup> Another exhibition in the Linen Hall Library in Belfast received funding from the South's Commemoration Committee, while the main cross-border initiative was an international conference entitled '1798: A Bi-centenary Perspective' which was held both in the Ulster Museum and in Dublin Castle.

Of the official national programme in the South, some of the more prominent events included a joint exhibition by the National Library and the National Museum, an Ecumenical Service in St. Patrick's Cathedral, and the funding of a three-part RTÉ television documentary series entitled 'Rebellion', which dealt with 1798 from a national and international perspective. The hosting of a stage of the Tour de France in the south-east of the country was designed to celebrate the French affiliation with the Rebellion, and in November, at the site where a number of those executed in 1798 were buried, the 'Croppies Acre' Garden of Remembrance was opened (into which the original Wolfe Tone monument foundation stone was incorporated<sup>130</sup>).

Centred in Wexford, Comóradh '98 was one of the largest local programmes of the bi-centenary. An extensive and diverse range of activities took place there over the course of the year. Two of the most enduring of these were the opening of a permanent National Commemoration Centre in Enniscorthy and an environmentally themed monument entitled *Tulach an tSolais* at Oulart Hill, which allows the solstice sun to shine onto Vinegar Hill, the scene of a decisive battle on 21 June 1798.

The commemorative focus and events of 1998 had a number of vocal opponents, most notably, historians Tom Dunne and Roy Foster who refuted what they saw as a clear manipulation and popularisation of history, in order to further the political goals of the government's agenda in the North. Foster expressed his concern for:

'The extent to which professional historians were involved in repacking alterations of emphasis. There seemed, in some quarters at least, to be an agreed agenda which owed more to perceived late-twentieth-century needs than to a close reading of events and attitudes two hundred years ago'.<sup>131</sup>

Such historians, he claimed, had been 'retained by the Government for the purpose of commemorations, and sent forth on a mission, acted up to the mark'.<sup>132</sup> Dunne and Foster took these historians to task on a number of issues, particularly Kevin Whelan's contention that in 1798 Wexford, a republic was declared which was presided over by an ecumenical senate. Despite an obvious lack of historic evidence to back up such a claim, this body was reconstituted in 1998 when 350 nominees paid IR£2,000 for the privilege of becoming 'Senators'. It was Whelan indeed, who in his role as 'the consultant historian to the National Commemoration', who received most criticism;

Dunne maintaining that he staked ‘a claim of ownership of 1798.’<sup>133</sup> Central to the revisionists’ argument was the assertion that a romanticised and sanitised version of 1798 (or ‘commemorationist history’) had been constructed by the authorities, one in which the noble intentions and ideals of the leaders was overstated. This emphasis, they argued, had glossed over the sectarian atrocities of the Rebellion, notably at Scullabogue in Wexford where about 100 Protestants were burned to death in a barn. Dunne drew further attention to the fact that while the Famine commemoration (described by Foster as being ruthlessly shoved into the wings by the bi-centenary<sup>134</sup>), drew attention to its dead, the 30,000 casualties of 1798 were silenced.<sup>135</sup>

Of further umbrage to the two academics was the view that the commemoration was profoundly commercialised. Dunne noted how business interests sought to promote ‘a largely non-violent, version of the Rebellion, reducing it to the anodyne of ‘heritage’, pre-packed, simplistic and politically correct, fit for mass consumption.’<sup>136</sup> Foster similarly derides the notion of historical memory being ‘recycled into a spectator sport and tourist attraction’ and lists a number of ill-conceived initiatives including over zealous re-enactments, puppet shows, and as mentioned in Chapter Four, most humorously, the spectacle of ‘squadrons of Lycra-cad bicyclists’ as an appropriate homage to the French involvement in the Rebellion.<sup>137</sup> It is certainly true that commemorative heritage can unfortunately manifest itself in gaudy or inappropriate displays. But, just as with the wider heritage industry, this is not to say that a meaningful recognition of the past cannot be communicated.

For his part, Whelan claimed that the commemorative heritage was not dictated by the government but by the historians as well as local communities. A ‘mature, positive and sophisticated’ understanding of 1798 in 1998, he claimed, had given rise to the markedly ‘civil, inclusive and pluralist’ tone of the commemoration.<sup>138</sup> Perhaps one of the tersest rebukes of the revisionist historians was the one from Thomas Bartlett, who accused Foster of professional elitism:

‘It is the duty of the historian in Ireland...to explain to audiences of all types, not just academics but ‘popular’ as well, what he or she is about, and to enter into discussion with them. It is not good enough for Professor Forster to assail those Irish historians who attempt to reach out beyond the ivory tower in order to inform and educate the ordinary public. For Irish historians not to do so would mean inevitably conceding ‘Irish history’ and ‘commemoration’ to the crank and the monomaniac and to those who are agenda driven and politically engaged’.<sup>139</sup>

More recently, Beiner has drawn attention to the ability of the commemorative heritages of 1798 to inform participants and to provide 'gateways to deeper historical understanding.' He also draws positive attention to many of the events of the commemoration – the 'folkloric sub-culture' exhibited by the pike people so disparaged by Forster, being one such example.<sup>140</sup>

### *Mayo Commemorations of the Bicentenary*

In a county where political allegiance has long been to the predominant parties of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, the commemorations to mark the bicentenary of 1798 were in line with the official stances of the respective organisations. Commemorative heritage events in Mayo, as before, were focused on the main centres of action in 1798, Killala, Ballina and Castlebar. In Castlebar, aware of the past and potential future significance of such an occasion, those involved seemed anxious for commemorations there to be appreciable. In the year prior to the bi-centenary, one councillor called for 'a pageant-style presentation similar to the one held in the town in 1848' while another prophetically claimed that 'history will deal us unkindly with us if we don't commemorate the occasion in a fitting manner.'<sup>141</sup> The opportunity for commercial gain was not lost on others particularly the Minister for Trade and Tourism Mr. Enda Kenny TD, who, speaking of his home county said: 'There is no reason why we cannot build on this to the benefit of the local tourism industry while at the same time commemorate the events of 1798 in a fitting way.'<sup>142</sup> Events in the county town were for the most part, co-ordinated by the 'Castlebar 1798 Commemoration Committee', a body largely and predictably made up of Fianna Fáil members. The committee presented the Castlebar Urban District Council with replicas of French and Irish flags used in Mayo in 1798, which were flown at civic buildings throughout the year. The commissioning of a prominent 1798 mural (see app. 6.11.), the publication of a commemorative booklet, the running of a school essay competition and the screening of 1798-themed films were all undertaken by the committee. In addition to hosting a number of talks and lectures, the Castlebar organisation also erected a commemorative plaque at a key battle location, which was unveiled by Taoiseach Ahern in July of that year. The County Council for its part was responsible for an exhibition, which was based in the County Library and travelled to branch libraries. One of the most praiseworthy initiatives of the year was the provision by the UDC to erect a series of

16 plaques at various locations in the town marking significant events or locations of the 'Races of Castlebar'. A more prominent marker was allocated by the authority at the site of a pivotal engagement known as Staball Hill. There, according to tradition, the English began to flee as the Franco-Irish leadership sounded the order to 'stab all'. Later in 2001, another prominent artwork featuring pikes and doves was unveiled in the centre of Castlebar (see app. 6.12 and 6.13.).



**Fig. 14. One of 16 plaques which mark sites related to the French campaign in Castlebar, erected in 1998**

*Source: Author*

A large proportion of events in Mayo took place in August 1998 to coincide with the anniversary of the French landing and campaign in the county. The most eminent of these was the General Humbert Summer School, which took on a greater degree of significance and appropriateness. Promoted as one of the flagship events and partly funded by the Government's Commemoration Committee, the school attracted a gathering of high profile speakers including the Taoiseach, the Government Minister in charge of the 1798 commemorations, Seamus Brennan, SDLP leader John Hume, British Ambassador, Dame Veronica Sutherland, Supreme Court Judge, Donal Barrington and Church of Ireland Bishop of Tuam, Killala and Achonry, Rt. Revd. Richard Henderson. The school carried the theme '1798 – The Legacy: EU Expansion, Reform and Local Development, Consolidating Peace in the North' – and moved

locations between Ballina, Castlebar and Killala over the four days that it ran. The inter-subject nature of proceedings saw Taoiseach Ahern address delegates on the current position of the Northern Ireland peace process, Bishop Henderson talk on themes of remembrance and reconciliation, and Fine Gael Spokesperson on Law and Reform, Jim Higgins TD, lecture on the role of women in the 1798 struggle. Taking place in the week after the Omagh bombing, the schools attendees were starkly reminded of the darker side of republicanism. As a mark of respect, the school closed at the exact hour of the bombing a week earlier. This move also enabled Mr. John Hume to return to Omagh for a day of remembrance. Before leaving, Mr. Hume delivered what was described as 'an outstanding and moving key note address' aptly entitled 'The Republican Ideal Today'.<sup>143</sup>

During the 'anniversary week' in Mayo, the 1798 memorial in Ballina was the scene of another wreath laying ceremony, this time performed by Taoiseach Ahern (an event that was coupled with an interdenominational service). A Ballina theatre company also staged a specially created production entitled 'Western Rebellion', which travelled to a number of locations and Ballina-based newspaper the *Western People* carried a supplement headed 'Remembering 1798'.<sup>144</sup> Killala and Kilcummin were also abuzz at this time as a medley of re-enactors, bands, FCA members, as well as 500 pikemen who had travelled from the South-East, took part in a procession between the two locations where further memorials were unveiled. In a carnival atmosphere, Killala held a further day of festivities in which its streets were respectively designated with French, English and Irish themes. Traditional fare, activities and costume were all on display. A theatrical parade – 'Spioraid '98' – performed by Mayo Arts group 'Fite Fuaite', incorporating giant papier-mâché figures of Humbert and other key players in the Mayo Rebellion, made its way through the streets. Following a town twinning ceremony with Chauve, Brittany, a firework display took place against the backdrop of Killala Bay. A number of walks along the route of the French were also held to coincide with the anniversary of their advance. Although Whelan may be have been correct in his assertion that 'communities took ownership of their past and of commemoration',<sup>145</sup> valid also it would appear was Dunne's belief that the theme of celebration often superseded that of commemoration.<sup>146</sup>



The village of Carnacon near Castlebar paid tribute to United Irishman, General James McDonnell, a wealthy Catholic landowner, who had joined Humbert's march, bringing with him an estimated 1,000 Mayo pikemen. Having led his charges in the Battle of Ballinamuck – for which he earned the praise of the French command – McDonnell made a famous escape and with a £500 reward on his head, made his way to America where he became a judge. The commemorations received a boost when the General's story was featured on both local and national radio. Family descendants, local officials, historians and members of the clergy took part in a wreath laying ceremony at a monument previously erected to the rebel leader. An arts pageant at the McDonnell ancestral home was preceded by an historic talk on his life and times.<sup>147</sup>

Another less fortunate rebel leader, James O'Dowda, who led the people of Bonniconlon, near Ballina, in the Rebellion was also honoured in his native village. According to popular memory, O'Dowda gave up his position as an officer in the local Cavalry Corps to join with Humbert who supposedly strongly considered him for the position of President of Connaught. Having commandeered a rearguard action in Killala, the newly appointed Colonel rejoined Humbert at Tubbercurry but was captured at the Battle of Ballinamuck, and subsequently court martialled and hanged. O'Dowd family lore maintains that his body was secreted back from the rebel burial site in Longford and re-interred at his homeplace. A plaque mounted on stone, records his deeds. The same village also saw a large family reunion of the Gillard family. The family are descended from a French soldier who remained in Ireland due to his injuries, and married an Irish woman with whom he had a family.

Erris also marked the participation of its locals in the 'garrisoning' of Killala in 1798. A plaque was unveiled there, and following a history talk, the route of the rebels' march from Erris to Killala was retraced. The town of Newport too remembered its involvement in the Western campaign by running a public lecture entitled 'Identifying Newport People Involved in the 1798 Rebellion', while Swinford – which the Franco-Irish alliance passed through *en route* to Ballinamuck – held a 'Liberty Tree' planting ceremony, a local history lecture and 1798-themed street performance. One of the most interesting events in Mayo in 1998 was the one held in Knock by its local folk museum and arts group. There, a night of traditional ballads relating to 1798 was held with noted singers from around the county along with guests from Donegal and Wexford.<sup>148</sup>

## Conclusion

The Rebellion of 1798 has by now a complex history of commemoration as well as a history of its own. Remembrance of the event has been shaped by the concerns of the day; Mary Daly's assertion that 'the commemorations reveal much more about contemporary Ireland than about the actual history of 1798' certainly holds true.<sup>149</sup> On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1798, any potential for widespread remembrance of the Rebellion was nullified by the cataclysmic events of the Great Famine. The Young Ireland movement, however, employed elements of commemorative tribute in its undertakings, and the doctrines of 1798 were certainly an inspiration, if not incitement, to some of its leaders in the Rebellion of 1848. By the time of the centenary of the Rebellion in 1898, commemoration had become rapidly politicised. With various opposing nationalist groups jostling to assume control of proceedings, the ideals of the United Irishmen were all but forgotten. Constitutionalist sought to re-invigorate the pervading apathetic attitudes towards their political *modus operandi*, while militant factions saw the commemorations as an opportunity to awaken a more fervent brand of patriotism among the masses. In Mayo, a county with comprehensive 'land agitation' networks, the hyperbole of the extremists reigned supreme. There, Maud Gonne was the undisputed champion of the people, although an occasional constitutionalist voice was heard. The Frenchill and Ballina monuments erected around this time were indicative of the nationalist appetite to openly celebrate its 'glorious past'. United briefly by political necessity, the uneasy alliance of parliamentarian and radical quickly dissipated by the end of the centenary year. It is of note, however, that Sinn Féin member George Lyons would later link 1898 with the 1916 Rising and by association with the War of Independence, when he stated that the centenary celebrations began 'all our modern efforts towards an ideal of independence'.<sup>150</sup> In the wake of the centenary, one of the key features of commemorative activity in Mayo was the erection of a number of monuments, often through local subscriptions by communities outside the main areas of action in 1798. Such efforts to solidify folkloric accounts of local players, also sought to validate the histories of such communities into a wider nationalist narrative.

By the next major anniversary in 1948, it was the alliance of Church and State who now had a firm grip on the commemoration in the independent state. Nationally,

and in Mayo, devout Catholic ceremonies and military parades were the commemorative order of the day, as locally organised memorial unveilings and gatherings gave way to more formal proceedings. The Church continued with its widely accepted 'faith and fatherland' position, while the popular political talk was that of the need to end the partition of the country. A strong emphasis was also placed on the commemoration as a source of historical learning for the nation's schoolchildren. The publication of Richard Hayes's *The Last Invasion of Ireland* around this time gave the Rebellion in the West a fresh and altogether more heroic slant. Portrayed by others simply as a post-script, Hayes portrayed the 'gallant' men of the West aiding the courageous Humbert in an 'Oh so nearly' daring escapade. The book inspired the erection of a 1798 memorial in Castlebar and the re-interrment of John Moore's body beside it in the 1960s. The proceedings of both mirrored the formal protocols of the sesquicentenary.

In County Mayo, the bi-centennial commemorations of 1998 were as elsewhere, the model of propriety which the government had called for. The unveiling of a plaque headed with the legend 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' by the Taoiseach in Castlebar, was one such example. That the state so openly and vehemently expressed its slant on how the Rebellion should be commemorated, coupled with the correlated gloss put on certain events by the state-sponsored historians, fed in to the hands of sceptics, despite its well intentioned aim. Of greater significance, however, was the fact that many Protestants and Presbyterians in Northern Ireland did reclaim their historic involvement in the Rebellion and that by and large, commemorative events in the North were inclusive. While the revisionists did certainly pick holes in the recently commissioned historiographies, claims that the sectarian atrocity at Scullabogue was airbrushed out of the commemorative picture do not hold water; an official event of the government's programme was the unveiling of a memorial at the site of the massacre. However, Tom Dunne's assertion that the commemoration was often confused for celebration does warrant attention; events in Mayo such as cycle races, firework displays and carnivalesque parades of 1798 effigies certainly add weight to his contention. Though the growth of the heritage industry has brought welcome benefits in the form of economic benefits, employment opportunities as well as the 'gateways' it can provide to deeper historical understanding, it has also been accused of 'dumbing down' history for the sake of tourist currency. Similarly,

commemorative heritage events need to safeguard against being manipulated as celebratory occasions as contemporary political agendas may dictate.

Another telling feature of the 1998 commemorations was the number of monuments and memorials erected throughout the year, a fair portion of which were in Mayo. The ease and immediacy with which these new unveilings took place reflects, it would appear, the resources available in 'Celtic Tiger' Ireland, rather than any deep political convictions or popular will as was exemplified during the centenary. Then, 30 memorials, many of them paid for by public subscriptions were erected nationwide during the year; in 1998 a total of 130 were unveiled in Co. Wexford alone.<sup>151</sup> Kevin Whelan has stated that local communities took ownership of the bi-centennial commemorations and while this may be true, a good number of local organisations responsible for the erection of '98 monuments were made up of members with strong mainstream political affiliations.<sup>152</sup> It is worth remembering that the funding for these monuments often came from local authorities or directly from the Government's Commemoration Committee.

The establishment of the Commemoration Committee, with ministerial function under the auspices of the Department of the Taoiseach, will no doubt generate further academic study in the future. Although state involvement in the commemoration of popularly held historic events is to be expected, the level of control imposed by the government over commemorations in the late 1990s is an issue which may incur popular resentment were such a trend to be maintained into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A telling example of the authority asserted by the State was the ending of official events to commemorate the Famine in July 1997 in order to make way for the 1798 bi-centenary. As has been observed: 'The duration and timing of the government's Famine commemorations almost exactly mirrored the British government's in the real Famine of the 1840s.'<sup>153</sup> The State, as expressed by Minister Brennan, deliberately set out 'to avoid what we had identified as a flaw in the commemorations of 1898, 1938 and 1948. That is the excessive emphasis on the Catholic Nationalist version of the rebellion, which saw 1798 only as a crusade for "faith and fatherland"'. That the State itself has a longstanding dubious alignment with commemorations in the Republic has been well documented,<sup>154</sup> though whether its current policy of concerted control

complete with definitive editorial lines will alter this historical perspective remains to be seen.

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- <sup>104</sup> Collins, *op. cit.* (2004a), p. 28.
- <sup>105</sup> *Connaught Telegraph* 12 April 1947.
- <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* 27 March 1948.
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* 12 June 1948.
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* 1 May 1948.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* 10 April 1948.
- <sup>111</sup> *Western People* 7 August 1948.
- <sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>113</sup> *Irish Times* 2 August 1948.
- <sup>114</sup> *Connaught Telegraph* 7 August 1948.
- <sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* 29 August 1953.
- <sup>116</sup> *Irish Independent* 9 Sep 1953
- <sup>117</sup> J. Higgins, '1798: Some Galway-Mayo Links', *Cathair Na Mairt* Vol. 1, No. 2, (2001), p. 77.
- <sup>118</sup> *Connaught Telegraph* 19 August 1961.
- <sup>119</sup> Freyer, (Ed.), *op. cit.*, p. xxii.
- <sup>120</sup> *Connaught Telegraph* 19 August 1961.
- <sup>121</sup> M. Garvey, 'Foreword' in G. Freyer (Ed.), *Bishop Stock's 'Narrative' of the Year of the French 1798* (Irish Humanities Centre, Ballina, 1982), pp. xii-xiii.
- <sup>122</sup> Cooney, *Humberts Expedition* p. 4.
- <sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- <sup>124</sup> *Irish Times* 29 July 2004.
- <sup>125</sup> R. Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland* (Penguin Group, London, 2001) p. 229.
- <sup>126</sup> Collins, *op. cit.* (2004a), p. 31.
- <sup>127</sup> Part of speech made by An Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern to launch the Government's 1798 Programme of Commemoration at Government Buildings, dated 20 Jan 1998. [http:// www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp](http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp) Accessed 10 January 2004
- <sup>128</sup> Collins, *op. cit.* (2004b), pp. 80-81.
- <sup>129</sup> Collins, *op. cit.* (2004a), p. 32.
- <sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- <sup>131</sup> Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 228.
- <sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.
- <sup>133</sup> *Irish Times* 18 March 2004.
- <sup>134</sup> Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
- <sup>135</sup> T. Dunne, *Rebellion: Memoir, Memory and 1798* (Lilliput Press, Dublin, 2004), p. 147
- <sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p.116.
- <sup>137</sup> Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
- <sup>138</sup> *Irish Times* 6 March 2004.
- <sup>139</sup> Bartlett, quoted in Collins, *op. cit.* (2004b), p. 159.



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- <sup>140</sup> G. Beiner, 'Commemorative Heritage and the Dialects of Memory', in M. McCarthy (Ed.), *Ireland's Heritages: Critical Perspectives on Memory and Identity* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2005), pp. 55-69.
- <sup>141</sup> *Connaught Telegraph* 26 March 1997.
- <sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* 8 May 1996.
- <sup>143</sup> *Western People* 3 September 1998.
- <sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* 19 August 1998.
- <sup>145</sup> *Irish Times* 6 March 2004.
- <sup>146</sup> Dunne, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
- <sup>147</sup> *Western People* 19 August 1998.
- <sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* 26 August 1998.
- <sup>149</sup> M. Daly, 'History à la Carte?' in E. Bort, (Ed.), *Commemorating Ireland* (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 2004), p. 48.
- <sup>150</sup> Quoted in Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 225.
- <sup>151</sup> Dunne, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
- <sup>152</sup> *Irish Times* 6 March 2004.
- <sup>153</sup> Daly, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
- <sup>154</sup> D. Fitzpatrick, 'Commemoration in the Irish Free State: A Chronicle of Embarrassment', in I. McBride, (Ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001), pp. 184-203.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusion**

During her tenure as President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, declared that commemoration 'is a moral act'.<sup>1</sup> Such a viewpoint had previously been disputed by Conor Cruise O'Brien, who pondered whether in Ireland, we are 'commemorating ourselves to death...sleepwalkers, locked in some eternal ritual re-enactment'.<sup>2</sup> So, having examined three of the most prominent episodes within the metanarratives of County Mayo's commemorative heritages, what can be deduced from commemorative practices in that county which might better inform future acts of remembrance? Who have been the primary instigators of commemorative activity, and why? What contemporary political concerns have been reflected by the respective remembrances and what have been the consequential cultural and economic effects of commemoration for the county and its population?

The commemorations investigated in the foregoing chapters are disparate to a degree, and display their own peculiarities and characteristics. One of the common factors to all three, however, is the fact that their remembrance climaxed during the heady days of the 1990s 'pop history' and heritage industry growth. Taking the 'Mayo 5000' programme again as a starting point, it is evident that such a programme was very much of its own time. Inextricably linked in an economic way to the inauguration of the Céide Fields centre, the fact that interpretive centres, and the wider heritage industry were at the time beginning to be critically regarded as harbouring a degree of spuriousness, helped to negate any sincerity with which 'Mayo 5000' may otherwise have been viewed.

That the overall programme was so indelibly associated with a commercial enterprise, coupled with the fact that it was reflecting on a prehistoric era rather than a fixed historic event, detracted from any claims 'Mayo 5000' may have had regarding the authenticity of its commemorative credentials. Unlike certain cities which have initiated commemorative events in relation to their antiquity (in some cases no doubt also for primarily commercial reasons), the Mayo event is further negated in that it is unlikely to be reconstituted in the foreseeable future, thus ingraining it with a level of temporal abstraction. Other elements which may have instilled 'Mayo 5000' with a greater measure of gravitas and credibility were clearly absent. A lack of academic investigation (or interest) – such as a historical perspective on farming in Mayo since the Neolithic – was evident, as were spin-off publications, conferences or general

appetite for any form of public or scholarly discourse on the county's past. The enthusiasm which the Erris, and wider Mayo community brought to bear on the establishment of the Céide Fields centre (albeit for the economic enhancement of their environs), does have echoes of the broad community participation in the establishment of monuments to the 1798 Rebellion which took place from the late nineteenth century up to the mid-1900s.

The 'Mayo 5000' year of 1993 should then be viewed for what it was, a made-up popular celebration disguising itself as commemorative heritage, rather than a commemoration in the purest sense of the norms. The programme may be seen as an exercise fabricated by those who initiated the Céide Fields centre in a bid to bring attention to, and thus validate the centre as well as their own reasoning for its establishment, in what remains a debated concern. More probable though is the idea that 'Mayo 5000' was designed to function on a number of levels. Undoubtedly one of its main aims was to highlight the opening of the Céide Fields centre in that year – the numbers visiting such a heritage attraction in its premier year were crucial to its long-term success. The key objectives of the centre were to enhance public awareness of the archaeological remains and also to provide a platform for economic rejuvenation through increased tourist numbers and expenditure in the area. Which of these goals was of greater significance to the projects' instigators remains conjectural. What does seem likely, however, is that the state's involvement in the establishment of the Céide Fields centre was motivated by the political necessity to economically enhance a traditionally under-developed and fiscally neglected region. It is also possible that the 'Mayo 5000' programme was something of a knee-jerk reaction to the government's unexpected injection of funds into the centre. Those behind the centre in Mayo were perhaps over-eager to ensure that its opening warranted the highest level of exposure possible.

If the media and the wider public alike saw the 'Mayo 5000' programme as just that – an astute package by which to sell the opening of an interpretive centre – then for the Mayo community there were, in contrast, inherent benefits. There was undeniably a raising of confidence within the county associated with the programme that no doubt arose from the ongoing advertising campaign for the programme which resourcefully played upon the physical and cultural virtues of the county and which

was repeatedly aired through a variety of media. The staging of the key 'Mayo 5000' events also increased self-assurance in the power of place-based identity, as did the plethora of localised events which attracted throughout the year a greater degree than usual of outside attention to the artistic and cultural as well as the organisational merits of the county. This, it should be remembered, was at a time prior to the confidence which the personal and societal economic benefits afforded by the 'Celtic Tiger' era helped to bestow upon Ireland. The willingness with which Mayo's inhabitants embraced the year's events and provided artistic and general participation to ensure its success also reflects the appreciable desire to celebrate and highlight the positive aspects of the county's heritage. The Ceide Fields/'Mayo 5000' association, with an unbroken link to an agricultural and seemingly harmonious past, lent itself towards stimulating the local interests of what is a predominately rural population in an increasingly urbanised society. The ancient hereditary land rites the Céide Fields archaeological discovery may have subconsciously, or otherwise, bestowed on the people of Mayo possibly had an effect which may have outlasted the year-long festivities of 1993.

Owing to its representativeness as an area of Famine extremities, County Mayo has witnessed something of a concentration of commemorative heritage undertakings, events and proposals through a combination of both internal and external influences. The decimation of the area's population and the high proportion of Irish diaspora with claims to Mayo ancestry undoubtedly identify the county not just with the Famine but also with the reverberations of its impact. Comparable with the rest of the country, a degree of muteness surrounded the event in the county up to, and beyond its centenary. This silence was punctuated only by the largely unpublished attestations of a number of second-generation Famine survivors to the records of the Irish Folklore Commission in the 1930s and 1940s. By the 1980s, at which time the occurrence and effects of the Famine began to transcend history books and gain recognition in the realm of public acknowledgement, a small number of Famine observances took place. By the sesquicentenary of the start of the Famine in 1995, this trickle had become a flow as local, church, NGO and state-conducted commemorations captured public awareness and attention – though the latter's involvement only as far as July of 1997 raises serious questions regarding the implications of governmental participation in events of national historical interest.

Fortunately, there has been an avoidance of any ill-conceived or garish remembrances of the Famine within County Mayo. Thankfully, there seems to have been something of an understated dignity and solemnity about many of the commemorations there. This is surely typified by the pilgrim-like journey that hundreds make each year to participate in the Doolough Famine walk – an outing which invariably also brings them into contact with the poignant ‘Famine Ship’ sculpture as they travel westwards. The walk is explicitly one of the few ongoing observances of the Famine nationwide which is entirely based on perennial public participation. Such a creditable commemorative heritage event does, however, as previously mentioned, need to safeguard against the pitfall of losing its *raison d’être* as it becomes ever more politicised within the realm of left wing concerns. Notwithstanding the welcome economic benefits that the growth of the heritage industry has brought to Ireland, one potential undertaking which could possibly debase Mayo’s hitherto deferential recognition of the Famine, would be the commercialisation of the abandoned village at Slievemore in Achill. It is apparent from many of those who take part in the Doolough walk, and from artists like John Behan and Brian Tolle, that the *in situ* evidence of the Famine in Mayo such as ruined cottages and ‘lazy beds’ as well as the broader landscape in which they lie, do more to communicate a profound and meaningful sense of the event than any interpretive centre could ever seek to. Thus, it is perhaps the abiding sense of rurality and relative under-development (where the physical scars of the tragedy are still conspicuous in the landscape), which helps to transmit a palpable sense of the Famine to both inhabitants of, and visitors to, County Mayo.

If one is to look at the principal commemoration of the Famine which took place in the 1990s in light of contemporary affairs, then the Celtic Tiger economy was surely the prevailing *zeitgeist*. As the individual and collective wealth in Mayo and the nation at large continued to rise to unprecedented levels, fuelled by a buoyant construction industry, this was perhaps then a time to reflect on the suffering and destitution of one’s forbears in light of such present affluence; a time to stand back and contemplate the dramatic changes to society and economy which had taken place over the previous 150 years.

The various modes by which the 1798 Rebellion has come to be remembered continue to reflect as much to do with contemporary concerns as about the event itself. At the Rebellion's centenary in 1898 one can observe a fanning of the long smouldering sparks of independence; a spark which would burst into a flame in the turbulent years of 1916-23. Moreover, the commemoration at that time was marked by a power struggle within constitutional nationalism and an external clash with their revolutionary counterparts to appropriate control of what had become a wholly Catholic remembrance of the 1798 Rebellion. At the risk of losing popular support to the other, all segments of Irish nationalism eventually united in a marriage of convenience but this did not outlast the commemorative year. In Mayo, the exponents of the physical force tradition were most vocal throughout the year, though in reality, there as elsewhere the centenary did for the most part provide a platform for all shades of Irish nationalist voices to be heard. Notwithstanding, the policy of clerical exclusion by the Ballina '98 committee is an interesting one, particularly given the predominately Catholic symbology which their monument of that period embodied. The late nineteenth-century period is indeed marked out by the process of nation-building which physically and enduringly manifested itself in the erection of such memorials to the Rebellion throughout the country. In order to take its place in the national narrative of defiant struggle against its coloniser, such a process, and indeed the rhetoric thrown up throughout the centenary, was undoubtedly designed to validate a sense of nationhood within the county. It is noteworthy that statuary symbolising military escapades and the leaders of such still remain as the prevalent form of sculpture in the public spaces of so many towns and cities throughout Ireland as a whole.

By the commemoration of 1948, the observances of the Rebellion mirror the insularity and insecurities of the conservative state – one dominated by the powerful monolithic Catholic Church, small farmers organisations and Irish language lobby groups. With independence now achieved, the fledgling state had formed an alliance with the church which sought to control such matters of public life. In 1932, the tone had been very much set by the Eucharistic Congress, the high point of which was the celebration of a mass in Dublin's Phoenix Park. Attended by over one million persons, the event was designed in part to commemorate the 1,500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Patrick's arrival in Ireland. The appearance then of heads of state and bishops in provincial towns such as Castlebar to champion the 1948 commemorations of 1798 was part of a

new phase of nation-building and one which every man, woman and child of nationalist persuasion felt it was their patriotic and civil duty to support. Unlike the nation building of the centenary – which had carried with it a level of defiance and bravado – freedom of choice was now apparent. In a nation seeking to contemplate on and re-connect with its pre-colonial past, that those choices were Gaelic and Christian in nature is hardly surprising.

The bicentenary of the commemorations in 1998 were notably marked by the Northern Ireland peace process, as efforts abounded to foster community links and to avoid a republican commandeering of events. The Irish government and a number of state sponsored bodies in the North were at pains to stress the egalitarian principles behind the Rebellion, and to stress the role played in it by Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter alike. While the highlighting of such a reinterpreted pluralist view was certainly commendable in its efforts to unite traditionally opposing communities, it should be asked whether the ends justified the means, as the government's forceful editorial line created something of a sanitised version of the Rebellion. While told during the Famine of the mid 1990s that 'we need the catharsis of a commemoration which fully recognises the pain and loss the Famine represented'<sup>3</sup>, the government sought on the bicentenary of the Rebellion, to 'relinquish our obsession with the military aspects of 1798, including pikes and deaths, murder mayhem and martyrdom.'<sup>4</sup> Of further relevance to Mayo was the dictum that 'we must stress the modernity of the United Irish project, its forward-looking, democratic dimension and abandon the outdated agrarian or peasant interpretation'.<sup>5</sup> Despite the haughty ideals of the French invaders, and the United Irish leaders who had co-opted their assistance, the rebellion in Mayo was very much supported by a peasantry who were propelled by a sense of the agrarian inequalities imposed upon them.

The state editorialising inevitably meant that local commemorations, such as those in Mayo, were largely conducted by small groups of persons, most of whom were affiliated with the government of the day. Long gone it would appear are the days of mass community input and involvement in commemorations which witnessed large numbers of civic, cultural and sporting organisations marching *en masse*. Departed also too is the idea of popular public contributions towards memorials to mark events of national significance, which had been so evident in the previous two major



commemorations of 1798. As McBride has remarked: 'Disconnected from their origins by globalisation and the advance of mass culture, contemporary societies can only simulate a past which pre-modern communities had experienced as spontaneous, collective and ritualistic'.<sup>6</sup> Though recent commemorations do not elicit the mass participation of old, it is worth remembering that there still is opportunity for personal reflection and engagement with the subject matter, particularly through the wealth of publications which currently coincide with the anniversaries of popular historic events.

Commemorative events in Mayo were largely celebratory and festive in character in 1998. The French involvement in the Rebellion in Mayo was strongly acknowledged throughout the bicentenary year and a number of events were planned with French participation. This international dimension is likely to have had the effect of consolidating local identity within the sphere of EU citizenship in the period following the acceptance of the Treaty of Amsterdam in Ireland. One of the more unfortunate facts of the 1798 commemoration in 1998 is that a vital opportunity was lost to conduct deeper research in to the 'Year of the French'. Such local studies (which were also not wholly seized upon during the commemoration of the Famine) can often feed into, and draw from, the wealth of information and the momentum created by historical research at national level during key periods of commemoration. It will hopefully not, however, be the mid 21<sup>st</sup> century before Humbert's campaign receives the due scholarly attention it so clearly warrants.

Commemorations still undoubtedly have a strong role to play in society today. Though commemorative events such as the Orange Order's annual march at Drumcree to celebrate King William's victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 continue to be divisive and contentious, other commemorations are being conducted in an increasingly pluralistic fashion which seeks to inform and to find common ground. Saint Patrick's Day parades, which have come to celebrate and highlight Ireland's new found sense of diversity and multiculturalism is one such example, while the lighting of 3,637 candles in memory of all those killed in acts of violence linked to the troubles in Northern Ireland during a march in March 2006 to mark the events of Bloody Sunday in 1972 is another.<sup>7</sup> While the role of commemoration has at times moved towards an emphasis on inclusiveness, the fact that such gestures are bottom-up, and community-based also marks them out with a greater sense of authenticity and

sincerity than the state-led declarations of certain recent commemorations. The potential of commemoration to symbolically reflect significant shifts in political will was also recently evident through the actions of Sinn Fein's Lord Mayor of Belfast, Alex Maskey, who in July 2002 laid a wreath at the city's cenotaph to mark the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme in 1916. In the South the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event in 2006 was conducted in an air of civility, respect and re-evaluation.

The decision by Bertie Ahern's coalition government to reconstitute the military parades to mark the events of the 1919 Rising on its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006 met with mixed reaction. For some the problem was the seemingly autocratic all-inclusive brand of commemoration which Ahern hoped would draw 'together all the strands that contributed to the Irish State, including Irish soldiers who died in the First World War while fighting for Britain.'<sup>8</sup> Indeed the notion of a state led 'themed' commemoration was again on the agenda in relation to the 1916 commemorations – 'remembrance, reconciliation and renewal', being the order of the day.<sup>9</sup> Whether this had any influence on the popularity of the event is difficult to estimate. What was clear, however, was the common desire to recognise the Rising both publicly and privately; an estimated 100,000 people taking to the streets of Dublin to watch the main parade while commemorative publications, DVDs and CDs were mass marketed. For others the contention over the 1916 commemorations was the view that Fianna Fáil was cynically seeking to recapture the mantle of republicanism in order to ward off political gains made by Sinn Féin, while for others it was the sight of a large scale military display to honour republican martyrs during a period of particular fragility in the Northern Ireland peace process. The 1916 rising and its legacy thus have particular potent contemporary relevancies. As journalist Fintan O'Toole has noted, the issues surrounding the event:

'...are arguments about the present and the future. One's view of the Easter Rising is determined very largely by one's views on other subjects: on the Northern Ireland conflict, on nationalism and socialism, on the awkward relationship between the terrorist and the freedom fighter.'<sup>10</sup>

Internationally, the power of commemoration was most forcibly demonstrated in the recent 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary remembrances of the liberation from Nazi control of the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland – the site of the biggest mass murder in history. In January 2005 amid poignant scenes, over 1,000 survivors of the camp as well as global political and spiritual leaders gathered in an event which honoured its victims, acknowledged guilt and sought to aid reconciliation. Moreover, the remembrances simply reinforced the aphorism that those who ignore history are doomed to repeat its mistakes.

Though commemorative events in County Mayo do not singularly hold the obvious intensity of those mentioned above, they do demonstrate the issues that the community holds close to its collective consciousness. While the remembrances covered in this thesis are by no means exhaustive, they represent some of the prime facets of the past that the people of County Mayo have most prominently and demonstrably chosen to acknowledge in modern times. McBride has noted that such communal processes of recall and shared perceptions of history are dependant on the characteristics of the society engaged in that remembrance:

‘remembrance and forgetting are social activities and our images of the past are therefore reliant upon particular vocabularies, values, ideas and representations shared with the other members of the group.’<sup>11</sup>

In turn, shared remembrances can have a unifying effect on the group. As Bort has light-heartedly put it: ‘A people, one might quip, that commemorates together sticks together’.<sup>12</sup> Although it was only the ‘Mayo 5000’ programme and the commemorations of 1798 in 1948 which specifically based themselves round the spatial entity that is the county, such a demarcation has long served to define particular group identity as well as to delineate the boundaries within which, specific (historic) events occur. In County Mayo as elsewhere, any form of public engagement with commemoration manages to ‘assert a depth of commitment transcending everyday preoccupations.’<sup>13</sup> The messages, which are both transmitted and absorbed by this engagement, are important issues with regards to historical awareness and education in Irish society. As Daly has concluded:

‘Despite the remarkable increase in the number of Irish people with second and third level education, an even smaller proportion of the population now studies history. Consequently historical knowledge and understanding is more likely to come from commemorative events, tie-in television programmes, heritage centres and films’.<sup>14</sup>

At local, national and global levels, human acts of commemoration serve important societal functions. They allow people to honour the dead, to acknowledge shared sufferings or glories, and pay tribute to individuals or groups who are believed to have excelled. Commemorations can act as benchmarks of how far, or alternatively how little societies have come (and want to come) since the events in question. They are an important pointer to the occurrences that a community wishes to maintain in its collective memory, yet they can also highlight episodes which would rather be forgotten or glossed over. Commemoration can advance and inform a society’s understanding of its history, though it can also serve to stagnate a prejudiced view of the past. Commemorations it seems, can serve competing goals. In a nation with such a disputed and contentious history, the aims and motives behind Irish acts of commemoration warrant a level of caution and vigilance. While the old adage states that ‘history is written by the victorious’, commemorationists as well as the concerns of the burgeoning heritage industry would also appear to have a strong hand in it.

## References:

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- <sup>1</sup> President Mary Robison's speech to the Oireachtas, dated 2 February 1995  
<http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/addresses/2Feb1995.htm> Accessed 24 November 2005.
- <sup>2</sup> C. Cruise O'Brien, *States Of Ireland* (Panther Books, London, 1974), p. 252.
- <sup>3</sup> Statement to the Dáil by Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach, Mrs. Avril Doyle, on the 150th anniversary of the Famine, dated 5 October 1995, <http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie> Accessed on 22 Mar 2005.
- <sup>4</sup> Statement made by Avril Doyle, TD in the Seanad. Quoted in T. Dunne, *Rebellions: Memoir, Memory and 1798* (The Lilliput Press, Dublin, 2004), p. 143.
- <sup>5</sup> Statement made by Avril Doyle, TD. Quoted in R. Foster *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland* (Penguin Group, London, 2001), p. 229.
- <sup>6</sup> I. McBride, 'Introduction: Memory and National Identity in Modern Ireland' in I. McBride, (Ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001), p. 11.
- <sup>7</sup> *Irish Independent* 30 January 2006.
- <sup>8</sup> *Irish Examiner* 17 February 2006.
- <sup>9</sup> *Irish Independent* 10 April 2006.
- <sup>10</sup> *Irish Times* 28 March 2006
- <sup>11</sup> McBride, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
- <sup>12</sup> E. Bort, 'Towards an Inclusive Culture of Commemoration? An Introduction' in E. Bort, (Ed.), *Commemorating Ireland* (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 2004), p. 2.
- <sup>13</sup> McBride, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
- <sup>14</sup> M. Daly, 'History à La Carte? Historical Commemoration in Ireland', in E. Bort, (Ed.), *Commemorating Ireland* (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 2004), p. 49.

## **Appendices**



**Appendix 4.1. Foyer of Céide Fields centre featuring 5,000 year old tree trunk discovered beneath bog**

*Source: Author*

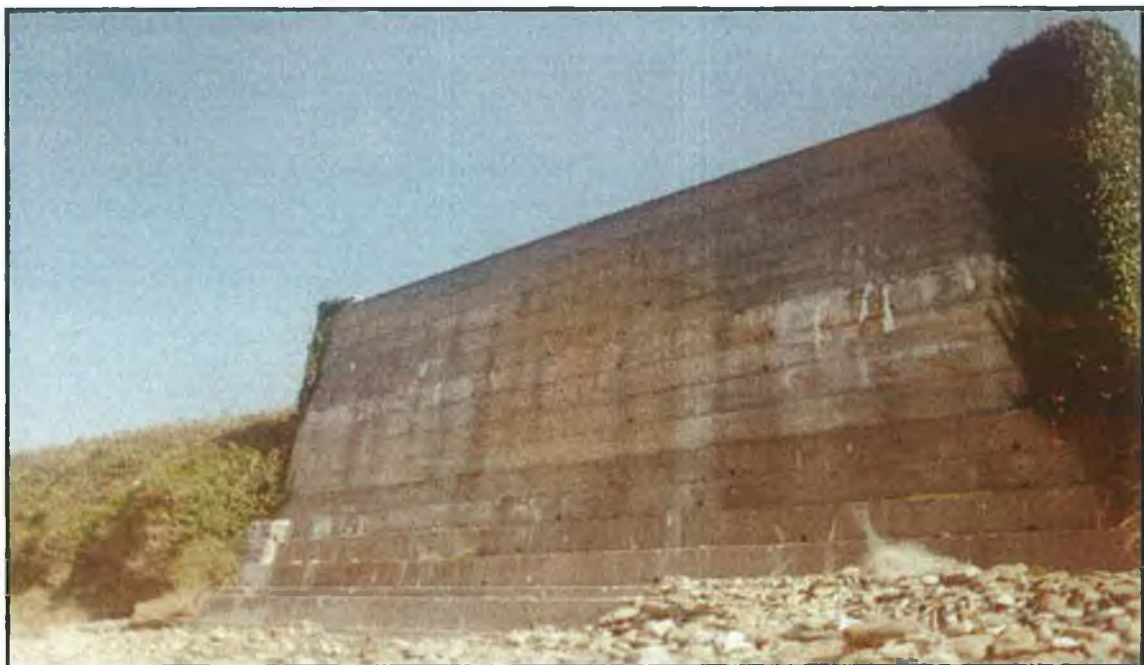


**App. 4. 2. Section of the interpretive display in Céide Fields centre**

*Source: Author*



**App. 4.3. Tír Sáile Sculpture: Trail 'Battling Force' at Downpatrick Head**  
*Source: Author*



**App. 4.4. Stone, glass and metal set into pier wall in 'Tonnta na nBlianta' at Kilcummin**  
*Source: Author*





**App. 5. 1. Doolough Memorial erected by Afri in 1994**

*Source: Author*



**App. 5.2. Doolough Memorial unveiled by Arun Gandhi, 1994**

*Source: Author*



**App. 5.3. Detail on National Famine Memorial, Murrisk, Westport**  
*Source: Author*



**App. 5.4. Attymass Memorial to cottage used in Irish Hunger memorial, New York, erected in 2004**  
*Source: Author*

**Appendix 5.5.**

Questionnaire distributed at AFrI Doolough Famine Walk

**AFrI Famine Walk – Peace Walk Survey  
May 2004**

**Introduction**

My name is Michael Quinn. I am an M.A in Humanities (Heritage Studies) student at Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology and am currently conducting research for my thesis which is entitled; 'Localised Pasts and Presents: Critical Viewpoints on The Making of County Mayo's Commemorative Heritages'.

A section of the thesis deals with the ways in which the Great Famine is commemorated in County Mayo and I would appreciate your help in assisting me to compile some information on participation in AFrI's annual Famine/Peace walk.

The questionnaire will only take about five to ten minutes to complete and all information given will be totally confidential. Your replies will not be shown or told to anyone in connection with your name.

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender                      Male                      Female  
                                                                              

3. Age              Under 18    18-24    25-34    35-44    45-59    60-69    70+  
                                                                                                                    

4. Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

5. Are you affiliated to either of the organising bodies? \_\_\_\_\_

If Yes, please state which                      Louisburgh  
                                         AFrI    Community Project    Both  
                                                                                                                    

6. Where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Where were you raised? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Where do you currently reside? \_\_\_\_\_

9. How did you become aware of the walk? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. How many times have you participated in the walk? (including today) \_\_\_\_\_

11. What do you feel the walk achieves? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

12. What do you gain personally from taking part in the walk? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. What emotions does taking part in the walk invoke in you? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

14. What do you know of the Doolough Famine tragedy? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

15. Are you aware of any of your ancestors being affected by the Famine? \_\_\_\_\_

If Yes, please elaborate \_\_\_\_\_

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16. Are you aware of any other commemorative events / sites relating to the Famine in County Mayo? \_\_\_\_\_

If Yes, please state which \_\_\_\_\_

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17. Did you participate in any events to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Famine? \_\_\_\_\_

If Yes, please state which \_\_\_\_\_

---

18. The Government has done enough to commemorate the Famine

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/ Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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19. Have you conducted any research / reading on the Famine? \_\_\_\_\_

If Yes, please elaborate \_\_\_\_\_

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**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey**



**App. 6.1. Plaque at Kilcummin dedicated by Maud Gonne, 1898**  
*Source: Author*



**App. 6. 2. Engraving on north face of Humbert 1798 Memorial, Ballina**  
*Source: Author*



**App. 6.3. Engraving on west face of Humbert 1798 Memorial, Ballina**  
*Source: Author*



**App. 6.4. Fr. Sweeney Memorial Grave, Burrishoole Abbey, erected in 1912**  
*Source: Author*



**App. 6.5. Fr. Conroy Memorial, Lahardane, erected in 1937**  
*Source: Author*



**App. 6.6. Memorial at Poll na Seantoinne, Downpatrick Head**  
*Source: Author*





**App. 6.7. Poll na Seantóine, Downpatrick Head**  
*Source: Author*



**App. 6.8. The grave of John Moore, Castlebar (re-interred 1961)**  
*Source: Author*



**App. 6. 9. Bust of Humbert, Killala, erected in 1989**  
*Source: Author*



**App. 6.10. Bust of Humbert, Killala, also erected in 1989**  
*Source: Author*



**App. 6.11. Wall mural at Rock Square, Castlebar, painted in 1998**  
*Source: Author*



**App. 6.12. The 'Pikes and Doves' monument, Market Square, Castlebar, erected in 2001**  
*Source: Author*



**App. 6.13. Detail of the 'Pikes and Doves' monument**  
*Source: Author*

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