

Liverpool from the port of Dublin. Westport, which had both a workhouse and a quay, was thronged with the starving of west Mayo. The son of a Quaker minister from Norwich, William E. Forster, described the scene in Westport as "... a strange and fearful sight, like what we read of in beleaguered cities, the streets crowded with gaunt figures".

Medical resources were almost completely inadequate but the Board of Health prevented the death rate from being much higher. The Irish Fever Acts placed responsibility for the provision of fever hospitals on local relief committees, which were slow in coming into existence, the government providing the housing in the form of army tents. The government announced that they would pay for assistance in July of 1847 but announced that relief measures would cease the following October. The crime rate began to rise dramatically in the Autumn of 1847 and property holders began to flee the county as crime and robbery became



A Famine scene

and lasted until July of 1849. Ophthalmia was also widespread. As conditions showed no signs of improvement, the government finally moved. A Rate-in-Aid system, whereby the wealthier Unions supported the poorer ones was introduced and 100,000 pounds was advanced from the Government.

The Government, private organisations, individuals and the Churches, particularly the Quakers, did attempt to relieve distress but the situation was almost hopeless. Upwards of 175,000 people died in, or left, Mayo in the years 1846 to 1850. Of the dead, an estimated 9% died directly from malnutrition. Fever was the main killer. It killed irrespective of the standard of nutrition. The cottiers and spalpeens who held just a cabin and a potato patch were almost completely wiped out.

In 1848 a large volume of seed potatoes was planted, but the crop failed