

0. FROM COTTAGES to BOG HOVELS - Story Preface

1. THE BACKDROP

2. IRISH POTATOES

3. THE POTATO BLIGHT

4. A NATIONAL CATASTROPHE

5. THE POOR LAWS

6. EJECTED, STARVING PEOPLE in IRELAND

7. FROM COTTAGES to BOG HOVELS

8. DEATH AND DYING

9. MASS EXODUS



In 1844 (although some accounts say 1845), Francis William Topham (father of twelve children) created this pencil-and-watercolor painting which depicts a “Cottage Interior, Claddagh, Galway.” It was the year before the late blight began to infect Ireland’s potato crop and reveals that some of the residents in The Claddagh area were already living in difficult conditions. The work is now owned by the Ulster Museum. Click on the image for a better view.

Some of the evicted Irish tenant-farmers, with no place to go and little to eat, tried to shelter their families by living in holes dug in the Irish bog. Others constructed scalpeen inside abandoned, roofless houses.

In early 1847, *The Illustrated London News* published drawings of areas particularly hard-hit by famine in the western part of Ireland. Its February 13th and 20th issues included stories about how difficult it was for people to cope.

People in the village of Meinies (seen below) were having a particularly hard time. Famine victims were dying but there were insufficient funds to have proper burials. Reporters and artists, trying to gather the facts, had a hard time believing the stories they were hearing.



THE VILLAGE OF MIENIES.

William Bennett, who made a 6-week visit to Ireland in 1847, writes:

Many of the cabins were holes in the bog, covered with a layer of turves, and not distinguishable as human habitations from the surrounding moor, until close down upon them. The bare sod was about the best material of which any of them were constructed. Doorways, not doors, were usually provided at both sides of the bettermost-back and front- to take advantage of the way of the wind. Windows and chimneys, I think, had no existence. (William Bennett, *Narrative of a Recent Journey of Six Weeks in Ireland*, 1847, page 25.)

What did Bennett find inside such a cabin? Children so pathetic it made Bennett's hand tremble as he wrote his account.

My hand trembles while I write. The scenes of human misery and degradation we witnessed still haunt my imagination, with the vividness and power of some horrid and tyrannous delusion, rather than the features of a sober reality. We entered a cabin.

Stretched in one dark corner, scarcely visible, from the smoke and rags that covered them, were three children huddled together, lying there because they were too weak to rise, pale and ghastly, their little limbs-on removing a portion of the filthy covering - perfectly emaciated, eyes sunk, voice gone, and evidently in the last stage of actual starvation. Crouched over the turf embers was another form, wild and all but naked, scarcely human in appearance. It stirred not, nor noticed us. (Bennett, page 26.)

Who cared for these suffering children?

On some straw, soddened upon the ground, moaning piteously, was a shriveled old woman, imploring us to give her something, - baring her limbs partly, to show how the skin hung loose from the bones, as soon as she attracted our attention. Above her, on something like a ledge, was a young woman, with sunken cheeks, - a mother I have no doubt, - who scarcely raised her eyes in answer to our enquiries, but pressed her hand upon her forehead, with a look of unutterable anguish and despair. (Bennett, page 27.)

Unfortunately, Bennett's first-hand account* does not describe an isolated event. Other primary sources depict many families enduring the same kind of horror. Whole villages of healthy peasants were turned into evicted, starving, rag-clad people for whom death became a relief.

Within a few years, Irish tenant-farmers had gone from living in cottages (which landlords destroyed), to living in hovels, to living in earthen holes. *The Illustrated London News* published a sketch (in its December 29, 1849 issue), together with these words ([from a longer article](#)):

On arriving at the bog of Cahuermore [Cahermore], I alighted at the scalp shown in the Sketch, which Mr. Monsel and his companions discovered to their surprise, and found in it a woman dying of the customary fever which attends on want of food and clothing and the ordinary necessities of life.

Than this scalp [located not far from the village of Kilmurry, in County Cork, where 604 homes had been deliberately leveled "in the last two years"], nothing could be more wretched. It was placed in a hole, surrounded by pools, and three sides of the scalp (shown in the Sketch) were dripping with water, which ran in small streams over the floor and out by the entrance. Yet, wretched as this hole is, the poor inhabitants said they would be thankful and content if the landlord would leave them there, and the Almighty would spare their lives.



SCALP AT CAHUERMORE.

* While William Bennett was preparing his letters for publication as a book, during the summer of 1847, another work (in three volumes) was being readied for release in October of the same year. *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë - a novel which explores still-relevant issues (like bullying) and topics (like becoming independent despite class and gender discrimination) - remains popular with modern readers, movie-goers and television-watchers.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/FROM-COTTAGES-to-BOG-HOVELS-Irish-Potato-Famine-The-Great-Hunger)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/FROM-COTTAGES-to-BOG-HOVELS-Irish-Potato-Famine-The-Great-Hunger>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/FROM-COTTAGES-to-BOG-HOVELS-Irish-Potato-Famine-The-Great-Hunger)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/FROM-COTTAGES-to-BOG-HOVELS-Irish-Potato-Famine-The-Great-Hunger>

Questions 2 Ponder

Does Disaster Reporting Always Lead to Help for Victims?

Although mid-19th-century newspapers published stories about Ireland's disastrous famine, few resources were donated to help the victims.

About 18 months after the potato crop failed, journalists who visited Ireland were reporting horrific conditions for Irish families. Some of the evicted Irish tenant-farmers, with no place to go and little to eat, tried to shelter their families by living in holes dug in the Irish bog.

So many people were dying that families had no funds for proper burials and coffins were in very short supply.

William Bennett, in his 1847 "Narrative of a Recent Journey of Six Weeks in Ireland," tells us this at page 25:

Many of the cabins were holes in the bog, covered with a layer of turves, and not distinguishable as human habitations from the surrounding moor, until close down upon them. The bare sod was about the best material of which any of them were constructed. Doorways, not doors, were usually provided at both sides of the bettermost-back and front to take advantage of the way of the wind. Windows and chimneys, I think, had no existence.

If a disaster, like this, were to occur today, how would people respond?

Do you think the response, from people wanting to help those in need, would be different from the response of people to the Irish potato famine? Why, or why not?

Even today, does disaster reporting always lead to help for victims? Explain your answer.

What kind of disaster reporting do you think is most effective to generate help for victims? Why?

Media Stream



Irish Potato Famine - Evictions for No Reason

Image, and quoted passage, from "Evictions of Peasantry in Ireland," an [article](#) from the December 16, 1848 edition of *The Illustrated London News*. The quote, above, is itself a quote from an article in *The Tipperary Vindicator*.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Irish-Potato-Famine-Evictions-for-No-Reason>

Irish Village of Meinies in 1847

After the potato blight infected the crops of Irish tenant farmers, in the summer of 1845, crop failures led to widespread economic distress in Ireland.

In early 1847, *The Illustrated London News* published drawings of areas particularly hard-hit by famine in the western part of Ireland. Its [February 13th and 20th issues](#) include stories about how difficult it was for people to cope.



People in the village of Meinies (depicted in this image) were having a particularly hard time. Famine victims were dying but there were insufficient funds to have proper burials. Reporters and artists, trying to gather the facts and create accurate illustrations, had a hard time believing (and comprehending) the stories (and scenes) they were hearing (and seeing). Image from *The Illustrated London News*, February 13, 1847.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Irish-Village-of-Meinies-in-1847>

Bog Home during the Potato Famine

As the impact of failing Irish-potato crops worsened their economic situation, people in Ireland could not cope.

On the 29th of December, 1849, *The Illustrated London News* published an article which included this sketch. It depicts Margaret Vaughan, a woman who was living in a makeshift bog home in Cahuermore.

These are the words which the article uses to describe [the woman's plight](#):

On arriving at the bog of Cahuermore, I alighted at the scalp shown in the Sketch, which Mr. Monsel and his companions discovered to their surprise, and found in it a woman dying of the customary fever which attends on want of food and clothing and the ordinary necessities of life. Than this scalp [a name used to describe this type of "dwelling"], nothing could be more wretched.

It was placed in a hole, surrounded by pools, and three sides of the scalp (shown in the Sketch) were dripping with water, which ran in small streams over the floor and out by the entrance. Yet, wretched as this hole is, the poor inhabitants said they would be thankful and content if the landlord would leave them there, and the Almighty would spare their lives. Its principal tenant is Margaret Vaughan, whose history has found its way before the public, and a more wretched history, even in this country of wretchedness, is scarcely to be found. Not far from her cave is the destroyed village of Kilmurry Strikane, another of those pictures of desolation of which I have already sent you too many.

For the present I will leave them, and turn to a little oasis of humanity in the desert of misery. Many Irish people, during the years of the "potato famine," endured the same plight as Margaret Vaughan.

Click on the image for a better view.

Image published, with corresponding article, in the December 29, 1849 issue of "*The Illustrated London News*." Public Domain.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Bog-Home-during-the-Potato-Famine>





Irish Potato Famine - Forced Evictions and Poverty

Image, and quoted passage, from "Evictions of Peasantry in Ireland," an [article](#) from the December 16, 1848 edition of *The Illustrated London News*. The quote, above, is itself a quote from an article in *The Tipperary Vindicator*.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Irish-Potato-Famine-Forced-Evictions-and-Poverty>



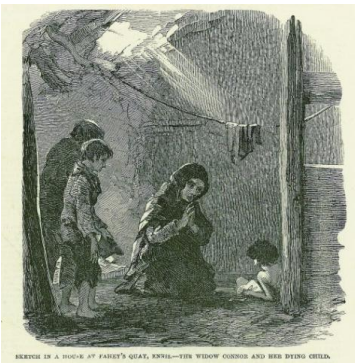
Potato Famine - Feeding Desperate People

Image, and quoted passage, from "Indian Corn in Cork," an article from the April 4, 1846 edition of *The Illustrated London News*. Online via Vassar College.

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Potato-Famine-Feeding-Desperate-People>



Potato Famine - Lack of Food and Shelter

Image and caption from "Conditions of Ireland: Illustrations of the New Poor-Law," an article from the January 19, 1850 issue of *The Illustrated London News*. Online via County Clare Library.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Potato-Famine-Lack-of-Food-and-Shelter>



Potato Famine - Life in a Scalp

Image, and quoted passage, from "Conditions of Ireland: Illustrations of the New Poor-Law," an article from the December 29, 1849 issue of *The Illustrated London News*.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Potato-Famine-Life-in-a-Scalp>



Potato Famine - What is a Scalp?

Image, and quoted passage, from "Conditions of Ireland: Illustrations of the New Poor-Law," a lengthy [article](#) from the December 29, 1849 issue of *The Illustrated London News*.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Potato-Famine-What-is-a-Scalp->



Potato Famine - What is a Scalpeen?

Image, and quoted passage, from "Conditions of Ireland: Illustrations of the New Poor-Law," an article from the December 15, 1849 issue of *The Illustrated London News*.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Potato-Famine-What-is-a-Scalpeen->



FROM COTTAGES to BOG HOVELS

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/FROM-COTTAGES-to-BOG-HOVELS>