

The decline of the Irish language in North Tipperary

By Mícheál Ó Gliasáin

Introduction

This article illustrates some of the problems involved in trying to reconstruct the decline of the Irish language in a particular area. It is based almost entirely on published sources. It is not intended to provide either a detailed description or an explanation of the decline of Irish in the north of the county. As regards description, the work of FitzGerald (1984) is taken as probably the best guide for the period it purports to describe (1771-1871). As regards explanations, it is not being argued here that any or all of the various suggested causes for the decline of Irish are necessarily wrong or utterly inappropriate for the area being studied.

Nor is any pet or pat alternative being suggested. Rather, it is more in the nature of a prolegomena, a preliminary clearing of the decks. The intention is to show that suggested explanations without sufficient supportive evidence are no more than speculation. It is hoped that the article will encourage more research into primary sources and generate more data-based theorising than heretofore.

While a case can be made that Co. Tipperary is representative of the country in certain respects, it is not claimed here that this is so in relation to Irish. The focus is on North Tipperary for the following reasons. Firstly, unlike other volumes in the county series of interdisciplinary essays published by Geography Publications, the volume devoted to Co. Tipperary (Nolan and McGrath, 1985) does not contain a special essay on the Irish language. The volume does contain some passing references to the topic, as do various other publications, and a small number of articles deal with it in some detail at specific times and locations in the county.

But the south of the county is much better documented than the north. This is partly due to the fact that Irish survived there longer as a vernacular and partly due to the work of a number of committed authors from that area. In his editorial to the ninth issue of the *Tipperary Historical Journal* (1996), Marcus Bourke bemoaned the fact that "Despite the editor's best efforts, material (from any discipline) relating to North Tipperary remains difficult to obtain, resulting in a regrettable imbalance in favour of South Tipperary that frustrates the aims of the founders of the sponsoring Society."

Whatever the reasons for this, the present article is a modest contribution from an amateur historian with paternal roots in, and happy memories of, North Tipperary. Secondly, Donal Murphy (1994: xxiii) notes that the Irish language is currently undergoing a sort of renaissance in North Tipperary, which, despite centuries of Gaelic rulers, became anglicised sooner than the more Normanised south of the county. This reversal, which is consistent with trends in census-claimed ability to speak Irish, is intriguing in itself, and it is hoped that the present article will interest others as well as language activists in the study area.

In the early 1900s, finding Nenagh "quiet and leaving it so", William Bulfin (1957: 220) was "surprised to find that the impulse of the Irish-Ireland movement [had] been felt less in Tipperary than in counties which might be supposed to be less Irish". He noted that this was

slowly changing under the influence of certain individuals, but did not mention use of Irish as a feature of this change. He was right not to do so. Yet he missed a mushrooming in local language activity by just a few months (see Breatnach, 1990). Almost a century later, we find Nenagh as the centre for the Gaelscoileanna ad hoc committee for all-Irish second-level education (*Irish Times*, 3.12.1997, Tuarascáil page) and winning the Glór na nGael main prize for the community which has done most to promote Irish (*Saol*, Márta, 1998, p. 1). It is to be hoped that the current renaissance will have long-term influences.

Evidence from the Census Language Question (CLQ)

Perhaps the most comprehensive description of the decline of Irish in the country as a whole, and in county Tipperary as well, is provided by the Irish language question in the Census of Population. A question about Irish was first asked in 1851 and has been included in a more or less standard form in most censuses since then. While the question and the data it produces are open to interpretation, there is no doubt that they provide consistent and meaningful patterns and trends, over space, time and other variables (see Ó Glasáin, 1996).

Table 1 shows that Tipperary South Riding was about seven times more Irish-speaking than the North Riding in 1851-61; about 2% ahead from 1911-36; about level in 1946-61, and has fallen gradually behind it since, to 5% in 1991. These figures refer to people who were returned as being *able to speak* Irish. That is, they include bilinguals who may rarely if ever use it.

TABLE 1

Percentage of Irish speakers in Tipperary North and South Ridings, 1851-1991

Based on the total population of all ages	Year	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1926
	North Riding	4.2	3.5	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	5.0	10.5
	South Riding	30.7	24.4	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	7.7	12.3
	Total County	18.9	15.2	10.1	11.9	7.1	6.1	6.6	11.5
Based on the population aged 3 years and over	Year	1926	1936	1946	1961	1971	1981	1986	1991
	North Riding	11.1	16.4	17.4	26.7	31.6	34.7	35.6	38.6
	South Riding	13.0	18.2	17.3	26.9	28.3	32.2	31.9	33.1

Source: Census of Population Irish Language volumes for relevant years (1851-1926 data are in the 1926 volume).

The 1851 CLQ recorded a mere 728 Irish monoglots in the whole of the county, almost all of whom were in the deep south. (The most northerly were in the baronies of Slievardagh (28) and Kilnamanagh Upper (2). There were none in Eliogarty.) But the lack of recorded monoglots in the north in 1851 cannot be taken at face value. For census purposes, an Irish monoglot was a person "*who speaks Irish, but cannot speak English*".¹ The belief of some contemporaries that the 1851 census generally undercounted persons who *normally spoke Irish* is supported by modern analysts, and it can be argued that there were many more of them some decades earlier.

Even if we confine ourselves to the recorded numbers, it can be plausibly argued that many recorded bilinguals may have spoken Irish as a mother tongue and been, if not virtual monoglots, then virtual Irish monolinguals; while others may have acquired Irish in dealing with such persons. All language shift was not necessarily towards English monolingualism.

Historical data from this census language question (CLQ) have been analysed in great detail and presented in the form of maps, tables and text by Dr Garret FitzGerald (1984). For a number of reasons, which he outlines, he considered the 1881 CLQ to be more reliable than earlier ones and so based most of his analysis on that census, backdating the claimed abilities in Irish for different age cohorts in baronies and towns to produce estimates of the *minimum* levels of Irish-speaking which would have been found in those areas when those cohorts were younger. However, he also makes limited use of earlier censuses, albeit with provisos, to extrapolate even further back to the 1770s. The census analysis by FitzGerald notes

"The apparent south-westward thrust of English at the expense of Irish through north Tipperary, into east Limerick, and eventually, down through central Cork, and a similar thrust across the Shannon into southeast Galway and east Clare, and eventually to the coast of Galway Bay." (FitzGerald, 1984: 138)

FitzGerald properly refers to the *apparent* thrust of English at the expense of Irish in North Tipperary. We simply do not know if, or to what extent, North Tipperary had been proportionately more English-speaking before the 1770s. We do not know how many people – never mind how many Irish speakers – lived there before that time. Despite claims to the contrary, the oft-cited classifications of "Irish" and "English" used in the so-called "Census" of 1659 have no necessary reference whatsoever to language. The 18th century population upsurge is still controversial and conjectural, but most scholars agree that it produced proportionately more poor people and therefore, presumably, more Irish speakers as well.

Elliott (1988: 5), citing a contemporary document, states that Irish was "dead" in North Tipperary by 1820. (In fact, his source indicated that under 50-60 year olds could understand English – Mac Lochlainn, 1975.) Elliott's remaining references to language are to the literacy of local Protestant emigrants (the sole evidence for which was often a poor attempt at a signature) and to Irish (presumably Hiberno-English) influences on Canadian English.

However, the 1851 CLQ data and FitzGerald's extrapolations suggest that Irish, while a declining minority language, was far from being "dead" in 1820. Although the three Tipperary baronies with the lowest numbers and percentages of Irish speakers in 1851 were those surrounding the Offaly "panhandle", each of them still contained a few hundred claimed Irish speakers – Lower Ormond (271 or 0.7% Irish speakers); Upper Ormond (437, 2.3%) and Ikerrin



Dromineer on Lough Derg. – Photo copyright Frank Burgess.

(296, 1.3%) – while among those who would have been 40-50 years old in 1820, the figures were 13%, 21% and 17% respectively (Ó Cuív, 1951: 89; Ó hÓgáin, 1981: 10; FitzGerald, 1984: Table 3).

Although these backward extrapolations are based on those who *survived* various serious outbreaks of disease, famine and emigration, it would be rash to conclude that they should be appreciably higher. There is only implicit evidence that the crowded mountain areas of poor land had been refuges of dispossessed Irish-speakers, whatever about “Gaelic culture”. Even if they had been, the Irish speakers probably constituted enclaves and/or social networks with a longer history of residence. (The fertile plains had been subjected to serious population clearances before the Great Famine of the 1840s, with the dispossessed moving up the mountains.²)

Moreover, while census data indicate that population loss was highest in the crowded mountain areas during the Famine decade, this need not mean that death rates were higher there. People may not have had money to emigrate, but they could relocate elsewhere in the locality. There is evidence that they initially stayed in the area and went to work for local farmers, moving to the towns during outbreaks of disease and famine. And people were more likely to die prematurely in urban than in rural areas, before, during and after the Famine.

A *prima facie* case can be made in relation to the role of various groups and processes in the decline of Irish. These include significant leaders and reference groups; the demography of, and relations between, ethnic, religious and occupational groups; the expansion of public administration, urbanisation, communications, commerce, paper transactions, schools and churches into new areas; institutionalisation of and outreaching to marginalised groups, etc. As will be shown below, the evidence for all of these is inconclusive, and while the census provides the most – and probably the best – evidence from 1770 onwards, we may have to leave open the possibility that much of the language shift had pre-dated these earliest CLQ extrapolations.

Lack of historical sources on Irish in NW Tipperary

There is little or no information from the normally cited early 19th century sources. The [Royal] Dublin Society series of county *Statistical Surveys* (1802-38) enquired about, *inter alia*, “the use of the English language, whether general, or how far increasing”, so that they indicated the use of Irish only inferentially. Moreover, the information in them depended largely on the individual who surveyed each county, so that it varied in quality (Ó Cuív, 1951: 20). In any case, the survey of county Tipperary remains unpublished.

According to Nolan (1985: 462: n.7) it contains “a wealth of data plagiarised from a great variety of sources” but it has been described as “of little value” by Prof Leslie Clarkson (cited in O’Brien, 1989: 158). The Tipperary section in the series of *Parochial Surveys* (1814-19), based on information from Protestant clergy, covers only three contiguous parishes on the southeast border with Co. Waterford; but this was effectively a “Gaeltacht” area, which is well-attested in various sources. Wakefield’s *An account of Ireland, statistical and political* (1812) reported “Irish very common” in the county (Ó Cuív, 1951: 89). But there is no mention of Irish in Co. Tipperary in Stokes’s *The necessity of publishing the scriptures in Irish* (1806) nor in Lewis’s *Topographical Dictionary* (1837, reprinted in Murphy, 1994), although they both note it in other counties.

A handful of somewhat unsatisfactory surveys carried out between 1820 and 1830 (Mac Lochlainn, 1975, de Brún, 1978, 1983a) indicate that monoglot Irish speakers in the north of the

county were very rare and elderly;³ but this does not mean that Irish was not widely understood or used by younger cohorts. Stray references to bilingual native Irish speakers can be found from most periods, even into the present century. Unfortunately, many of these references are ambiguous and are not necessarily representative.

For instance, during the 1798 rebellion, the High Sheriff felt it worth his while to speak "partly" in Irish during his three hour session with locals at Templemore. Like many other such references from around the country, we have no idea of the relative size or representativeness of the target audience, or the necessity to use Irish with them. In 1838 William and Joseph Le Fanu, sons of the rector of Abington, on the Limerick-NW Tipperary border, were being guided on a local mountain tour with a group of companions when, suddenly enveloped in a thick fog, the guide "tried to cheer us up by constantly saying 'Nabochlish' (never mind) [*recte Ná bac leis*] 'the houses is near, the houses is near'." McCormack (1991: 34) describes the guide as "a Gaelic speaker from Tipperary".

He does not state that William so described him; but even had William done so, the quote itself would indicate at least minimal competence in English – unless, of course, William had translated the quote from Irish into Hiberno-English dialect: "Nabochlish" (variously spelt) was one of those Irish phrases, like *acushla* and *mavourneen*, which survived into popular Hiberno-English. This is a typical problem for reconstructing former sociolinguistic situations. Moreover, some 19th century definitions of terms such as *Gaeilgeoir*, *Irishian*, *To Know Irish* (see e.g., Ó Madagáin, 1974: 46, nn.104-5) differ from modern dictionary definitions and popular usage. The same applies in the case of numerous other words related less directly but nonetheless relevantly to the Irish language such as *Literacy*, *Native Irish*, *The Big House*, *Planter*, *Gael*, *Peasant*, *Farmer*, *Culchie*, *Jackeen*, etc.

Church records – doubtful value

Several Protestant proselytising societies, not least those concerned with converting Irish Roman Catholics through the medium of Irish, kept abundant records. Unfortunately, they are incomplete and controversial. For example, the districts used by the Irish Society for the Education of the Native Irish through the Medium of their Own Language (one of the major societies) were variously renamed and are difficult to pin down. The *Carrick-on-Suir* (earlier *Callan*, Nov. 1825, and *Kilkenny*, Feb. 1826) district extended into Co. Kilkenny, as did the *Tipperary* district (at least in 1828, although it may have been established in June 1826 – de Brún, *Eigse* 20: 37), while the *Thurles* district was not set up until June 1827, at which point the Society's records peter out (de Brún, 1983: 281 & note 264).

Thus, for example, was the John Gleeson who taught in the Irish Society's Callan/Kilkenny/Carrick-on-Suir district between 1825-27 the same John Gleeson teaching at Modeshill in 1824, or even the John Gleeson teaching in Thurles in 1824? Moreover, in Tipperary, as elsewhere, the numbers they claimed to have taught and influenced were disputed at the time (e.g., McGrath, 1985) and are probably unresolvable at this stage. Nonetheless, there are occasional hints about local linguistic situations and other relevant matters. For example, "virtually all" the scholars returned for the Tipperary and Carrick-on-Suir districts were adults. This is in stark contrast with other areas (e.g., only 23% in Claremorris), which "suggests that the Irish Society may have provided the only schooling available in some places" (de Brún, 1983: 329). Roman Catholic schools in Tipperary are discussed below.

Roman Catholic Church records generally began to be kept much later than Protestant ones and in any case are not very enlightening on the language situation either. This applies even for

the much more Irish-speaking, and much better documented, south of the county. This is easily illustrated by a handful of references to Irish in O'Shea's detailed study of priests, politics and society in post-famine Tipperary.

"In 1841 William Heffernan, P.P. Clerihan, asked Archbishop Slattery to send him a curate who could speak Irish and hear confessions in that language. During the Land War some Tipperary tenants were unable to speak English, and Thomas Finn P.P. Newcastle put himself forward as interpreter in the land courts. The decrees of the provincial synod of Cashel, drawn up in September 1853 and published in 1854, placed responsibility upon the bishops to see that their priests were proficient in Irish." (O'Shea, 1983: 18)

Both Clerihan and Newcastle parishes are in areas of South Tipperary which census data show to have had the county's highest levels of Irish at that time, outliers of even stronger Irish areas in Co. Waterford. (Newcastle is actually in Waterford diocese: the question of court interpreters, etc. is discussed elsewhere.) The Clerihan request seems to have been unique. Certainly, it is the only parish in regard to which there is any mention of language in the Cashel Diocesan reports on 91 visits to 35 parishes between 1846-55 (O'Shea, 1983: Table 7).

Under the heading "Regular Sunday Instruction", most visitations record either "yes" [there is such] or leave it blank. As all parishes record blanks for 1846 and 1847, maybe the question did not apply until 1848. In any case, Clerihan's two subsequent visitations show "Eng/Irish" in 1852 (the only such entry), and "yes" in 1855. That is the sum of our information. With regard to the bishops' responsibility to provide Irish-proficient priests, the contemporary situation with regard to Latin in Maynooth seminary is worth noting:

"A working knowledge of Latin was essential because many lectures were delivered in that language ... Deficiencies were repaired during the first few years at Maynooth, and the penalty of expulsion for continued lack of progress was rarely imposed because of the shortage of priests in Ireland in the early years of the century. There is some evidence however, that the standard of Latin among students left something to be desired." (O'Shea, 1983: 17).

We will return to the Roman Catholic church in more northerly parts of the county below.

Evidence from literacy and dialects

A question on literacy was asked in all national censuses of population from 1841 to 1911 inclusive. It is generally taken to refer more or less exclusively to literacy in English.⁴ Paradoxically, the first three CLQs on *oral* Irish (1851, 1861, 1871) were a footnote to this pre-Independence literacy question. It was only in 1881 that the Irish CLQ was elevated into the body of the census schedule as a question in its own right, which is one of the reasons why experts such as G.B. Adams and FitzGerald take the 1881 CLQ to be the most reliable of the early CLQs.

The numbers who were returned as able to read and/or write on this census literacy question are often taken as a proxy measure of the minimum numbers able to speak English. This need not be so at all. Indeed, it need not even mean that they were functionally literate in English. Current writers vary in the way they define literacy and in the way they interpret the extant historical evidence on literacy, which is often a mere signature, and a not very good one at that.⁵

Although FitzGerald warns that the CLQ data "carry with them no implications for dialect", he also seems to imply, perhaps unconsciously, that the progress of anglicisation in North Tipperary paralleled the earlier direction of Munster Irish influences on Connacht Irish:

"An ambiguous situation of Clare in terms of dialect is described by O'Rahilly (1932: 262-3), where he suggests that Munster influences may have penetrated into Connacht Irish mainly across the Shannon between Lough Derg and Lough Ree rather than from County Clare – although he also (p. 137) describes links between the Irish of Waterford, Tipperary, East Limerick and Clare" (FitzGerald, 1984: 155).

In fact, O'Rahilly was referring to *Southern* Irish, which incorporated both Munster and the ancient province of Leinster. But the latter excluded most of the former province of Meath – "the battleground of the dialects" – which extended as far south as Birr, Co. Offaly, on the modern north Tipperary border. Despite meagre data, revisionism, and disagreements among linguists, it seems that North Tipperary straddled the two southern dialects. While most of the county used Munster Irish, the dialect line ran through Lower Ormond and Birr (Williams, 1994).

However, prolonged dialect contact need not lead to language shift. There is evidence from other places that vernacular Irish can last longer in areas where different dialects meet than in single-dialect areas. The successful experience of a quarter century of Raidió na Gaeltachta further exemplifies this fact. In any case, Ó Cuív (1951: 71) too notes the links between the Irish of Waterford, south Tipperary, east Limerick and Clare, and adds parts of northeast Cork. But the role of North Tipperary is not elaborated.⁶

Powerful lordships and language

Ó Cuív (1951:71-2) makes the tentative suggestion that an extensive lordship under a powerful feudal lord may have helped to mould and sustain particular dialects in the past. He instances a "fairly homogeneous" dialect of Irish extending from Carrignavar, north of Cork city, west to the Kerry border and north into Duhallow, centred on the Muskerry East and West baronies. In the 16th century, this area was ruled tightly by a branch of the McCarthys, who had been forced out of mid-Tipperary some centuries earlier. They kept at least half of the area as demesne land for themselves, a comparatively small portion was divided among lesser McCarthys, and about a third was divided among subject clans. Be that as it may, by the first half of the 19th century both the census and non-census data indicate that this area was much less Irish monolingual than other areas in Cork (FitzGerald, 1984: 155).

It could be argued that the Butlers in Kilkenny and Tipperary played a similar role to the McCarthys in Cork. In Co. Tipperary, Irish survived longest in the south where large estates were individually owned by Roman Catholic members of interbred Gaelic, Norman and other immigrant ethnic groups, up to but excluding the New English. All however, were ultimately beholden to the Butler overlord. Many in fact were Butlers themselves, or related to them through marriage. Various authors refer to the friendly mantle or shield or umbrella of the Butlers as an explanation of how so many Catholic gentry and landowners survived as such for so long in Co. Tipperary. This was most apparent in South Tipperary, which was more Normanised and under Butler control than North Tipperary.

Despite numerous interruptions down through the centuries, most of the Tipperary Butlers retained or regained their lands and continued to support Roman Catholicism and Gaelic

culture. Some of them however, partly out of class concerns at the agrarian outrages of their poor fellow Roman Catholics, became increasingly anglicised, signing petitions of loyalty and/or converting formally to the established church. Did the poorer classes follow their example? If they had contempt for them, why should they do so? But there is little evidence of such contempt as long as "apostates" practised "fair play".

With particular regard to the Irish language in the nominally anglicised Big Houses of the former Gaelic[/ised] aristocracy, there is a tendency to extrapolate from, and to speculate upon, rather flimsy evidence. A traditional account, written down in 1895 by a gardener of the North Tipperary Cromwellian Prittie family, tells how a famous duellist member of the anglicised gentry Carrol family of Nenagh (formerly aristocratic Gaelic O'Carrolls) fought a British officer on their behalf at Limerick in 1786. It has the Carrol landlord understanding a helpful hint in Irish from his "loving crony and servant" at a crucial moment in the fight, although they appear to have been speaking in English up to that point. However, the authenticity of the whole account – including the identity of the Carrol duellist – is questioned by one of his modern descendants, whose own father appears to have believed it (O'Carroll Robertson, 1994: 23) and by Murphy (1994: 80 n49), who had another version of the same story as well as a similar story from the Knight of Glin. Similarly suspect accounts could be cited from other areas in Ireland.

Urbanisation's impact

A notable feature of rural South Tipperary was that it coexisted with settled urban centres for centuries, yet remained Irish-speaking. By contrast, Irish began to decline in the north of the county where, from the 17th century onwards, the revived anglicised branch of the Norman Butler family and Cromwellian grandees, who lived behind their newly constructed high walls, introduced numerous small villages and commercial centres as well as foreign Protestants to settle in them and on the best farmland (see Smyth, 1991 and Jones Hughes, 1985 & 1986).

In the mid-17th century, "the new urban frontiers" of Tipperary were in the west and north of the county at Clogheen, Tipperary town, Roscrea and Nenagh.

"Most of the smaller foundations were also in these regions, marking the growing penetration of the formerly autonomous Gaelic heartlands by expanding commercial influences. In contrast, in the Old English core of the south and east of the county were located the older, more continuous and more durable urban worlds of Thurles, Fethard, Cashel, Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir. These old towns exhibited both more complex physical morphologies and social structures than the still rudimentary, if now thriving, fair towns of the north and west" (Smyth, 1991: 165-6).

The two western towns need not detain us here, except to note that although they had at least their fair share of official conversions to the established church, the Protestant presence in them was relatively small in the longer-term compared with the north of the county.⁷ Our chief concern is with Roscrea and Nenagh, the chief urban centres in the north and northwest respectively. Here, the expansion was "under the careful patronage" of the Butler Earl/Duke of Ormond, the head of the Tipperary palatinate who had been dispossessed under Cromwell but who – like most of the other dispossessed landowners – had managed to recover much of their lands and economic power and influence after the Restoration.

Unlike more southerly areas of the county (especially the centres of Cahir and Kilcash), where junior members of the Ormond dynasty and their wealthy network of intermarried

fellow-Catholics tended to support both the Catholic Church *and* Gaelic culture, the head of the family was a non-resident Anglophile, close to the Royal Court, who had been reared in England as a Protestant. Ormond is said to have learnt Irish in his early 20s during the 1630s by conversing with Irish gentlemen in London. "He understood it perfectly well and could express himself well enough in familiar conversation, but considered himself not so well qualified as to discourse about serious matters". In such cases, he always spoke in English but allowed weak English speakers to speak in Irish (Hyde, 1980: 614). He entrusted his urbanisation and commercialisation policy in NW Tipperary to his closest kin (his Mathew and Hamilton brothers-in-law) and to his allies based in Kilkenny, the family's headquarters in Ireland.

Thurles and the reorganised Roman Catholic Church

Thurles was the property of the Mathew family, who were close kin of the Ormond Butlers. As the traditional archdiocesan centre of Cashel was in the hands of the established church, the 18th century Catholic Butlers chose Thurles as a springboard for the revitalisation of Irish Roman Catholicism. Three related Butlers served there consecutively as Archbishops from 1712-1791. The town was intended by these Butlers and their successors to be a model centre from which orthodox Roman Catholicism (as opposed to traditional Irish versions) was to be diffused throughout the country. The organisation of lay catechists and the building of schools and churches were important elements in this plan.

There is a tradition that Christopher Butler, Archbishop of Cashel from 1712- 1757, who spent his last years living with relations near Callan, Co. Kilkenny, used to walk in the grounds with his niece, reciting the rosary in Irish (Nic Eoin, 1990: n.32). Be that as it may, some 20 years later in 1778 his kinsman, Archbishop James Butler II, founded the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament. Its members were

"to teach the Christian doctrine, if appointed for the purpose, in English or Irish to the young and old, in the chapel, and at the station for the catechism in town and country. To read pious books for them; and particularly to instruct and prepare the children and others for their Holy Communion".

The catechism distributed by the Confraternity members was Butler's own composition. It was in English. Roman Catholic chapels, most of which were very primitive, were often used for secular purposes during the week, especially as schoolhouses, and in such cases the school teacher was obliged to teach Christian doctrine as part of the curriculum. The Butlers' successor, Archbishop Bray (1792-1820) regularised this *ad hoc* practice in 1810 by founding a society of Christian doctrine in every parish whose members were to give catechetical instruction in the chapel on Sundays and were to follow the same instructions laid down by Archbishop Butler in 1778, as quoted above, including that relating to teaching in English or Irish.

At the same time however, Bray denounced a variety of traditional "Catholic" practices, many of which involved Gaelic, e.g., funeral keening and swearing on the "Bearnán Cualn" (Whelan, 1985: 226, 243-4). But these were not direct attacks on the use of Irish as such. In fact, Archbishop Bray's instructions concerning abuses at wakes and funerals, issued *ca* 1800, ordered that they should be "repeated as often as occasion may require, and where necessary, should also be explained in Irish" (Ó Súilleabháin, 1969: 21). Wakes were opposed by Roman Catholic churchmen and others for many reasons – as occasions of drunken, lewd and rowdy behaviour, etc. (*ibid.*: *passim*), or the spread of disease such as typhus and cholera (Robins, 1995).

Schools in Thurles

Wallace (1989) claims that "with the advent of the *de facto* denominational school system of education, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine gradually disappeared" (p 53). However, in 1824-5, less than a decade before the National School system was established, there were nearly 700 pupils attending Roman Catholic lay schools in Thurles (two boys to one girl). Most of these day schools were "cabins", the one with the most pupils (70) being described as "a miserable hovel" by the Commissioners of Education. Unfortunately, we know little or nothing about what went on in these schools, or what their attendance records were like.

A similar number of pupils attended the Ursuline, Presentation and Christian Brothers schools in Thurles at that time (one boy to two girls, including about 70 girl boarders, most, presumably, from outside Thurles). These religious order schools had been wooed to Thurles by Archbishop Butler, although disputes over his bequest (*inter alia*) had delayed their coming. Whelan attributes the "rapidity with which spoken Irish vanished from Tipperary" in large measure to the arrival of the Ursuline teaching order of nuns in Thurles in 1787. "French in origin, urban-based, geared to educating the bourgeoisie, using English as the language of communication, working hand in glove with the local clergy", they were followed to Thurles between 1815-20 by the Presentation sisters, who modelled themselves on the Ursulines but catered for the poor, and by the Christian Brothers who catered for boys.

According to plan, these orders radiated outwards, setting up further schools. Yet Irish lasted longer in Eliogarty barony (where Thurles was situated) than in northwest Tipperary which had none of these anglicising institutions until much later. We might note that the Thurles Ursulines were among the first subscribers to the first printed edition of Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin's Irish language *Pious Miscellany* in 1802, which was "orthodox in most ways, but which was not entirely representative of the direction of the official Catholic church" (Ó Ciosáin, 1997: 118, 124).

While conditions in the religious order schools were much better than in the lay-run schools, Ó Dúgáin (1989) contends that, despite the "plethora" of schools in the town, most children in Thurles either stayed away from school altogether or else did not attend beyond the infant classes. He bases this conclusion partly on the fact that Thurles CBS had an average attendance of only 200 over its first 50 years of operation, and on literacy figures for Thurles in 1841, which showed 48% of over-five-year-olds still unable to read or write.

But these figures are broadly compatible with the county and national averages at the time (51% and 53% respectively) and with the 55% unable to read *Irish* in Tipperary North Riding in the 1981 CLQ. As most people in the present century learnt their Irish at school, where the main emphasis was on reading and writing, it is assumed, backed by research, that those who can speak Irish can read it also.

TABLE 2a

Literacy of the Thurles population, aged over 5 years, in 1841

	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Can read and write	1,418	832	2,250	46.7%	23.1%	33.9%
Can read only	424	760	1,184	14.0%	21.1%	17.8%
Can do neither	1,192	2,014	3,206	39.3%	55.8%	48.3%
Total	3,034	3,606	6,640	100%	100%	100%

Source: Based on Ó Dúgáin, 1989.

Note: Literacy is normally taken to mean literacy in English – and is so here – but this can be questioned.

TABLE 2b

Irish abilities of the Tipperary North Riding population, aged 5 years and over, in 1981

	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Can speak Irish	9,304	9,798	19,102	34.3%	38.0%	36.1%
Can read only	2,375	2,378	4,753	8.8%	9.3%	9.0%
Can do neither	15,441	13,592	29,033	56.9%	52.7%	55.0%
Total	27,120	25,768	52,888	100%	100%	100%

Source: 1981 CLQ volume and unpublished runs on literacy provided by the Central Statistics Office.

Support for churches

Unfortunately, there is very little evidence on the state of the Catholic church in northwest Tipperary, most of which was in the Killaloe diocese. Even the social background of the Roman Catholic clergy is largely unknown. For instance, the details on five of the six Gleeson priests who ministered in that area during the second half of the 19th century tell us little more than the periods they spent in each parish and the fact that they were all politically active. We do not know when or where they were born or educated, or their social backgrounds (see O'Shea, 1983: 326-360).

However, the abundant archives relating to the state of the church elsewhere in Tipperary, especially in the contiguous Thurles-centred Cashel & Emly diocese, show that the middle classes generally were the backbone of the church, both financially and in terms of personnel; that the clergy were overwhelmingly recruited from "rich lowland parishes, with a significant element from the towns" (Whelan, 1985: 245); that the urbanised poor and the poorer hill farmers had the lowest weekly mass attendance in the 1830s and were not very involved – and in many cases were antagonistic towards – the "official" Roman Catholic church (O'Shea, 1983: 31; Whelan, 1985: 242); and were the last to build new churches. The extant data from the northwest area supports these findings. Thus, while we have little data on the valuations of chapels and parishes in the area, the northwest Catholic parishes were among the lowest contributors to the Daniel O'Connell "Tribute" of 1834.

The new church at New Birmingham, in the hilly countryside of east Tipperary, was built (1813-15) by local landlord Vere-Hunt, on the understanding that the priest, Dr. Meighan, would repay him with parishioners' contributions. "However, these subscriptions, despite promises, were slow in materialising so that Meighan was obliged to refuse to say Mass until they were paid" (Whelan, 1985: 229). Similarly, their hill-dwelling Catholic contemporaries in northwest Tipperary, despite their alleged material "substance" and that of their urbanised kinsfolk (shopkeepers, publicans, etc.) were slow to fund the building of churches.

They were eventually built nonetheless, and in such isolated upland areas the Roman Catholic chapel was often the only service available locally to isolated mountain communities. Along with the barracks, they were "the only intrusive elements in these village-less, small-farm, kin-connected mountain communities" (Whelan, 236). Were either or both of these responsible for the decline of Irish? The references to Irish in the better-documented south of the county, where Irish was more widespread, illustrate these data deficiencies.

Chapel villages' roles

Jones Hughes (1985: 358ff) emphasises the different roles in different types of areas played by the location of new Roman Catholic chapels built during the "dramatic re-emergence of institutionalised Catholicism" in 19th century Tipperary. The highest ratio between operating Catholic churches and pre-reformation centres was in Eliogarty barony, which contains Thurles. It was also high in areas which had remained the most Gaelic in culture and language.

By contrast, the lowest ratios were in the most heavily planted areas such as the northwest, where "the challenge presented by the presence of the planter in this way contributed to the enhancement of village life" (p 362). Here, the new churches not only created new parish centres for redefined parish boundaries – both of which were distinct from the medieval ones used both by the established church and by the civic authorities – but new secular foci as well. Many of these new centres were based on service sites associated with the new government roads – some of them with only tiny populations – bypassing a variety of traditional centres.

"Essentially they were the product of two main stimuli making for the development of vigorous new forms of village life in the early nineteenth century. On the one hand, the rehabilitated church ... was seeking appropriate settlement foci for its fresh parochial structures, and on the other hand the state was becoming more aware of its obligations locally as a provider of elementary welfare services, especially as these were concerned with health, justice and education. Chapel villages were, therefore, in origin embryonic service centres attached to a parish system." (Jones Hughes, 1985: 365)

The Catholic church itself built upon its own chapel villages by locating its schools near them. However, although they ultimately supplanted many traditional centres, including many associated with the planter class, thereby playing a vital role in the "decolonising" process, Jones Hughes also states that

"In the Ireland of the early nineteenth century the nature of its devotional rituals, its apparent lack of concern for Christian Ireland's impressive Celtic roots and its generally urbane flavour gave the impression that the reborn Catholic Church was yet another alien intruder. It differed, however, from other intrusive movements, including the medieval church, in that it was entirely manned by natives."

The strong implication is that vernacular Irish was a casualty of this process. However, he states that these new parish centres were often so pathetically poor in their early stages that they were not only "derided" but were even ignored by the valuers and census enumerators (p 366). This may be true for the Griffith's Valuation surveyors and for the earlier censuses, but the census coverage appears to have been "sorted out" by the time of the first CLQ in 1851 and the CLQ data can be extrapolated backwards to earlier periods in ways that other data cannot. (Jones Hughes also states that "a church seems to be an indispensable component of village life" in Ireland (p 360). The case of "chapel-less" agricultural settlement clusters in marginal areas is discussed elsewhere.)

Communications and transport

Hindley's view (1990: 164) that physical remoteness at a time when cars were rare was an "aid to survival" of Irish in Gaeltacht areas is backed by many other commentators⁸ and by

some *prima facie* evidence. For example, there is a remarkable correspondence, though by no means perfect, between the areas which were more than ten miles from public transport (canals and roads) in 1841 (NHI 5: Map 8) and the modern Gaeltacht. Be that as it may, the decline of Irish in NW Tipperary had preceded the opening up of communications. Substantial commercial and passenger traffic on the Shannon only began in 1827 when steam ships began operating from Dromineer on Lough Derg, linking it with Limerick, Dublin and many other anglicised areas; but the commercial traffic involved very few people and most of the passengers were departing emigrants (Grace, 1991).

The series of Anglesey roads which opened up the area date from the same time (1828) while the railway, which had reached Thurles during the Famine, did not reach Nenagh, the local town centre, until 1862. By contrast, the Irish-speaking south of the county had always been linked by navigable rivers to the trading ports and had regular road public transport since 1815-16, when Bianconi's Clonmel-based coach service linked Cahir, Carrick-on-Suir, Tipperary town and Thurles.

Obviously, there had always been ways of getting from one place to another. However, great store was laid at the time, and still is by many authors, on the role of the Anglesey roads in opening up the "hidden Ireland" of NW Tipperary. Most of the county west and northwest of Thurles, except for the Ormond plain, was mountainous. It was also deemed to be lawless and backward and an affront to civilised government.

The plan of Lord Lieutenant Anglesey was to divide the mountains in four by building two intersecting "government" roads, one from Ballycahill near Thurles to Newport in the west, the other from Nenagh in the NW to Tipperary in the SW. These were built to plan but a parallel plan to generate economic activities in the areas was aborted. We will return to these roads again. For now, it is sufficient to note that they provided increased opportunities for travel and communication and that small service sites developed around turnpikes and other road intersections.

Geographically mobile individuals/groups

It could be hypothesised that language shift was facilitated by travellers of various kinds – beggars, dancing masters, musicians, entertainers, emigration agents, recruiting agents, journeymen, pedlars, pilgrims, preachers, proselytisers, poor scholars, teachers, tourists, etc. – the various "shuilers" and "callers at the door", most of whom are described as being invariably welcome in different parts of rural Ireland (see, e.g., Carbery, 1973; MacManus, 1988). Besides such individual shuilers and group visits by spalpeens, navvies, tinkers, etc., it seemed at times during the frequent outbreaks of disease in the first half of the 19th century that the whole country was on the move, with well-off people fleeing built-up areas and hordes of rural dwellers taking to the roads and descending on the towns (Robins, 1995).

With regard to beggars for example, Lady Glengall, from the Cahir district of Tipperary, noted on a General Board of Health questionnaire in 1821 that "strolling mendicants are numerous and the poor rarely refuse to admit them, often in whole families" (Luddy, 1991:77). The context was disease-spread; but why not language spread – or indeed, language maintenance, if hosts and guests spoke the same language?

With regard to spalpeens, hostility towards them appears to have been particularly strong in Tipperary and neighbouring areas. Indeed, as late as the 1930s North Tipperary workers, like those in other areas, successfully opposed official plans to employ and permanently house Gaeltacht migrant workers at the new semi-state sugar factories then being established,



A recent view of Main St., Borrisokane. – Photo copyright Frank Burgess.

insisting that any new employment should go to locals (Foy, 1976: 42). O'Dowd (1991: 268) cites a report from 1869, referring to the situation in Tipperary *ca.* 1800, where Kerry spalpeens, who "slept huddled together in a barn or outhouse", would be called out individually at night and forced to pronounce the Irish word "gabhar", a Kerry pronunciation guaranteeing them a brutal beating or worse. However, the 1869 informant gave no source for his information and O'Dowd suspects exaggeration in the method of detection, if not the treatment meted out to those detected. On the other hand, Kerry spalpeens seem to have brought home elements of Tipperary folklore (Ó hÓgáin, 1985: n.39), indicating at least some social intercourse with locals.

In 18th century Kilkenny, Whiteboys, many from neighbouring Tipperary, were unpopular and were known disparagingly as "Munstermen" (Trench, 1997: 167). Amhlaoibh Ó Súilleabháin refers in his diary (August, 1828) to the annual arrival of Tipperary reapers in his part of west Co. Kilkenny (Callan, near the east Co. Tipperary border), but alludes neither to their social (as opposed to their economic) acceptability in the area nor to their language (de Bhaldraithe, 1979: 56-57). Amhlaoibh was an enlightened outsider who sympathised with the lot of all poor people, including spalpeens, and actively helped them.

By contrast, Walter McDonald, a native south Kilkenny man from Mooncoin, near counties Tipperary and Waterford, an Irish-speaking area, recalled that in his youth (the 1850s-60s), he and his local peers had been deliberately reared as monolingual English speakers by bilingual parents who instilled in them a contempt for the Irish language and for those who could not speak English well. It was only much later in life that he rued the fact that despite "every opportunity of learning Irish" from Waterford spalpeens in their youth, they had refused to do so (Nic Eoin, 1990: 469).

However, we have no idea if his peers shared his later change of attitude. Even if they had learned Irish from the spalpeens, it is likely that they would have learned a lower class language register, which might have caused problems given the later conflict between

exponents of "book Irish" and of "caint na ndaoine". We simply cannot base any conclusions about the sociolinguistic role of spalpeens on the basis of such stray and unrepresentative references.

Breatnach (1990: 215) was told that his father and uncle learned their Irish in Tipperary earlier this century, not only at school and from a few old local speakers, but also from numerous beggars and from Waterford railway navvies. As there is evidence that many of the 19th century CLQ Irish speakers recorded in counties Wicklow and Kildare were railway navvies from other counties, some of whom settled in those counties (Hannigan, 1988: 23), it might be worth investigating this for North Tipperary also. On the other hand, some of the Waterford navvies may have been recently settled spalpeens from other counties. O'Dowd (p 298) lists a number of places where spalpeens settled down in Waterford, South Tipperary and East Limerick, but gives no example from North Tipperary.

Ó Muimhneacháin's view that the famous Munster Irish-speaking seanchaí, Timothy "The Tailor" Buckley, probably achieved his mastery of English while plying his trade in English-speaking areas seems plausible; and he was hardly unique. Yet one hears very little of anglophone journeymen picking up Irish in Irish-speaking areas. J.M. Synge reported successful English-speaking pedlars with no Irish on the Aran Islands, but Bulfin noted that the successful continental Jewish pedlars in the midlands had at least some English.

Indeed, Bianconi had arrived in Dublin as an Italian-speaking travelling pedlar "with practically no English" and within a few years, "now more fluent in English", had established a successful business in Clonmel (Ó Corrbuí, 1991: 191). One wonders if he picked up any Irish as, in recent decades, some town shopkeepers in Gaeltacht areas have, and as Pakistani pedlars in Gaelic-speaking Scotland have picked up Gaelic. Incidentally, Bianconi is said to have been known to his customers in Clonmel as *Brian Cooney* – "the nearest Irish sound they could get to his name" (Byrne & McMahon, 1994: 25). However, it is said that he was known as *Brian Connolly* in Dublin (Glasheen, 1956). It is plausible that this could have happened as a joke, but not due to genuine linguistic confusion.

Two letters to the *Tipperary Free Press* (14 and 17 November, 1827) suggest that pedlars and hawkers were popular among consumers in Thurles for selling books, among other items "not generally sold in any shop" there. One wonders how much (if any) they sold of the abundant Irish language printed material then popular in Munster (see Ó Ciosáin, 1997: 70, 154ff). Clearly, on the basis of such stray examples, we cannot generalise about the linguistic interaction involved or form a reliable picture of the linguistic situation even at that time, never mind extrapolate backwards to when such areas were more Irish-speaking. For example, "we are in the dark about the travelling hucksters and gray merchants who must have been active on the roads" of 17th century Tipperary (Smyth, 1991: 164).

Security forces' contacts

The interaction between local people and soldiers stationed in Irish-speaking districts is inconclusive and will not be discussed here, except to comment on one of the most quoted sources for Tipperary, the semi-autobiographical novel *Lavengro* by British author George Borrow. Borrow claimed to have learnt Irish from a bilingual Clonmel playmate while his army father was stationed there in 1815-16 and to have used it effectively later on in North Tipperary, especially in the Templemore area. However, Borrow was an eccentric, amateur polylingual whose father strongly disapproved of his son's enthusiasm; and in any case, all his reported Irish-speaking encounters seem to have involved bilinguals (Borrow, 1947: 71ff).

Ó Corrbuí (1991: 74) reports Templemore-bound Galway pilgrims with little or no English being helped by a Connemara Irish-speaking policeman stationed at Cloughjordan in 1920. In fact, by that time policemen from Irish-speaking areas were often among the few Irish speakers in many parts of Ireland – e.g., in Monsea parish, northwest Tipperary, where only two Co. Tipperary-born adults were returned as able to speak Irish in the 1901 census, two Kerry-born R.I.C. men were also returned as Irish speakers (see Grace, 1996a: 208).

It was only from the late 1830s that locally-based units of police became a significant ongoing presence in most areas, but the evidence on their relationships with local communities is inconclusive: many policemen were acceptable, even popular, as individuals (Brady, 1974). Their linguistic effectiveness in Irish-speaking areas (including their role as census enumerators) is even more inconclusive and cannot be discussed here; but it is noteworthy that Irish-speaking Gardaí still had language problems in the “Irish Using Districts” in the 1930s (Breathnach, 1974: 152-154, based on contemporary Garda sources).

Thurles Savings Bank

It has often been stated that the rise of the money economy and the increase in paper transactions of sundry kinds was a major influence on the Irish poor to master English so that they could not be taken advantage of. The Thurles Savings Bank is an example of a type of bank explicitly geared towards the working classes. It functioned from 1829-1871 and its complete records are fortunately extant. O’Shea (1989) points out that the largest group of depositors were farmers, but he is unsure as to how these were – and should now be – classified in social class terms. Artisans/labourers/servants formed the second largest group, but these are a mixed bunch also in social class terms. Moreover, while it is clear that labourers were increasingly using the bank until they were decimated by the Famine, he also points out that many depositors made only one deposit and/or withdrawal during that period. This has implications for his apparent acceptance of signatures as a proxy measure of literacy, albeit of a rudimentary, “minimal functional” kind; about 75-80% of farmers and labourers had signed their names rather than the customary “X” of illiterates.

Many other questions arise which would need to be analysed in great detail before unambiguous conclusions could be made about this particular institution. For example, his distribution map of depositors shows that some areas were more highly represented than others, but he also points out that some of the depositors from outlying areas actually worked in Thurles. Even if these could be sorted out, however, O’Shea also shows that Thurles did not necessarily parallel the experience of savings banks in other locations.

Urbanisation and the Famine

A potential problem with implications for Irish is raised by the impact of the Famine. An analysis of changes in house occupancy in selected streets in Thurles for the period 1845-1850 showed a “high level of disturbance” and suggested that “there was a considerable influx of rural inhabitants to the town ... that the urban poor were the early victims of the Famine and their tenements were later occupied by the poorer tenant farmers and labourers who may have survived the first years of the Famine and then had to migrate toward the town” (Condon, 1987: 87).

However, Mokyr (1985: 274) found “no evidence whatsoever that the degree of urbanization

or any variable strongly correlated with it was in any way a protection against [death due to] the famine". Indeed, people were more likely to die in urban than in rural areas. The high death rates in the North Tipperary workhouses and hospitals seem to bear this out. Can CLQ data help us?

FitzGerald (1984: appendix C) has shown, in his analysis of the relationship between Irish-speaking levels in smaller towns and their surrounding countryside in the 1851 and 1861 censuses, that Thurles was typical of those towns where Irish was already a minority language in its rural hinterland insofar as Irish-speaking figures for the *older* age group (60-79 year olds) in the rural areas, although low, were much higher than in the towns. Of the twelve such towns in 1851 listed by FitzGerald, four were in Tipperary North Riding. In fact, they are the only sizable towns in the north of the county: Thurles, Templemore, Roscrea and Nenagh.

Moreover, in these four towns, Irish-speaking figures for the *younger* age cohort (10-29 year olds), although miniscule, especially in comparison with the older rural cohort, were equally so in the town and rural areas.⁹ Interestingly, the figures for the older cohorts in the four TNR towns held their own between 1851-61, albeit at a very low level. In Nenagh, they actually rose slightly. Although the figures for Cashel and Cahir fell sharply, they rose sharply in Tipperary town, Fethard, Clonmel (also in Callan, Navan and Kells). Perhaps some towns *did* provide a longer-term refuge for Irish speakers and Mokyr's finding needs to be qualified.

Ultachs and other settlers

North Tipperary experienced a wide range of new settlers and changes of land ownership over the centuries. Medieval immigrants included Dalcassians from Clare, Vikings, Normans, Italian mineworkers, and others. Much of the evidence on these is patchy and disputed. Later settlers included 17th century Ulster Catholics – "Ultachs", variously spelt, most of whom had come south with Ulster armies (see Gleeson, 1938: 201), and English Protestants – pre-Cromwellian mineworkers, who were largely annihilated in the 1640s, and Cromwellian and later planters, including a "spillover" of longer-settled anglophone Protestant planters from neighbouring counties Laois and Offaly. However, the only two sizable groups which seem to have retained any special "ethnic" identity or identification were the Catholic Ultachs and the English Protestant farmers of the Ormond plain.

We have a good idea of the distribution of Ultachs (people of claimed/ reputed Ulster origin) in Co. Tipperary (Ó Corrbuí, 1991: 35, 82, 91 -2, 173-4, 192-3, 199, 213). Most of them appear to have been Catholics; an order in 1653 to resettle 260 leading Ulster Presbyterians in counties Tipperary, Kilkenny and Waterford was abandoned (NHI 3: 379). In South Tipperary, where Irish survived longest according to the 1851 CLQ, Ultachs remembered their roots but integrated fully into the local community.¹⁰

By contrast, there is some evidence to suggest that Ultachs tended to remain separate in North and mid-Tipperary until the 19th century, e.g., the lack of Ulster surnames in connection with the mid-17th century expansion of urban commerce in the north and west of the county, with strong "native" Irish involvement (Smyth, 1991); the lack of Ulster surnames in the heavy 19th century chain-migration to Australia of inter married families from Clonoulty, "the meadow of the Ulstermen", in mid-Tipperary (Reid, 1987); the tradition of faction fights in north Tipperary in the 19th century between Ultachs and local groups such as the O'Kennedys who claimed their lands (O'Donnell, 1975; Ó Corrbuí, 1991). If this was so, perhaps their influence may be reflected in today's dialects or with the retreat of Irish from Co. Tipperary.

TABLE 3

Level (%) of Irish speaking recorded for towns and neighbouring baronies in 1851 and 1861 censuses in respect of 10-29 and 60-79 age groups

		Age cohort		10-29 years		60-79 years	
Town	Barony	Year	Town	Barony	Town	Barony	
D Roscrea	Ikerrin	1851	0	0	1	9	
		1861	0	0	1	5	
D Templemore	Eliogarty	1851	2	2	4	32	
		1861	2	1	4	25	
C Thurles	Eliogarty	1851	1	3	15	31	
		1861	1	1	15	25	
B Nenagh	Ormond Lr. Upr.	1851	0	0, 1	4	2, 13	
		1861	1	0, 0	8	5, 9	
B Tipp. town	Clanwilliam	1851	4	13	32	44	
		1861	5	7	59	61	
B Cashel	Middlethird	1851	11	20	65	67	
		1861	3	12	42	57	
D Fethard	Middlethird	1851	0	19	1	67	
		1861	2	16	14	57	
D Cahir	Iffa and Offa West	1851	29	65	83	88	
		1861	7	52	33	76	
B Carrick-on-Suir	I & O East, Upperthird	1851	28	34, 72	72	56, 84	
		1861	17	12, 40	66	46, 71	
A Clonmel	I & O East, Upperthird	1851	15	34, 72	31	56, 84	
		1861	10	12, 40	45	46, 71	
C Longford	Longford	1851	1	0	3	10	
		1861	0	0	1	12	
C Enniskillen	Tirkennedy, Magheraboy	1851	0	0, 2	0	21, 14	
		1861	0	0, 1	2	2, 9	
E Castleblaney	Cremorne	1851	0	2	9	15	
		1861	—	—	—	—	
D Kells	Upper Kells	1851	1	19	9	42	
		1861	0	36	14	37	
D Navan	Lower Navan	1851	1	47	7	30	
		1861	0	0	29	30	
D Boyle	Boyle	1851	7	19	19	46	
		1861	2	11	5	53	
D Roscommon	Ballintubber Sth.	1851	3	16	16	39	
		1861	1	3	14	41	
D Callan	Callan	1851	2	13	12	35	
		1861	1	5	28	35	
E Ballina	Owney and Arra	1851	2	12	14	20	
		1861	—	—	—	—	
E Killaloe	Lower Tulla	1851	7	26	22	63	
		1861	—	—	—	—	

Source: Abstracted from FitzGerald, 1984: Table 4.

Note 1: Under each age cohort, the town figures are on the left, the rural, baronial ones are on the right (in italics). Where a town straddles two baronies, figures for both baronies are shown.

Note 2: Town populations are shown thus: A: 10,000+; B: 7500-10,000; C: 5000-7500; D: 2500-5000; E: 0-2500.

Note 3: FitzGerald's Table 4 lists Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir in Iffa and Offa West, *recte* East barony.

Note 4: FitzGerald's Table 4 contains some minor discrepancies in his figures for some baronies. Compare e.g., the two Eliogarty sets and the two Middlethird sets in the table above. Compare also, the figures for Upperthird barony in the table above with those in his Table 4 for Portlaw: the latter show 63% rather than 71% for 60-79 year olds in 1861, which is more compatible with his commentary as regards Carrick-on-Suir.

Folk sources are not much help. Henry (1958: 195) claimed that the term *Ultach* is met "repeatedly" in modern Anglo-Irish, but it does not appear in a random selection of modern glossaries of "Gaelic survivals" in local English speech in those areas (e.g. Ó Riain, 1988: 222-3; Ó Muiris, 1991, Prendergast, 1991), although further research might yield some evidence. He also states that modern usage of the term *Ultach* refers to "a man of Northern extraction, from Ulster" *without* negative connotations.¹¹ Even the evidence on famous Ulster individuals such as Miler McGrath, Br. Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, Peadar Ó Doirnín and Damer's Scottish-Gaelic-speaking servant Barlow, all of whom seem to have had happy sojourns in Tipperary, is disputed (see e.g. de Rís, 1973: xv; Ó hÓgáin, 1985: 142). This suggests that we must find other sources.

English Protestant settlers

Wicklow was shired at the same time as the county boundary of northwest Tipperary was officially redrawn into more or less its present shape (1606). Hannigan (1988) has argued that the rapid replacement of Irish by English throughout Co Wicklow in the 17th and early 18th centuries was characterised not so much by gradual transmission or assimilation among the native population as by the sudden implantation of a large English-speaking population into areas which were "in all probability, sparsely populated and in which their linguistic ascendancy was more easily achieved".

These settlers were overwhelmingly English-born Protestants and represented "not just the wealthy and powerful but those with more modest means and ambitions; tenant farmers, servants and craftsmen, hampered by economic and social pressures at home and anxious to make a new life in another country.... In terms of its intensity and its geographical concentration, Wicklow's settlement was as comprehensive as any in the country". Indeed, "no other county outside Ulster had such a high proportion of Protestant inhabitants". Frazer's 1801 report on Wicklow states that Irish was "unknown". Hannigan, combining census and other sources, claims that this dogmatic statement can be "merely ... modif[ied] somewhat". He does not deny "the essence of Fraser's claim that English was the language of everyday life" throughout early 19th century Wicklow.

For the most part, the new English Cromwellian planters in NW Tipperary, the large grantees, lived in a world of their own behind newly constructed high walls. However, "as a result of a deliberate policy of plantation", they established a number of villages in the late 17th century, most notably Borrisokane and Cloughjordan. In fact, they established most of the villages still existing in the early 19th century (Elliott, 1988: 18). In addition, a substantial English Protestant strong farmer element was planted successfully on the surrounding Ormond plain centred on Nenagh, supplanting the native farmers who relocated on the high ground - "the mountainy men" of the future (Gleeson, 1938, Smyth, 1985; Elliott, 1988).

This is the only area in the north of the county where this happened and is also the only area in mid 17th century North Tipperary with a high population density. FitzGerald's Map 1 suggests that English was already the majority language in this North Tipperary area in the 1770s. Was this dense concentration of largely English and Protestant villagers and farmers responsible for the language shift?

"Though Protestants made up only 8.5% of North Tipperary's people in 1831, they formed (and still form) one of the largest clusters of non-Catholic population in the south [of Ireland]. Also, emigration from the region, particularly before the 1840s, was mostly Protestant. The 775 families that left for the Canadas during the period of this study, most in the generation between 1818 and 1855, were equal to a quarter of the Protestant population in the region in 1831" (Elliott, 1988: 233).

It could be interesting to extrapolate backwards from the CLQ data for smaller areas in the 1911 Census to see if the areas with significant minorities of older Irish speakers coincided with areas which so many Protestants had left in the meantime. However, even if the poor Catholics were more likely to have had Irish than the Protestants who left, census data for 1821 and 1841 suggest that the poor Catholics did not take over their land, as population rose in an inverse proportion to the quality of the land.

The population of the Protestant pastoral parishes declined as "the numerous minor gentry converted from tillage to stockraising in an attempt to stave off bankruptcy", leaving the dispossessed to gather in the "mountain parishes that ringed the commercial farming district" (Elliott, Map 9). This census evidence is supported by other sources; e.g., evidence to the Devon Commission of 1843-5 suggests that competition was rife between landlords for more land in the NW Tipperary baronies. It is also supported less explicitly by combinations of other data from Ordnance Survey maps and placename books, nomenclature, and the Griffith's Valuation project (1848-64).

Chapel-less settlement clusters

Nolan's (1985) study of the growing settlements of the dispossessed on the margins of Tipperary's good lands is exploratory and inconclusive (all the more so due to apparent inconsistencies between his text, map and table), but he has some interesting observations which might repay further inquiry. It seems that most of these dispossessed gathered in agricultural "clusters" – nucleated settlements below the status of a chapel village. Unlike other types of clusters located in the vicinity of old abandoned medieval centres, "Big Houses", industrial and communication sites (mines, mills, turnpikes, etc.) – and unlike the better lands in the rest of the county where local landlords were renaming the landscape in their own image, giving fancy or anglicised names and insisting on the Ordnance Survey using them on their maps – the agricultural cluster placenames almost invariably remained Gaelic.

These tended to describe the locations as unattractive (hard land, place between two cliffs, etc.) – as did the few English names for them such as Swinehill. Of course, the persistence of Gaelic placenames is no necessary indication of vernacular Irish in these settlements: at best, it is suggestive. In any case, while many of these clusters were provided with a police barracks or even a national school, these institutions were as ephemeral as the communities themselves; for even before the Famine, landlords competing for further land had already begun to reassess the value of these formerly neglected areas.

Where the ephemeral pre-Famine populations of these settlements went after their re-

dispossession might repay further study. Did they go to work for local farmers, gravitate to the towns, take to the roads, emigrate to Australia, die in the Great Famine, etc. ? The evidence is mixed. Three factors indicate that they stayed in Tipperary and found employment with local farmers. These are (1) that out-migration – as measured by the percentage depletion of the 6-15 year old cohort between the 1821 and 1841 censuses – was much lower in all six Munster counties than in the rest of Ireland, although this was to change radically during the 1840s and 1850s (Fitzpatrick, 1989, Table 1, Map 14); (2) that the ratio of farm workers to farmers increased in Tipperary between 1841-51 (as it did also in counties Clare, Cork and Kerry), and (3) the likelihood that they did not have the resources to emigrate independently (Donnelly, 1989: 354).

Insofar as we can trust these earlier censuses and their manipulation by modern specialists, Co. Tipperary as a whole had one of the fastest growing populations in the country throughout the period c.1800-1841; but the upland areas of Tipperary with their subsistence farming on tiny holdings were among the areas where the Famine struck hardest (Foster, 1988: 322-3). Yet the "excess death rate" due to the Famine in Co. Tipperary as a whole was only "moderate" vis-à-vis other parts of Ireland (Mokyr, 1985: 268). Mokyr tested a variety of possible causes for the differential impact of the Famine on mortality rates. He found that the two most important factors alleviating mortality were high levels of pre-famine income and of literacy. Both of these are notoriously mercurial measures and are hard to relate to language. Moreover, they would both rank as assets for potential emigrants trying to improve their lot.

Tipperary people were overrepresented among the members of a number of "troublesome" groups who ended up in the antipodes and north America in the decades before and during the Famine. The county supplied more than its fair share of transported convicts to Australia even before the Famine (Fitzpatrick, 1989: 572-3); of the government-assisted "poor and destitute" Catholic emigrants sent there in the 1840s (O'Farrell, 1989: 670); and of landlord-assisted emigrants to north America in the 1840s. For example, Spaight in Owney and Arra barony in northwest Tipperary and Wyndham in Tulla across the Shannon were among the top eight tenant-exporting landlords in Ireland, each ridding himself of *ca.* 1500 tenants, both individuals and families (Fitzpatrick, 1989: 593 & Table 8; MacKay, 1992).

Tipperary was also overrepresented (along with Wexford and Waterford) among the two emigrant waves of "small farmers' sons, fishermen-farmers and cottiers" to Newfoundland between 1811-16 and 1825-33 (Doyle, 1989: 709); and there is evidence of small numbers of Catholics emigrating to the USA from the mountain parishes of northwest Tipperary in the 1820s and 1830s (Elliott, 1988: 102-6). While these groups were relatively small, taken together they indicate that Tipperary was shedding much of the undesirable elements of its population as viewed by the authorities and local moneyed interests in the pre-Famine decades. However, generalisations based on such evidence would obviously need to be supported by very many local studies.

Nolan seems to imply that these concentrations of landless labourers and vagrants had already largely vanished by 1841, i.e., before the Famine, but there were still many such cluster settlements in 1850. He acknowledges an important limitation of his analysis of clusters, viz., "Their definition does not, of course, carry chronological exactitude, as settlements which attained chapel village status during the period 1770-1850 would obviously have been clusters prior to this" (Nolan, 1985: 308). This is crucial insofar as the most numerous type of such clusters seems to have been those "arising from the subdivision of a single farm, usually by kin groups" (p 314) – which implies that we are not referring to landless labourers.

Jones Hughes (1985: 352ff) makes a crucial distinction between "landless labourers and

vagrants" on the one hand, and the "near landless" population who had "a stake, however insecure, in the land" on the other. He describes the latter as "the more substantial and obvious knots of poor people in the famine decade", living in low value dwellings in the physically marginal upland/wetland/moorland areas as well as on "infill" sites of inferior lands interspersed among the continuously occupied areas of better lands. Here, they tended small scattered parcels of land in a complex landholding system of shared open fields. Such communities were maintained by endogamy (inbreeding), resulting in a restricted range of patronymics. He sees these – and similar areas elsewhere, e.g., east Co. Wicklow – as "refuge areas" of traditional Gaelic lifestyles and culture – although he does not specifically state that they used Irish.

Much of this culture was still observable well into the 20th century in such areas – e.g., the intermarried multitudinous Ryans and Dwyers in Kilnamanagh, and their counterpart Byrnes, Keoghs and Doyles in Wicklow, adhering to "God's time", etc. However, there are some apparent *non sequiturs*. For example, Jones Hughes states (p. 353) that many of these groups of poor were "obvious" because they were "within reach" of the Anglesey government roads built in the late 1820s, while simultaneously maintaining that the traditions and endogamy of these communities were largely due to their "increasing physical inaccessibility".

Sectarianism

Can sectarianism explain the decline of Irish in NW Tipperary? Although it has been claimed that the Whiteboy movement began at Nenagh (O Corrbuí, 1991: 215), it is noteworthy that, in contrast to the rampant agrarian disturbances to the south, there was little Whiteboy activity in the northwest in the 1760s and none at all in the 1770s (Bric, 1985: Map 9.1). The Whiteboys "did not distinguish between Catholic and Protestant victims" (op. cit. p 157) and later agrarian outrages "in general ... seem to have transcended denominational boundaries" (McGrath, 1985: 274). There was a lot of faction fighting in the early 19th century but this too was seldom sectarian: indeed, much of it seems to have involved ethnic Ultachs fighting with their fellow Catholics.

Further, there appears to have been quite an amount of interdenominational marriages and conversions during the 18th and into the early 19th centuries. The official Convert Rolls (O'Byrne, 1981) show that there had been substantial numbers of "native Irish" converts to Protestantism in the 18th century and there were over 30 "native Irish" surnames among the 775 north Tipperary Protestant emigrant families to Canada in the first half of the 19th century (Elliott, 1988), although it is difficult to trace most of these surnames – not to mention the individuals who bore them – from the Convert Rolls to Elliott's study area (see Ó Gliaáin, 1998).

There is also considerable evidence that sectarianism was not far below the surface. According to McCormack (1991: 24), the fact that the bookshelves of the Le Fanu rector of Abington included Irish Gaelic dictionaries and translations of the Bible "suggest that Le Fanu inexperience of native Ireland was not wilful"; but he produces no evidence that these Irish books were ever used apart from the fact that the rector's daughter (a sister of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, the novelist) had tried, sometime c. 1828-32, to teach English to the Irish-speaking tenants with the aid of New Testament quotations and an Irish-English spelling book – a mission which was soon aborted due to local sectarian animosities regarding tithes, etc. (p 62). Perhaps this helps to explain why biblical proselytisers in the 1820s apparently lost more converts to Catholicism than they gained (see McGrath, 1985).

Examples of tension between Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy, and sometimes between their flocks, over where converts to their respective denominations should be buried, date from the 1830s to the 1860s (McGrath, 1985). Elliott (1988) shows that the heavy Protestant emigration from north Tipperary to Canada peaked in the early 1830s, and he suggests that "the taut political atmosphere" preceding and surrounding Catholic Emancipation in 1829 was "a significant factor" in this movement – but not the only factor. Indeed, the apparent movement of south Offaly Protestants into North Tipperary revealed in the 1831 religion census, suggests that they felt safe there. When this "spillover" occurred cannot be determined, however, as there is no previous religious census.

Given the fluidity of denominational affiliations, census data on religion cannot be extrapolated backwards by age cohorts in the way that language data can. It would be interesting to compare these movements by religious denominations from Tipperary with other places in the south of Ireland (e.g., parts of Mayo, Kerry, Longford) where Protestants (those of long standing, more recent immigrants, and indigenous Irish-speaking converts to Protestantism by the Irish Society, etc.) had also been strong earlier in the 19th century, but left the area in large numbers.

Institutionalisation of sick, poor, and criminals

In the first half of the 19th century, Co. Tipperary was among the counties hardest hit by diseases and criminality. Consequently, it had a high proportion of institutionalised persons. Lewis in 1837 listed an impressive array of institutions dotting the county, ranging from lunatic asylums, hospitals, and workhouses, to prisons, bridewells, military posts and – most numerous of all, nearly 100 constabulary stations. In addition, there were many non-residential public institutions such as dispensaries, courts, post offices, churches, schools, etc. All of these would surely have provided many instances of language contact.

The institutional evidence from North Tipperary does not suggest much chance of sustained language contact leading to local language shift.¹² It In the first instance, there was a high fatality rate among the victims of the various diseases which hit the county from time to time, including those in the workhouses and in hospitals. During the Great Famine cholera epidemic, the northwest of the county bore the brunt of the deaths. There was a very high mortality rate in the Borrisokane and Nenagh hospitals (Robins, 1995: 107, 92, 140-2). Among the larger towns in the county, Thurles had the highest number of deaths while Nenagh had the highest percentage of deaths among reported cases (60%). The lowest death rate among the larger towns was in the more Irish-speaking south, at Clonmel (42%), which matched the national average (Grace, 1995).

Secondly, assisted emigration of workhouse inmates was very low throughout the county – e.g., Thurles and Tipperary town workhouses sent only 101 and 167 respectively in the ten-year period 1848-58 (O'Mahony, 1993, 1994). Nenagh was exceptional – it helped *ca.* 400 inmates to emigrate in 1852 alone. This might repay further study.¹³ Thirdly, unlike other parts of the country, due to ideological objections to outdoor relief, only half-hearted efforts were made by the Co. Tipperary workhouse guardians in the 1850s and '60s to send children into the community, either into paid service or into fosterage, and the community was not anxious to have them anyway, so that very few children were exposed to living with new families using a different language. The subsequent establishment of industrial and reformatory schools took much of the pressure off the workhouses and allowed a more positive approach to subsidising outsiders to take the children, but by that time Irish was no longer widely used anywhere in the county (Robins, 1980: 240, 275).

It is difficult to determine the extent to which "community health care" involved language contact. For instance, during the typhoid epidemic of 1816-19, a single doctor operating a dispensary in Clogheen, in the south Tipperary "Gaeltacht", claimed to have treated 1,259 typhoid cases over a 13-month period, some of them as they lay dying on the roadside, but he received no extra official support for his pains (Robins, 1995: 54). During the cholera epidemic of 1833-34, the provision of hospitals was strongly opposed by locals at Cashel and elsewhere. Indeed, at Borrisokane in the northwest the locals went so far as to burn down the hospital. With or without access to qualified doctors or public health care, many people relied on untrained religious or lay nurses, or resorted to quacks, folk doctors, and persons in and around the local Big House (see e.g., Luddy, 1996; Grace, 1995; McGrath, 1982; O'Donnell, 1975: 78).

The court system

Tipperary was a liberty or palatinate of the Butler Earls/Dukes of Ormond from 1328 to 1716. Despite occasional losses of Butler control and occasional alterations to the boundaries, both *de jure* and *de facto*, this meant that it was administered largely independent of the crown. Indeed, the county court laid down laws to such an extent that it largely functioned as a proxy parliament (Empey, 1985). This county court (again with occasional breaks in sequence) was in the deep south at Clonmel, on the border with Co. Waterford. However, local courts ensured that the population of the county had greater access to the legal system than in neighbouring Kilkenny, which was the Butler family headquarters from the late 14th century.

We do not know much about these local courts, but there are references to them at different times and places, including Silvermines in the NW Ormond area. There is also a largely unanalysed corpus of Irish language legal material from the area which might elucidate matters (Nicholls, 1985). Could the fact that the traditional Gaelic *brehon* family (the MacEgans) in the northwest adopted English law in the 17th century have influenced the shift to English? Perhaps; but Irish survived longer in the south of the county where the Butler influence and English law had been stronger for centuries beforehand and where *brehons* had been functioning as regular common-law judges since the early 16th century (Nicholls, 1972: 46ff).

Anyhow, the Clonmel court remained the paramount centre of legal power and process until the county was divided into north and south ridings in 1839, with Clonmel continuing to serve the south and a new assize court in Nenagh for the north (Murphy, 1994). By that time, although the Ormond baronies were heavily overrepresented in the crime statistics (Grace, 1996), the shift to English was almost complete in the north.

Court and prison records

In any case, court and prison records are weak sources for evidence of knowledge and/or use of Irish. Even if all the extant references to the Irish language in courtrooms were collated, then (as now) the presence or absence of, or demands for Irish-proficient interpreters, judges, police, stenographers, court reporters, etc., did not always reflect their absolute necessity, while those actually available did not always have sufficient fluency, motivation or opportunity to fulfil the task to the satisfaction of all parties involved. Besides a tendency among 19th century court reporters to summarise and "correct" what they heard in court "in terms of their own standard" (Troy, 1991: 170; Ó Riain, 1988), the adversarial system used in Ireland and other

jurisdictions adds further difficulties for analysing language interpretation in courts (Hale, 1996).

Another problem with records is that place of trial or incarceration is no necessary indication of place of origin or even of normal residence. An attempt to trace female convicts transported to Australia to Irish-speaking places of origin in Ireland was thwarted by the extant documentation recording place of trial rather than residence. For example, while only 0.6% of Irish women convicts sent to Australia before 1827 were tried in Galway city or county, the available data on native place, which only began to be recorded in the early 1820s, show that native Galway women were tried in various other counties (Robinson, 1988: 104-5). Indeed, an earlier researcher who sampled these Irish trial data calculated that only 63% of male convicts and 50% of females were tried in their native counties (Robson, cited in Troy, 1991). Not only were disproportionately large proportions of the remainder tried in Dublin and Cork (not to mention the thousands of Irish convicts who were tried in Britain), but it was not possible to ascertain the extent to which those who were tried in their native counties came from towns, villages or the open countryside.

The validity of some superficial consistencies between Irish monolingualism as measured in an 1822 survey of Irish prisons and in the 1851 Irish Census are quite properly described as "debatable" by de Brún (1978). Besides the 30-year gap, the prison survey did not consider bilingualism and its geographical coverage was incomplete.¹⁴ His data are summarised in Table 4.

TABLE 4

Prisoners "speaking only Irish" in 21 counties and in four cities in 1822 compared with Irish monoglots among the total populations of the same areas in the 1851 Census of Population

	1822	1851		1822	1851		
Carlow	(0)	(0)	Kerry	20.1	18.5		
King's	(0)	(0)	Mayo	17.7	18.4		
Queen's	(0)	(0)	Donegal	3.6	13.6		
Kildare [Naas]	(0)	(1)	Clare	2.9	12.0		
Westmeath	(0)	(1)	Tipperary	3.0	0.2		
Longford	(0)	(3)	Sligo	4.8	8.2		
Louth [Drogheda]	(0)	(1)	Roscommon	1.8	0.7	1822	1851
Cavan	(0)	(54 = 0.0%)	Cork	16.2	8.2	— city (0)	(123 = 0.1%)
Monaghan	(0)	(243 = 0.2%)	Waterford	NA	16.1	— city (0)	(140 = 0.5%)
Tyrone	(0)	(405 = 0.2%)	Limerick	4.0	3.2	— city (2)	(313 = 0.6%)
			Kilkenny	0.4	0.1	— city (0)	(5 = 0.0%)

Source: Tabular presentation of data in de Brún, 1978: 392.

Note 1: Unless otherwise indicated, figures within parentheses are numbers, those outside are percentages.

Note 2: Obviously, a person "speaking only Irish" need not be a monoglot, especially in a prison environment.

The Leinster and Ulster inland counties for which prison data are available are consistent with the census data. So is the inland Connacht county of Roscommon. In the more Irish-speaking counties, however, anomalies abound. Kerry and Mayo are consistent with the census but Clare and Donegal had a fourfold underrepresentation of Irish monoglots in its jails in 1822

compared with the 1851 CLQ. Sligo and Tipperary were also mismatched, but from a much lower base – and in contrary directions.

Tipperary had a lower proportion of Irish monoglots than of Irish monoglot prisoners. Nearly all of the 728 Irish monoglots in Co. Tipperary in 1851 lived in the Iffa & Offa baronies in the south, bordering the strong Gaeltacht areas of Co. Waterford. These west-Waterford areas were continuously agitating for a more accessible assize court and county jail at Dungarvan, rather than in distant Waterford city (Murphy, 1994). Do the low figures for Waterford city vis-à-vis county suggest that many Waterford *county* criminals were lodged in Clonmel jail rather than in Waterford city? Or do the figures reflect the growing anglicisation of South Tipperary? Or perhaps the Irish monolinguals in Tipperary were simply wiped out, through death and/or emigration? It would be an endless task trying to resolve these and many other related questions.

FOOTNOTES

1. In the 1881 CLQ, the suspicious census authorities changed the “Irish only” option to refer to each person “*who speaks Irish only*”. This effectively changed the option from Irish monoglot to Irish monolingual, that is, from exclusive ability to exclusive use. They reinforced this interpretation after the census forms were returned by ordering the enumerators to double-check anyone in areas where Irish was “very seldom spoken” who had been returned as able to speak Irish at all. Not surprisingly, the enumerators, who were all policemen, adjusted their claimed Irish speakers downwards, especially in the “Irish only” category. Most modern analysts agree that the decision was probably an improvement. By that stage, it probably made no difference in the context of North Tipperary; but it might have done so in areas where vernacular usage was still common.
2. Although the 1741 famine has largely faded from popular memory, it was probably every bit as severe as the Great Famine of the 1840s. In both cases, the near-landless cottiers were hardest hit. But the 1741 one was different insofar as it hit the fertile lowland areas of Munster rather than the barren mountain areas. Tipperary was one of the acutely distressed parts of Ireland in 1741 (Dickson, 1995).
3. A random selection of writers identify the last local native Irish speakers in various parts of 20th century Tipperary as males, from Newcastle in the south, northwards through the Aherlow, Cashel and Thurles areas (Breathnach, 1976; Breatnach, 1990; Ó Corrbuí, 1991: 144, 199). But all of these references could be fortuitous and unrepresentative. Whereas five of the nine Tipperary South Riding (TSR) Irish monolinguals recorded in the 1926 census were male, all four in Tipperary North Riding (TNR) were female. On the other hand, a native speaker of Irish need not be an Irish monoglot, and there are interesting concentrations of TNR District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) in the 1926 census where the number of males able to speak Irish exceeded the number of females. The male surpluses tended to be small compared with some of the female ones, but this topic could repay further study.
4. While this interpretation has been questioned, it is very difficult to estimate, never mind establish, the extent of popular literacy in Irish at any point before the present century. The 1926 Irish Free State CLQ was the first census to ask specifically about literacy in Irish in the present 26 county jurisdiction and all subsequent CLQs have done so; but it is merely a residual option for those returned as unable to speak Irish.
5. For some early-to-mid-19th century Tipperary examples see e.g. O’Shea (1989: 101-2) on the signatures of Thurles Savings Bank depositors; Elliot (1988: 76) on Protestant emigrants to Canada; and Fitzpatrick (1991) on the scribal identity of the letters sent home from Australia by the Hogan/Ryan families. For more general and detailed coverage of the issue, see the essays in Daly & Dickson (1990).
6. Incidentally, in his memoir of growing up in east-Limerick, in a small pocket of territory bounded

on two sides by Co. Tipperary, James Kennedy (1991: 2) boldly pinpoints Dromkeen and Herbertstown as the exact locations where the "real Limerick accent" (in English) takes over from that of neighbouring Tipperary. This is interesting given the inconclusive efforts of the professional Gaelic scholar Ó Cuív (1951: 37) to account for the progress of Déise-type Irish pronunciations from Waterford through south Tipperary, east Limerick and on into Clare. Ó Cuív traced it as far north as Kilmallock and Ballingarry, which would place it within Kennedy's "Limerick accent" area, but not to Rathkeale, five miles further west of Ballingarry, where Cork-Kerry pronunciations prevail. One wonders if Ó Cuív would agree with the amateur Kennedy, and if so, what this implies with regard to the type of Tipperary Irish that might have been formerly used in Kennedy's Limerick-Tipperary accent zone, and further north in Co. Tipperary.

7. Clogheen recorded 23 conversions on a single day in 1747 (O'Byrne, 1981: xiv) but the civil parish of Shanrahan in which it was situated returned only 252 Protestants of all denominations in the 1831 census (2.3% of the parish population, or half the county average of 4.4%). With regard to Tipperary town, an unknown number of those in O'Byrne's convert lists whose address is given as "Tipperary" were possibly living in that town, but over 600 Protestants constituted only 4.8% of the population in the town and its contiguous parishes in 1831 (McGrath, 1985: Appendix).
8. In the 20th century, Sean O'Faolain (1993: 149) defined his favourite environment, *ca.* 1921, as the still Gaelic-speaking areas of the west with their "trackless mountains". In the 1940s, the saying "leanann an Béarla an tarra" (main roads bring visitors and English) was used in the Loch an Iúir Rosses area of Donegal (P. Mac Gairbheith, *An tUltach* 73 (8) 17); while more recently, and further south in the same county, Robert Bernen (in Ó Conluain, 1983: 136) suggests that increased road transport south of the Blue Stack mountains led to the decline of the small Gaeltacht on the southern slopes there as "people grew less used to walking long distances over difficult ground" to their fellow Irish speakers in the more extensive Gaeltacht to the north of the "roadless hills". Anecdotal evidence from an unscientifically selected random sample of persons who were reared in Gaeltacht areas, or who can draw on extensive personal experience of such areas, tends to support this apparent correspondence for parts of Donegal, but not elsewhere.
9. The same applied in three of the other twelve: Longford, Enniskillen and, less dramatically, Castleblayney. Even more reassuring is the fact that four of the remaining five towns where this second feature did not apply form two pairs of neighbouring or linked clusters: Kells-Navan in Co. Meath; and Boyle-Roscommon in Co. Roscommon. The remaining town, Callan, Co. Kilkenny, has a similar profile to the latter. (Ballina in NW Tipperary and, facing it across the Shannon, Killaloe in Co. Clare, are shown for comparison.) Thus, despite FitzGerald's acknowledgement of problems with the pre-1881 censuses, and particularly with this aspect of his attempted analysis, the overall consistency and plausibility of the CLQ emerges yet again. FitzGerald provides no figures for the only other major town in the area, Birr/Parsonstown on the north Tipperary-south Offaly border. This is unfortunate because he notes that his backward extrapolations of CLQ data for various parts of Co. Offaly seem to understate the amount of Irish understood and used vis-à-vis the contemporary reports on that county. However, the latter reports do not mention Irish monoglots. Rather, they imply universal knowledge and use of English, with any Irish usage in decline and confined to the poor and/or peasants alone. A more or less similar situation applied in Co. Laois. FitzGerald notes that in areas where a majority of the older people were still Irish-speaking, the figures for older age groups in 1851 and/or 1861 were quite close in the town and rural areas, regardless of town size. By contrast with the north of the county, this applies to all of the south Tipperary towns except Fethard, viz. Clonmel, Carrick-on-Suir, Tipperary, Cashel, and Cahir, but for one census only. (See Table Notes 3, 4)
10. For example, "Sieve Oultagh" (Sive the Ulsterwoman) was one of two female names frequently appended to 18th century Whiteboy agrarian secret society threatening letters (Wall, 1973: 16) while some south Tipperary Ultachs, notably Col. Eoghan Ó Néill, still proclaim their Ultach origins into our own time. The south had been more effectively colonised than the rest of the county by "native" Irish, Vikings, Normans, Old English (but not New English), and Ultachs, who interbred with each

other and held on to *large* estates. Ulster surnames such as O'Donnell were represented among the large Catholic farmers in the 19th century (Jones Hughes, 1985).

11. Similarly, in 19th century Mayo, which had received heavy influxes of Ultachs in the previous century, people used an Ultach proverb originally referring to the poverty of Roman Catholics vis-à-vis Protestant planters in Ulster "without its background in history, which is not known there as it is in Derry" (Joyce, 1988: 169). On the other hand, this apparent instance of folk forgetfulness may be fortuitous and may even have been fairly recent. For example, according to the Ordnance Survey Memoirs, collected in the 1830s, people in Westport and Galway "within memory" knew of the "terrible reputation" of the Ulster Islandmagee massacre of 50 Irish by Scots as far back as 1642 (Mac Cuarta, 1997: xiii).
12. It is not always possible to distinguish between the institutionalised sick, poor, and criminal. Many victims of the various diseases which hit the county from time to time were accommodated in the workhouses rather than in the inadequate hospital system (Robins, 1980, 1995; Grace, 1995). Many workhouse inmates deliberately broke the rules so that they would be sent to jail instead, where the regime was more congenial (Ms Joan Kavanagh, who has researched the history of Wicklow Jail, personal communication). Many prisoners feigned illiteracy so that they could attend school there rather than the less attractive alternative of prison work (Ms Rena Lohan, who has researched the Dublin convict prisons, personal communication).
13. Most of the Nenagh workhouse Minute Books survive. The Registry Books are gone. Dr. Joseph Robins and Dr. Helen Burke (personal communication) believe that, in general, workhouse Minute Books would provide much more data on language as a perceived problem than the Registry Books (the Clerk often had to help less literate inmates); but as they are in manuscript prose, unindexed, and do not adhere to a standard set of questions for each inmate, it could entail a lot of time and effort to sift out the language references.
14. It ignored the entire north and east coast from Derry to Waterford inclusive, except for Drogheda town and Waterford city. As noted, Dublin and Cork accounted for a disproportionately high number of convicts from other counties and the Limerick and Cork data in the table hint at a wide "catchment area". Although the Dublin and Wicklow prison records examined by Ms Rena Lohan and Ms Joan Kavanagh do not mention Irish at all, the complete lack of prison data for Galway and Derry is unfortunate. Galway city was the only urban area excluded in 1822 which had significant numbers of Irish monoglots in 1851 (3511 plus 72,075 in Galway county); but were Clare convicts sent to Galway or to Limerick? Do the missing Derry data account for the Donegal discrepancies?

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