

The end of the Napoleonic War resulted in a reduction in grain prices. Consequently more land was required to grow the grain required to pay the rent. The tonnage of oats exported from the ports of Ballina, Killala and Westport increased from 4,044 tons in 1813 to 15,514 in 1824. This extra demand for land, coupled with the increasing population figure, caused a spiraling increase in land prices. The demand for land became so great that those who had not sufficient rented land on which to exist resorted to renting 'conacre'. Conacre was the term used to describe seasonally rented tillage land for the growing of potatoes, oats and flax. The owner, or more frequently the middleman, manured the land before letting it out for tilling by the tenant. The rent was paid in cash before the crop was harvested. If the tenant had not the cash, the middleman disposed of the crop.

EARLY EMIGRATION

Emigration from Mayo commenced after the famine experienced in 1822 which was occasioned by bad harvests. These emigrants went to the South of Scotland and Merseyside and Lancashire in England. There they found limited employment in the manufacturing and construction industries. Being desperate, they worked at wages much lower than Scottish and English labourers. Frederick Engels in his "The Conditions of the Working Class in England" tells of the dreadful living conditions of the poor and less sympathetically the historian Carlyle remarked that "Everywhere the Irishman brings with him his disgusting companion the pig". It was in most instances the emigrants only source of meat - and the origin of the phrase 'pig in the parlour'. Christopher Mayhew the economist commenting on the employment scene in London's East End described assembled casual dock workers hopeful of securing a day's work thus "All are shouting. Some cry aloud his [the foreman's] surname, some his Christian name, others call out their own names to remind him they are there. Now the appeal is made in Irish blarney - now in broken English... the scuffle being made fiercer by the knowledge that hundreds must be made to idle the day out in want." The severity of the working conditions of the Irish, and of the poor of England, is summed up by Mayhew as follows: "The Irish boy could live harder than the Jew - often in his own country he survived on a stolen turnip a day - he could lodge harder, lodging for a penny a night in any noisome den, or sleep in the open air, which is seldom done by the Jewish boy. Thus the Munster or Connaught boy could live on less, the Hebrew youths were displaced by the Irish in the street orange trade". As a result of the Irish emigrant's willingness to exist on subsistence wages the Poor Law for Ireland was introduced in 1838 in an attempt to stop the industrial towns of England and Scotland being swamped by Irish. As early as 1822 one third of the beggars of London were of Irish origin.

MIGRATION

Seasonal migration of agricultural labours from the West of Ireland to England had also been taking place from the 1820s. This migration was mainly to Lancashire and the Midlands. These migrants walked across Ireland to Dublin and many received free passage to Liverpool as ballast on ships containing bulky yet light commodities. They usually left Ireland in March and April in gangs which offered themselves for hire en block. They helped with hay making, corn harvesting and beet pulling and returned home in late September. Commenting on this seasonal migration J. Archer Jackson in his books "The Irish in Britian" and "Poverty and Prejudice" points out that seasonal migration suited the landowners and their agents and middlemen in two ways: It made rent payment fairly certain while absolving them of the need to improve economic