

0. EJECTED, STARVING PEOPLE in IRELAND - Story
Preface

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Frederick Goodall, a prolific British artist, created this oil-on-panel—entitled "Irish Eviction"—circa 1850. Today the work is owned by the Leicester New Walk Museum & Gallery. Click on the image for a better view. PD
Unable to pay rent, thousands of families were evicted from their dwellings. It's not like people lived in middle-class housing. Most homes were hovels with thatched roofs.

People who tried to pay their rent, but had previously reported dishonest behavior, were also at risk. Judy O'Donnel—pictured below—was forced to live in a hole, under a bridge, after her house was levelled. *The Illustrated London News* (ILN) tells her story in its December 29, 1849 issue:

Two wretched families have taken refuge under the bridge [at Doonbeg] in a hole. They consist of two widows, one with three children, all ill of jaundice, and the other with five.

The history of Judy O'Donnel, one of the widows, is worthy of being sketched. She had given evidence against a dishonest relieving officer whose relative was a driver upon the estate on which she lived, and Judy's house was very soon afterwards levelled with the ground.

The wreckers came upon it in her absence, when her son gallantly defended his home. He mounted on the roof with a bag of stones, and kept the enemy at bay till his ammunition was exhausted, when he was obliged to give in, and stand by to see the little furniture of his mother cast into the road and the house pulled down.

Judy exhibited her receipts for the rent up to the last gale; and she declared the agent of the owner, to whom she had tendered what was due twice, had refused, and that she was ejected because she deposed against the dishonest public servant.

Judy and Margaret O'Donnel, with their families, then retired to the hole under the bridge, represented in the sketch, and there they are now suffered to remain, holding their habitation at the mercy of the county surveyor. They are afraid of being ejected even from this spot, and dare not cross the stepping-stones shown in the Sketch lest they should be taken up for trespassing. Judy O'Donnel's son is dying of dysentery. (ILN, 29 December 1849, at page 443.)



JUDY O'DONNELL'S HABITATION UNDER THE BRIDGE AT DOONBEG.

Some people, like Tim Downs, came from families who had lived on the same land for generations. The ILN reports that Tim

...and his ancestors resided on this spot for over a century, with renewal of their lease up to 1845. He neither owed rent arrears or taxes up to the present moment, and yet he was pitched out onto the roadside, and saw then other houses, with his own, levelled at one fell swoop on the spot...None of them were mud cabins, but all capital stone-built houses.

If people who owed no back rent were evicted, what would happen to people who did? Whole families were thrown out and, like Tim Downs, were helpless as they watched their erstwhile shelters become heaps of rubble.

Mud cabins and stone houses were rammed by their owners to make sure tenants couldn't come back. Places that had given families refuge from the cold were burned to the ground. Starving people with their possessions on their back, walked with their children to nowhere. Many dropped dead on the roads.

Poor houses were filled beyond capacity. Mansions of the wealthy were flooded with needy, starving, homeless families. Mothers begged for food for their children.

Not everyone agreed, of course, that the English could have done something to prevent the famine. T. C. Foster, a London barrister sent by *The Times* soon after the 1845 crop failure, observed:

For the poverty and distress and misery which exist, the people have themselves to blame. (See *Letters on the Condition of The People of Ireland*, by Thomas Campbell Foster, published in London by Chapman and Hall, in 1846, at Preface page viii.)

Other first-hand accounts would vehemently disagree with that conclusion.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/EJECTED-STARVING-PEOPLE-in-IRELAND-Irish-Potato-Famine-The-Great-Hunger)

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Questions 2 Ponder

Do We Have an Obligation to Care for Widows and Orphans?

In the 19th century, as the Irish potato famine devastated families, widows and orphans were particularly at risk.

Landlords, reacting against the requirements of "Poor Laws," wanted to relieve themselves of the responsibilities of helping to care for destitute people. As a result, they evicted many, many families from rented homes.

Two of the evicted individuals were Judy and Margaret O'Donnel, two widows with eight children between them. Although Judy's rent was up-to-date, she had reported dishonest behavior on the part of a local official. In exchange, her home was levelled.

Forced to take shelter in a hole under a bridge, O'Donnel and her family were in desperate shape. The children were ill, but the women were too afraid to even walk around lest they be accused - or arrested - of trespassing.

Do you think that widows and orphans should ever be treated the way they were treated in Ireland, during the Irish Potato Famine? Explain your answer.

Do you think that we have an obligation to care for widows and orphans? Explain your answer.

Before you read this story, did you have any idea that people in Ireland had been evicted from their homes in such extraordinary ways during the potato famine?

Do you think such a thing could occur today?

Media Stream



Irish Potato Famine - Scalpeen of Tim Downs

Image from "The Illustrated London News," December 22, 1849. Online, courtesy [Vassar College](#).

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Judy O'Donnel - Habitation under the Bridge

During the Irish Potato Famine, many already-devastated Irish people were evicted from their homes.

"Poor Laws," which Parliament had passed in an effort to have landowners help their destitute tenants, had a backlash effect when those landowners threw-out the home dwellers.

Tenants who tried to pay their rent, but had previously reported dishonest-landlord behavior to the police, were also at risk of eviction. Judy O'Donnel—one of those individuals—was forced to live in a hole, under a bridge, after her house was levelled. *The Illustrated London News (ILN)* tells her story in its December 29, 1849 issue: *Two wretched families have taken refuge under the bridge [at Doonbeg] in a hole. They consist of two widows, one with three children, all ill of jaundice, and the other with five.*



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*Illustration and quoted passages from *The Illustrated London News*, published on December 29, 1849. Public Domain.*

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BEGGING AT CLONARILITY.

Irish Potato Famine - Begging Mothers

Sketch by James Mahoney, in the *Illustrated London News* (February 13, 1847), from the news article "Sketches in the West of Ireland." Online, courtesy Vassar College.

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