

# Spalpeens, Gombeens and Squireens: Class Relations in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ireland

## Conference

Saturday July 31<sup>st</sup>, 9:30am – 6:00pm

AX1, Auxilia House, North Campus, NUI Maynooth

**9:30 – 9:45 Registration, Auxilia Foyer**

**9:45 – 10:00** Welcome; Eoin Flaherty (NUIM) and Terry Dunne (MIC)

**10:00am – 11:00am**

### Industry and Proto-Industry

*Education in 19<sup>th</sup> century model villages in Ireland*

Elena O' Brien, Archaeology, (UCC)

*Mapping social class in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland: towards a more systematic approach*

Dr. Jane Gray, Sociology, (NUIM)

**11:00am – 11:15am Break**

**11:15am – 12:15pm**

### Health

*'In death there is no remembrance': The evidence of post-medieval health from human skeletal remains*

Linda G. Lynch, Archaeology, (UCC)

*The silent voice: Narratives of health at the 19<sup>th</sup> century watering-place*

Dr. Ronan Foley, Geography, (NUIM)

**12:15pm – 12:30pm Break**

**12:30pm – 1:30pm**

### Late Nineteenth Century

*Social change in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland: The advent of narrow gauge railways in Munster*

Edel Barry, Archaeology, (UCC)

*The poorest classes? Language and social class in post-famine Ireland*

Dr. Nicholas Wolf, History, (Virginia Commonwealth University)

**1:30pm – 2:30pm Lunch**

**2:30pm – 4:00pm**

### Pre-Famine

*Class conflict in the 1830s Tithe War*

Noreen Higgins-McHugh, History, (UCC)

*Between a rock and a hard place: The reality of being a land agent in Ireland in the 1830s and 1840s*

Laura Vickers, Moore Institute, (NUIG)

*"No more at present from your friend, Captain Rock": 'Threatening letters' and social attitudes in pre-famine Ireland*

Terry Dunne, History, (MIC)

**4:00pm – 4:15pm Break**

**4:15pm – 5:15pm**

### Modes of Production

*The Rundale System in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ireland: Conceptualising and Exploring the Ecological Dynamics of Primitive Communism*

Eoin Flaherty, Sociology, (NUIM)

*'Wooden idols triumph and human beings are sacrificed': Marx on legal theft in the Rhineland and Ireland*

Dr. Eamonn Slater, Sociology, (NUIM)

## *Industry and Proto-Industry*

### **Education in 19th century model villages in Ireland.**

**Elena O' Brien, Department of Archaeology, University College Cork.**

This paper aims to explore the presence, and indeed impact, of the educational facilities provided in Model industrial villages of the 19th century in Ireland. Educational facilities became commonplace in factory settlements after the 1833 Factory Act made it a requirement for children between the ages of nine and thirteen to attend school for twelve hours each week. Industrialists provided facilities in or near the factory to improve the efficiency of daily school to work transitions. Schools were also seen as a means of providing child care so that mothers could work (children and women being the cheapest, and therefore most favoured, form of labour).

In model villages this legislation no doubt had some part to play in the provision of educational facilities; however other factors may have had a part to play. Facilities commonly provided include not just schools and infant's schools but also mechanic's institutes with reading rooms, lecture halls and provision for evening classes for adult employees. These additional educational amenities had no direct economic benefit for the employer, so what factors are behind their construction? The proposed paper will examine this question through a review of the physical remains of buildings, looking at the impact their material presence had on the architectural character of model industrial settlements.

This research forms part of an on-going Ph.D. thesis which examines model villages built by dissenter religious communities in the 19th century in Ireland which has received funding through the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

### **Mapping social class in 19th century Ireland: towards a more systematic approach.**

**Dr. Jane Gray, Department of Sociology and NIRSA, National University of Ireland - Maynooth.**

Explaining social change in 19th century Ireland requires an understanding of processes of class-formation in all their complexity. However, while social science historians have made some progress towards documenting the changing moral economies of class, the analysis of changing class structures remains comparatively underdeveloped. In part, this may be attributed to the difficulties of using published census reports for this purpose. Scholars have pointed to the failure to record occupational data for many adults (especially women), inconsistencies in the data on farm size and on the prevalence of by-employments, and to the puzzling phenomenon whereby different indicators of class status do not correlate with one another in predictable ways.

This presentation will attempt to shed some light on these issues by developing a social class index based on evidence from the 1821 manuscript census returns for Counties Cavan and Fermanagh. It will then test the robustness of this index by comparing it with published data from the 1821, 1831 and 1841 censuses. Proto-industrialization theory suggests that districts such as these, where participation in the domestic linen industry was widespread, should have experienced a decline in social class complexity associated with incipient working class formation. The presentation will consider both the extent to which the evidence on social class from the 1821 manuscripts is consistent with that from the published censuses, and to which the social class index does a good job of predicting the direction of social change across parishes.

## *Health*

**‘In death there is no remembrance’: The evidence of post-medieval health from human skeletal remains.**

**Linda G. Lynch MA MIAI MIAPO, Human Osteoarchaeologist, Department of Archaeology, University College Cork.**

This paper presents some of the findings of recent osteoarchaeological research into human remains that have been excavated from a number of post-medieval sites in Ireland. The cemeteries are reflective of the diversity that existed in Irish society in that period, particularly towards the end of that era in the nineteenth century. The sites range from Union Workhouse cemeteries, for the poorest and most destitute of society, to the middle-class cemeteries of members of the Church of Ireland and of Quakers. One of the primary aims of the study is to address the physical manifestations of physiological stress in the human skeleton. In essence, it is known that the Workhouse individuals would have been under severe stress, particularly with regards to nutrition and/or disease loads, whereas middle-class populations were not as devastated by such stresses. Is this reflected in the human skeletal remains? And, if we were to look at those skeletal populations with no knowledge of their class origins, do the skeletons reveal the nature of their origins? The post-medieval period in Ireland was witness to some of the most profound changes ever recorded in Irish history. The analysis of the archaeological manifestations of this period is in its infancy in Ireland. This is particularly due to previous beliefs that the period was too modern to be considered of archaeological merit. The present study is just one of the many in recent times that highlight the complex richness of information that can emerge from archaeological analysis of post-medieval remains.

**The silent voice: Narratives of health at the 19<sup>th</sup> century watering-place.**

**Dr. Ronan Foley, Department of Geography, National University of Ireland – Maynooth.**

In uncovering a deeper understanding of therapeutic landscapes, medical/health geographers have often focused their attention on health histories in place. Typically such histories are ‘sourcist’, focusing on the voices and practices of the rich and the powerful. In considering health at the Irish watering-place, such elitist colonial narratives form much of the evidence base. Yet it is possible using these sources, as well as more silent voices drawn from a range of other sources, to uncover a parallel set of inhabitations and performances of health. As typical sites of folk medicine and hydrotherapy, a range of settings including holy wells, spa towns, sea-bathing resorts and sweating-places are examined to uncover these narratives and practices. Key sources include; traveller accounts, folklore archives, literature, local histories, songs, observer accounts and photography. Sites to be discussed include; Ardmore, Kilkee, Mallow and Struell. In particular the performances of health in such settings were shaped by a series of ‘gazes’, colonial, clerical and biomedical, to produce what Foucault might call a ‘conduct of conducts’. Yet there are parallel sets of practices, often liminal and carnivalesque, which talk to a deeper and more organic performance of health which resists that gaze. In considering how these different narratives are reported some valuable evidence emerges as to how indigenous health behaviours and performances were seen and reported. More significantly the emergence at the watering-place of a range of themes associated with class identity, regulation, power and ownership all speak to contestation of both health in place and the place of health.

## *Late Nineteenth Century*

### **Social change in 19th century Ireland: The advent of narrow gauge railways in Munster.**

**Edel Barry, Department of Archaeology, University College Cork.**

Much of Ireland's original railway system was in place by the closing decades of the 19th century, with those which were subsequently constructed, built to serve the remote, marginalised and therefore unprofitable areas to the west of Ireland. These were termed the "congested districts" owing to the tendency for clusters of habitation to occur in and around the minimal areas of good quality land amongst the predominantly poor terrain. Often narrow gauge lines were built to service these areas, as they were cheaper and easier to construct.

The aim of my research is to assess the social impact that a narrow gauge line had on the people of a given area. The promotion of a railway network for Ireland is an important example of the social engineering which occurred in the 19th century. It was heavily bound up with the political agenda of Constructive Unionism and attempts to dissuade nationalistic feeling in the working classes. For the purposes of this presentation, the improvement in the overall standard of living as regards growth in consumerism, employment and the development of tourism as an industry will be addressed through the perspective of consumption theory and social engineering. The contribution of the railway to urbanization and development of rural society in early modern Ireland will be discussed, and, lastly, its role in the facilitation of emigration and subsequent depopulation of rural areas will be examined.

### **The poorest classes? Language and social class in post-famine Ireland.**

**Dr. Nicholas Wolf, Department of History, Virginia Commonwealth University.**

Anecdotal evidence along with assumptions about how cultural behaviour is passed from elite to popular culture have led most historians to draw two interrelated conclusions from the case of language shift in nineteenth-century Ireland: first, that Irish-speakers were largely found among the poorer classes, and second, that language shift involved an abandonment of Irish by the wealthier ranks that was later imitated by the lower ranks as a means of social advancement. But how much do we actually know about the social class of Irish speakers during the linguistic decline of the second half of the nineteenth century? Did the loss of bilingualism follow lines of class, or were other factors such as occupation and age just as salient?

This paper will examine some of these questions based on a sizeable dataset consisting of over 25,000 individuals from Clare and Galway who were enumerated in the 1901 census. Building on the previous work of Máire Ní Chiosáin, Ciarán Devine, Garret FitzGerald and G.B. Adams, this research considers the relative weight of three major variables: age, occupation, and social class on the retention of Irish alongside English in bilingual communities, as well as the tendency to pass the language on to children. These findings show that those households where bilingualism remained strong were not always necessarily the "lower class" in that rural status was a more predictive indicator of Irish speaking. Moreover, within rural communities, farmers, whether occupying a middling or lower-rank status, were far more likely to remain bilingual at higher levels than their lower class (and younger) labourer counterparts.

## *Pre-Famine*

### **Class conflict in the 1830s Tithe War.**

**Noreen Higgins-McHugh, Department of History, University College Cork.**

By 1830, there were an estimated 700,000 predominately Catholic tenant families in the country, of which 75 per cent held farms of twenty acres or less and 50 per cent under ten acres or less. At the bottom of the social scale, the cottiers and labourers rented land on a conacre basis and had no other means of employment. Yet these were the very classes that paid the bulk of a land tax known as tithes for the financial upkeep of the Irish Anglican clergy. Moreover, landlords and large graziers did not pay tithe as grassland had been exempted from payment since 1735. Tithes also took precedence over the payment of rent. In contrast, the Irish Anglican church enjoyed an annual income of nearly £800,000, of which the bulk was derived from tithe payment. It had four archbishops and twenty-two bishops and owned vast tracts of land, having 100,563 acres in the Armagh and 33,040 acres in the Dublin dioceses respectively. Rentals from these church lands largely provided for the incomes of the bishops and archbishops. Both the Anglican hierarchy and clergy were drawn from a small pool of Anglo-Irish families and enjoyed a lifestyle similar to the landed gentry. They provided employment in their households, acted as magistrates and patronised the Kildare Place Society schools. This paper explores the class differences between the poor Catholic tithe payers and the wealthy Anglican clergy tithe owners, which led to the 1830s Tithe War.

### **Between a rock and a hard place: The reality of being a land agent in Ireland in the 1830s and 1840s.**

**Laura Vickers, Moore Institute, National University of Ireland – Galway.**

Focusing on the period following Catholic emancipation and the eve of the famine, a period marked by the shift in land management, this paper will focus on the role of the land agent and consider how agents dealt with the reality of being caught between the wishes of their employer the landlord and the demands of an increasingly violent tenantry. The land agent as the landlord's representative was responsible for the day to day and the strategic running of the estate and it is unsurprising to discover that they were often unpopular figures who were often targets for agrarian violence/outrage and historically as a group have been maligned as dishonest and ruthless operators. This paper aims to take a different approach the agent was in essence a business manager and their working lives consisted of building and maintaining relationships with a variety of people. This paper therefore seeks to explore the relationships that the land agent had to cultivate firstly and perhaps most importantly with the tenantry, with the landlord, other administrators, government officials, stewards and bailiffs. Focusing on evidence given by land agents to the Devon commission and the estate correspondence from several estates including it will explore the various responsibilities facing the agent and how they addressed them in an attempt to convey the reality of the life of an Irish land agent in the 1830s and 1840s.

### ***“No more at present from your friend, Captain Rock”*: 'Threatening letters' and social attitudes in pre-famine Ireland.**

**Terry Dunne, Department of History, Mary Immaculate College (University of Limerick).**

This paper will employ so-called 'threatening letters' as a source offering some glimpses into the social attitudes of the rural poor in pre-famine Ireland. 'Threatening letters' or 'threatening notices' were a mixture of letters sent to particular individuals to intimidate them into certain courses of action and more rarely more general proclamations posted up in public places (e.g. outside churches). These notices are among the only documentary sources of this period emanating from the lower parts of the social hierarchy and consequently are essential to a bottom up perspective on pre-famine Ireland. A collection of such documents from the year 1832 will be examined and these concern both land occupancy and employment issues. Particular reference will be made to evidence of class consciousness. The use of 'threatening letters' is associated with, but not exclusive to, Whiteboy-style movements. Whiteboy movements were attempts to regulate local socio-economic conditions using violent clandestine direct action. There will be some discussion of the possibility that the prevailing content of the notices changed with the fluctuating class make-up of these movements.

## *Modes of Production*

### **‘Wooden idols triumph and human beings are sacrificed’: Marx on legal theft in the Rhineland and Ireland.**

**Dr. Eamonn Slater, Department of Sociology, National University of Ireland – Maynooth.**

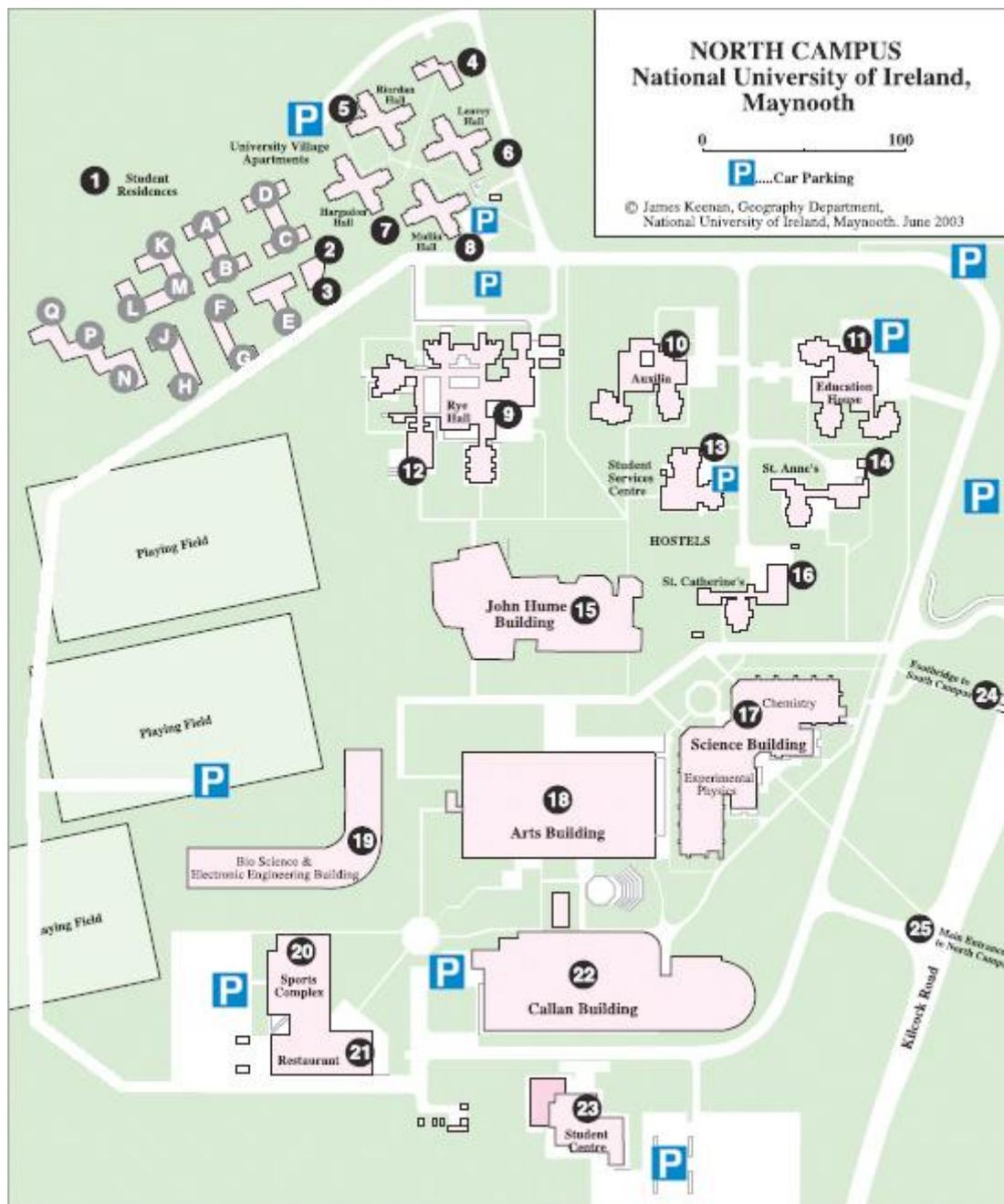
In this paper I am proposing that Marx developed a complex theoretical framework to deal with how class struggle can manifest itself within the legal system of the modern state. Without collapsing the idea of the autonomy of the state apparatus from the economy, Marx in his discussion of the debates on the theft of wood from the forests of the Rhine, proposes that inequality in the legal form concerned the presence of ‘one-sidedness’ and how that perspective only recognized the determinate rights of the rich and ignored the indeterminate customary rights of the poor. This framework allows us the opportunity to investigate the legal structure of the colonial state in Ireland and Marx’s conclusion that *‘it is this continuing robbery that forms the object of dispute over the Irish Land Legislation’* (Capital, vol.3).

### **The Rundale System in 19th Century Ireland: Conceptualising and Exploring the Ecological Dynamics of Primitive Communism.**

**Eoin Flaherty, Department of Sociology, National University of Ireland – Maynooth.**

Despite significant advances from earlier conceptions of 19th century Irish class structure as one of a homogeneous ‘peasantry’, certain problems remain in advancing valid frameworks for understanding social change in the 19th century; the rundale system offers one such problematic. Within twentieth century Irish scholarship, the phenomenon of communal tenure has posed explanatory problems for historians, archaeologists, and historical geographers. The rundale has consistently defied ‘systematic’ conceptualisation, with much pronouncement on its nature and structure tending toward fragmentary case studies with little scope for generalisation. I suggest that by adopting Karl Marx’s ‘mode of production’ analytical approach, we overcome this issue by developing an explanatory framework that is capable of explicating the internal dynamics of the rundale system, placing it in comparative context, and helping us avoid certain reductionisms that have thus far hampered attempts at its analysis.

This paper attempts to develop an understanding of both the inner logic of the system, and how this in turn related to its external concrete practices. In conceptualizing the rundale as a metabolic system, we further allow ourselves to advance a concept of class exploitation located not only within the mechanism of surplus extraction, but also at the level of the physical environment. The argument is developed through an examination of the distinct strategies and practices adopted by rundale communes in their attempts to cope with a rapid confrontation of ecological limits in the decades prior to the famine.



Our venue (Room AX1) is located on the North Campus, in Auxilia House, building 10 on the above map.

Maynooth is served by regular commuter trains and also by Dublin Bus. You may access train timetables from [www.irishrail.ie](http://www.irishrail.ie). If travelling from outside Dublin, on arrival at Heuston station, you should take the luas to Connolly station. A journey from Connolly station to Maynooth is approximately 45-50 minutes, and trains depart regularly (including weekends). You may also take the 66, or 67a ([www.dublinbus.ie](http://www.dublinbus.ie)) buses, which depart regularly from Sean Heuston Bridge, beside Heuston station. If arriving by bus, Busáras is just beside Connolly station. A taxi from Dublin to Maynooth will cost approximately €35-€45 euro.

If you wish to stay overnight in Maynooth, rooms are available on campus from €30 per person. For reservations, contact Maynooth Conference and Accommodation on 01 7086400, or 01 7083533.