

Utrecht University

The Legacy of Hunger

Commemoration of the Great Irish Famine

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Abstract

The Great Irish Famine was a defining period for the country. With 1 million dead and 1.25 million having emigrated, the Famine changed Ireland forever. The population has never recovered, and it plays an important role in Irish national identity. In recent years, the loosening grip of the Catholic Church, the abortion and equal marriage referendums, membership of the European Union, the Brexit vote, and an ever-increasing Irish diaspora means that Ireland is becoming a more global, international country and a more important player in European and international events. As the country becomes more important, so too does its history. This thesis examines the nature of the Famine legacy in Ireland, by analysing several key forms of public commemoration, and zooming in on three museums, two exhibitions and three monuments. It asks how Famine commemoration has changed over time, examines the trends and the differences between localities, and asks how these heritage sites help to construct Irish identity. It becomes clear that a certain type of Irish-ness is being built, a character of resistance and fortitude against the victimisation and persecution by the colonial invader. The theories of dark tourism and the visual methodologies of Gillian Rose are used to shed light on commemoration of the Famine.

Preface

The basis for this research originally stemmed from being part of a large extended Irish family. My position as a half-Irish, half Dutchwoman with strong links to Ireland, without ever having lived there, gives me a unique position to be able to notice but also understand the peculiarities of its culture and history. The Famine graveyard at Abbeystrewry was first pointed out to me as a child by my grandmother on our annual holiday to Skibbereen. My interest was piqued then, but this thesis has given me the opportunity to spend more time in Ireland and immerse myself in the rich Irish Famine history, which has been rewarding.

Completing this thesis would have been much harder, firstly, without my parents, who have been continuously supportive and interested, despite being more than a little confused by my choice of topic. Secondly, my partner, who had barely heard of the Irish Famine before I announced I was writing my master's thesis about it, and who patiently listens to me talk about it non-stop. Thirdly, classmates and friends, who have always been on hand to give commiserations and congratulations in equal measure. Finally, my supervisor and teachers, who have given me patient advice and guidance throughout.

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Introduction

Ireland is becoming ever-more present on the international stage. Just a few decades ago, it was an often-forgotten country, poor and ever-dominated by its more prestigious neighbour. The newly-independent country was heavily under the influence of the Catholic church and, to an extent, remains so. Becoming a member of the European Union (EU) in 1973¹, the clergy child abuse scandals,² the Troubles in Northern Ireland³ and the recent referendums on equal marriage and abortion have changed the reputation and character of the nation. The Catholic Church's hold has loosened, and relations with the United Kingdom have mellowed.⁴ Since the 'Brexit' referendum in Britain, Ireland is becoming a larger player in European and international politics, as the only country with a border with the UK.⁵ Approximately 70 million people worldwide claim Irish descent, an astonishing number for a small island.⁶ As Ireland becomes more important, so does its history.

The Famine had many far-reaching consequences for today's English-speaking world. In the 1840s, a potato blight spread across Europe. In Ireland, where the majority of the population depended on potatoes, the effects of this were exacerbated. In 1841, the population of Ireland was 8.1 million people.⁷ By 1850, a million people were dead and 1.25 million people had emigrated.⁸ In 2016, the Irish population was 4.5 million people; the population has never recovered.⁹ Emigration has also become an Irish tradition and especially common amongst young people. In this, one can see how the effects of the Famine have lingered in the country.¹⁰ Over a million Irish emigrated to America, which today leaves a culture of memorials and ceremony in the USA and Canada as well as in Ireland.¹¹ The monuments and heritage sites commemorating and educating about this event offer a rich set of sources for examination.

¹ Catherine Rees, ed., *Changes in Contemporary Ireland: Texts and Contexts* (Cambridge 2014) 4.

² Eamon Maher and Eugene O'Brien, ed., *Tracing the Cultural Legacy of Irish Catholicism: From Galway to Cloyne and beyond* (Manchester, United Kingdom 2017) 4.

³ Rees, *Changes in Contemporary Ireland*, 6.

⁴ Ibidem, 4.

⁵ David Allen Green, 'How Ireland is shaping Britain's post-Brexit trade', *Financial Times* (zp 2017) [, <https://www.ft.com/content/34a22284-0ff3-36a7-9e33-c010bbb2cd23>]; Peter Hamilton, 'Ireland to have more significant role in Europe post-Brexit', *The Irish Times* (zp 2018) [, <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/ireland-to-have-more-significant-role-in-europe-post-brexit-1.3364126>].

⁶ Irish Abroad Unit, 'Irish Emigration Patterns and Citizens Abroad' (zp 2017).

⁷ Michael Moroney, 'The 1841 census— do the numbers add up?', *History Ireland* (zp 2015).

⁸ See Figure 30

⁹ Central Statistics Office, 'Census of Population 2011: Preliminary Results' (zp 2011).

¹⁰ Stephen J Campbell, *The Great Irish Famine* (Ireland 1994).

¹¹ Margaret Kelleher, 'Hunger and history: Monuments to the Great Irish Famine', *Textual Practice* 16 (2010) 249–276, aldaar 264 <doi:10.1080/095023602761622342>.

In 1997, the 150th anniversary of the Famine was remembered with pomp and ceremony in Ireland. This contrasted with 1947, where the centenary received barely a mention.¹² Why has the memory of the Famine become more prevalent in recent decades? Documents from the Department of the Taoiseach describe how a book was commissioned by the Taoiseach's office on the centenary of the Famine; 'the *Great Famine*...was published about February 1957...under the auspices of the Irish Committee of Historical Sciences'¹³. Otherwise, little seems to have taken place.

When writing or reading about the Famine, it is difficult to get away from the concept of 'blame'. This has declined in recent years as subjective historical writing has become commonplace, but early historical writing about the Famine was accusatory of the 'English'. This set the tone for historical Famine writing for decades. The following phrase (or variations of it) is still well-known in Ireland:

'The Almighty sent the potato blight, but the English created the Famine.'

In 1997, Tony Blair's Labour government issued an apology for Britain's role in the Famine, the first admission of any kind of guilt on behalf of the British government.¹⁴ In the whole of England, there are four Famine memorials.¹⁵ This may seem unsurprising in a country which was relatively unaffected by the Famine, until you consider that North America has thirty and even Australia has two.¹⁶ In September 2017, the successful ITV drama *Victoria* showed a view of the Famine.¹⁷ Many British viewers were shocked by this, showing how little the Famine has played a role in the popular memory of the British. Famine commemoration is clearly a relevant topic far outside of Ireland, even if Britain does not participate in this. Within Ireland, there are many heritage sites dedicated to educating and memorialising the Famine.

The research question of this thesis is; how do memorials and heritage sites commemorate the Famine? Furthermore, how has this evolved over time? What kind of 'Irish' identity is constructed? Are they objective, well-considered, nuanced or do they accuse a party of guilt? My primary sources will be the heritage sites and memorials themselves; the Coming Home Famine art exhibition, the Dark Shadows exhibition, the National Famine Museum of Ireland, the Dunbrody Famine Ship Experience, the Skibbereen Heritage Centre, the Abbeystrewry Famine

¹² Kevin Whelan, 'The Revisionist Debate in Ireland', *Project Muse* 31 (2004) 179–205, aldaar 198.

¹³ T.D. Williams, 'Letter/memorandum for Taoiseach' (zp 1958), NAI, TSCH/S13626.

¹⁴ Kathy Marks, 'Blair issues apology for Irish Potato Famine', *The Independent* (zp 2 juni 1997).

¹⁵ Emily Mark-Fitzgerald, 'Irish Famine Memorials', *Irish Famine Memorials* (zp 2015) [, <https://irishfaminememorials.com/>].

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Jim Loach, 'Faith, Hope and Charity', *Victoria* (zp 2017).

Graveyard and the *Famine* sculptures. By analysing these sites, I will investigate how the portrayal of the Famine has changed and its remaining legacy in Ireland.

Chapter 1

Ireland and the Great Famine

In Irish, the island is called *Éire*. The island was never absorbed by the Roman Empire, but several Roman influences migrated from Britain to Ireland, most importantly Christianity. This influence shaped the history of the nation and continues to do so, to a larger degree than many other European countries.¹⁸ After William the Conqueror invaded England in 1066, much of Ireland was also conquered by Anglo-Norman forces. This laid the foundation for the claim to rule Ireland which would be maintained for nearly a millennium.¹⁹

In 1542, the Lordship of Ireland became the Kingdom of Ireland under Henry VIII. Consequently, power in Ireland was dominated by the Anglican nobility. After Henry VIII broke with Rome, Ireland remained Catholic. Ireland came to be vulnerable to the interference of England's Catholic 'enemies', such as France and Spain. In the 1500s and 1600s, the native Irish aristocracy and the Catholic church were suppressed and dispossessed by English forces. The Anglican Church of Ireland was established. Ireland was considered a barbaric region in need of civilising, a sentiment echoed by the European colonising forces in South America, Africa and Asia in later centuries. Comparisons of the Irish to the Native Americans, for example, were made. Visitors to Ireland reported on attitudes there a decade before the potato blight hit;

*'In July and August 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville travelled in the south of Ireland...three main themes emerge from his observations: the extreme poverty of the Irish people, their enduring and implacable hatred of the aristocracy, and their deep attachment to Catholicism'*²⁰.

In the 1530s, potatoes were brought into Ireland from America.²¹ This transformed the lives of the peasantry in Europe and Ireland; 'few plants have been as central to the destiny of a nation as the potato...has been to Ireland'²². The introduction of the potato and other new foods from the New World narrowed the diets of the poor and expanded those of the rich.²³ By the 1840s, potatoes were the main diet for most of the Irish peasantry, supplemented with dairy products, oats and cereals, scarce meat, and fish and shellfish for coastal dwellers.

¹⁸ Rees, *Changes in Contemporary Ireland*, 14.

¹⁹ Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, *Irish Ethnologies* (United States of America 2017).

²⁰ Ibidem, 3.

²¹ Paul Henry, 'The Introduction of the Potato into Ireland', *History Ireland* [, <https://www.historyireland.com/early-modern-history-1500-1700/the-introduction-of-the-potato-into-ireland/>].

²² Mairtin Mac Con Iomaire en Pádraic Óg Gallagher, 'The History of the Potato in Irish Cuisine and Culture' (gepresenteerd bij Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery Devon 2009) 15, aldaar 1.

²³ Ibidem, 5.

This set the scene for the devastation of the Famine. But why did the Famine have such a ruinous effect? There are three main reasons. Firstly, over-dependence on one crop. The potato, as mentioned above, was the staple diet for most of the Irish peasantry. In the early 1840s, Irish peasants lived in abject poverty, but were still generally healthier and taller than their continental European counterparts, who lived on bread.²⁴ Potatoes were higher in vitamins and nutrients.

The potato blight struck in the eastern United States in summer 1843 and was transported into Belgium, quickly spreading around western Europe²⁵. The blight (*phytophthora infestans*) wrecked 1844 potato harvests in Belgium, the Netherlands, southern England and Normandy. These countries, however, were far less reliant on the potato crop than Ireland. By 1845, following a rainy summer, a fungus was discovered on the vital Irish potato crop; 'the Great Famine...constituted the greatest watershed in Anglo-Irish history since the 17th century, its reverberations felt for more than a century'²⁶. Suddenly millions were facing starvation and destitution.²⁷ Many nearly starved themselves by keeping back healthy potatoes for the next years' crop in 1846, which in turn was also devastated by the blight.

Secondly, the terrible living conditions of the Irish peasantry. Ireland was, and remains, a rural, agricultural nation. Her eight million inhabitants were among the poorest people in Western Europe, with low literacy rates, low life expectancies and high infant mortality rates. Peasants had no right to the land they lived on, nor the land they worked. Most of the Catholic farmers lived on less than 10 acres and could be evicted on a whim. Any improvements made to the cabin or the land would not be reimbursed by the landlord.²⁸ Thus, there was little incentive to improve the living conditions,²⁹ which links to the next point.

Thirdly, Ireland was mostly owned by the prejudiced Protestant English aristocracy. Many were so-called 'absentee' landlords who rarely, if ever, visited Ireland. Instead, they employed 'middlemen' to run their estates for them. This led to a system of exploitation where the middlemen had immense power over the Catholics who rented the land, with no one to hold them accountable.

Many peasants were evicted from their hovels when they failed to pay their rent by landlords and middlemen, who have retained a particularly bad reputation from this time. Some,

²⁴ Campbell, *The Great Irish Famine*, 11.

²⁵ Ibidem, 21.

²⁶ Peter Furtado, *Histories of Nations* (zp 2013) 61.

²⁷ John O'Farrell, *An Utterly Impartial History of Great Britain* (London 2008) 372.

²⁸ Ó Giolláin, *Irish Ethnologies*.

²⁹ 'Irish Potato Famine: Introduction', , *The History Place* (zp 2000) [, <http://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/famine/introduction.htm>].

like Denis Mahon in Strokestown, devised 'assisted emigration' schemes.³⁰ This involved paying for their tenants' one-way passage to North America on 'coffin ships'. Some evicted their tenants and left them in the wilderness to fend for themselves. Some were sympathetic and bankrupted themselves trying to help their tenants. Peter Furtado describes how, besides the very poor, the landlords lost the most and the middlemen gained the most from the Famine, regardless if they tried to help their tenants or not. Many lost their rental incomes and gained huge debts. The middle-level tenants opposed almost every effort to improve the lot of the starving.³¹

Despite these reasons, in Westminster and the United Kingdom, the response to the crisis was lukewarm at best. There was similar Famine starvation and destitution in the Highlands of Scotland (whose suffering is often overlooked), and relief was organised.³² This shows how the Irish crisis could have been handled if the British government had chosen to. This short Irish history and explanation of the lead-up to the Famine helps to illustrate how the disaster could have such widespread effects.

Overview of academic discussion

In this thesis, analyse several heritage sites and their contribution to Famine commemoration will be analysed. However, several other academic contributions have gone before it. Kevin Whelan calls the Famine 'the single most important event in Ireland in the modern period',³³ and his article provides an invaluable source to this thesis with an overview of historical writing on the Famine, from 1861 to the 1990s. The Famine has always been important in Ireland, but its role in academia and the public sphere has developed significantly since the disaster.

The act which created the Republic of Ireland came into force on 18th April 1949. The centenary of the Famine in 1948 therefore 'passed remarkably quietly.'³⁴ With the Second World War having just ended, rationing still in force and Ireland's being on the brink of relinquishing her ties to Britain, in the 1940s the Famine was an awkward issue which was pushed to the side. The only commemoration was a commissioning of a book, *The Great Famine* (1957), by the then-Taoiseach, Éamon de Valera; 'the Taoiseach and the government generously provided a substantial grant for the production of *The Great Famine*'³⁵. However, this letter was buried in the National Archives of Ireland and the book was not widely read outside of academia. *The Great*

³⁰ Campbell, *The Great Irish Famine*.

³¹ Furtado, *Histories of Nations*, 61.

³² O'Farrell, *An Utterly Impartial History of Great Britain*, 372.

³³ Whelan, 'The Revisionist Debate in Ireland'.

³⁴ Ibidem, 198.

³⁵ Williams, 'Letter/memorandum for Taoiseach'.

Famine blames the calamity on circumstance, overpopulation and poverty. The book never goes into any detail about how these situations are created and removes any agency or responsibility from the ruling classes. There is little to no link to the British, with the incident treated as a purely Irish event. Ostensibly for the centenary of the Famine, the book did not appear until the late 1950s.³⁶

In the latter half of the 20th century, there was a shift in how the Famine was studied. In 1962, *The Great Famine* was followed by *The Great Hunger*. This book was a different style, by Englishwoman Cecil Woodham-Smith. She was not an academic, not Irish, a woman, and she disagreed with the academically-written text on the causes of the Famine, the role of Charles Trevelyan and the role of the government.³⁷ Sir Charles Edward Trevelyan was the British officer in charge of Famine relief in Ireland during the 1840s, and his personal prejudices against the Irish people is widely suspected to have slowed the provision and spread of relief.³⁸ He is a very controversial figure when it comes to the Famine, and several historical commentators on the Famine lay a large portion of blame right at Trevelyan's door.³⁹ Woodham-Smith's book was torn apart by academics, but went on to become the best-selling book ever written about any aspect of Irish history and did far better than the government-funded *The Great Famine*.⁴⁰ After the publications of these two volumes, the Famine disappears, both as an academic research topic, in Ireland and abroad, and from the Irish public consciousness.⁴¹

As the 150-year anniversary of the Famine approached, focus on it re-emerged, mostly from non-Irish scholars who came to appreciate the lasting effect mass Irish emigration had had on European and colonial history.⁴² Several scholars rewrote the history of Famine and moved away from nationalistic and revisionist rhetoric.⁴³ The tone of writing shifts from self-righteous, indignant, moral superiority to more objective, well-rounded accounts of how the Famine could happen.⁴⁴

³⁶ R.D. Edwards en T.D. Williams, *The Great Irish Famine* (1956).

³⁷ Whelan, 'The Revisionist Debate in Ireland', 200.

³⁸ Niamh O'Sullivan, ed., *Coming Home: Art & the Great Hunger* (Dublin, Ireland 2018) 112.

³⁹ John Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* (Dublin 1858).

⁴⁰ Whelan, 'The Revisionist Debate in Ireland', 200.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Campbell, *The Great Irish Famine*; Donald Harman Akerson, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer* (Toronto 1993).

⁴³ Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800-1850*. Economic History (zp 2006); James S Donnelly, *The Great Irish Potato Famine* (zp 2002); Peter Solar, 'The Great Famine Was No Ordinary Subsistence Crisis', in: E Crawford ed., *Famine: The Irish Experience, 900-1900* (Edinburgh, Scotland 1989) 112-133; Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Great Irish Famine: The Irish Famine 1845-1852* (zp 1995); Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Famine, Trauma and Memory', *Béalóideas: Folklore of Ireland Society* (2001) 121-143.

⁴⁴ Whelan, 'The Revisionist Debate in Ireland', 203.

In 2012, the most comprehensive overview of the Famine was published, *The Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*. This encyclopaedia of Famine studies has contributions from many of the abovementioned authors provides invaluable insight for those studying the Famine. Used throughout this thesis, the *Atlas* provides an objective and varied oversight into the Famine. It shows how far Famine literature has come, from the few biased accounts in the late 1800s, to silence in the early 1900s, to objectivity and well-rounded academic writing since the late 1900s.

There are four topics used in the abovementioned discourse which help to construct an Irish identity in relation to the Famine. Firstly, the role of memory (collective, social, cultural) which is relevant to many of the authors; Pierre Nora and his work on collective memory is referenced frequently.⁴⁵ Pierre Nora also noted that ‘recent decades have been marked by an almost obsessive trend in memorialisation’ and this observation is reflected in Famine commemoration.⁴⁶ Nora’s theoretical idea of the *lieux de mémoire* is another concept which applies here.⁴⁷ Although he wrote about France, the concept can still be applied further afield. His ideas for *lieux de mémoire* have been criticised by Ho-Tai for being too Catholic and linear; she claims that there is fuzziness to his ideas of history and memory.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, is the Famine an Irish *lieu de mémoire*? Can an event be such? What kind of Irish-ness is constructed by these modes of Famine commemoration? These are all questions I would like to grapple with in my thesis.

Donald Akerson characterises memory of the Famine as ‘a popular Famine intertwined with issues of narration, representation and identity, and subject to manipulation and distortion in its antagonism with history.’⁴⁹ While there is plenty of literature on the Famine and its role in popular memory, there is limited literature analysing the representation of the Famine in forms of memory other than dedicated monuments, and this gap is filled by this thesis by examining museums and art exhibitions besides the traditional memorials. The collective memory of the Famine plays a huge role in how it is commemorated, as will be demonstrated in this thesis.

Secondly, the topic of blame. John Mitchel shows the origins of antagonism towards the ‘English’ for the role they played in exacerbating the Famine;

⁴⁵ Peter Gray, ‘The Memory of Catastrophe’, *History Today* (2001); Kelleher, ‘Hunger and History’.

⁴⁶ John Crowley, William J Smyth en Mike Murphy, ed., *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine* (Cork, Ireland 2012) 596.

⁴⁷ Pierre Nora, *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de Mémoire* (zp 2001).

⁴⁸ Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ‘Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory’, *The American Historical Review* 106 (2001) 906–922, aldaar 915.

⁴⁹ Akerson, *The Irish Diaspora*.

'The Almighty indeed sent the potato blight but the English created the Great Famine... a million and half men, women and children were carefully, prudently and peacefully slain by the English government. They died of Great Famine in the midst of abundance which their own hands created⁵⁰.'

As the quote shows, when discussing the Famine, is it difficult to get away from 'blame'. Mitchel was one of the first to provide an interpretation of the disaster, and his 'unambiguous demonstration of British culpability set the tone for decades to come.'⁵¹ For Mitchel, the 1801 Union between Great Britain and Ireland began a regime which descended into colonial barbarism. Mitchel's newspaper articles provide an insight into the way he wanted the Famine to be portrayed.⁵² In 1845, he wrote to warn farmers and landlords of the consequences of a failure of the potato crop.⁵³ Throughout the Famine and its aftermath, Mitchel continued to write antagonistic articles for 'The Nation'. His articles show a huge disdain for the British rule of Ireland and mishandling of the Famine; 'People are expecting famine day by day...they ascribe it unanimously, not so much to the rule of heaven as to the greedy and cruel policy of England.'⁵⁴ His views were widely circulated and very influential in how the Famine, and the English role in it, came to be viewed by the public.

In 1875, Catholic priest John O'Rourke contributed with his *History of the Great Irish Famine*.⁵⁵ He agreed with Mitchel's that the Famine had been a 'genocidal onslaught' on the Irish by the British. However, he also regarded it a genocidal onslaught on the Catholics by the Protestants. This was a clear rewriting of history since many Protestants also died. After Mitchel and O'Rourke, the rhetoric of the Famine was avoided for many years. It may seem strange in an overview of academic discussion, but the absence of academic study should be pointed out as well. When studying the Famine, its disappearance and subsequent revival in the academic and public consciousness characterises its commemoration. The silence also helped to solidify the views of Mitchel and O'Rourke in people's minds, since there was little which disagreed with them. Blame and how different places choose to handle it is an interesting part of Famine commemoration. The idea of blaming 'the English' for the Famine has played into the idea of

⁵⁰ Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)*.

⁵¹ Whelan, 'The Revisionist Debate in Ireland', 195.

⁵² John Mitchel, 'The People's Food', *The Nation* (zp 1845); John Mitchel, 'Potato Disease', *The Nation* (zp 1 november 1845); John Mitchel, 'The Detectives', *The Nation* (zp 8 november 1845); John Mitchel, 'Oregon-Ireland', *The Nation* (zp 6 december 1845); John Mitchel, 'The Protestant Interest', *The Nation* (zp 20 december 1845); John Mitchel, 'English Rule', *The Nation* (zp 7 maart 1846).

⁵³ Mitchel, 'The People's Food'.

⁵⁴ Mitchel, 'English Rule'.

⁵⁵ John O'Rourke, *History of Great Irish Famine of 1847 with Notes of Earlier Irish Famines* (Dublin 1875).

Irish-ness in relation to the disaster. If there is a guilty party, then there must also be an innocent party, and the narrative of a persecuted population triumphing against all odds against a colonial oppressor is one used repeatedly in Famine commemoration and Irish identity construction.

Thirdly, the theme of mass emigration. Several more general works on Ireland's history mention the calamitous effects of the Famine, without focusing directly on it. This shows how the Famine is accepted to be a pivotal moment in Irish history; Diarmuid Ó Giolláin writes about how the 'Great Famine 1845-48 decimated Ireland'⁵⁶ and Ciaran Brady says that the 'reverberations were felt for more than a century.'⁵⁷ These works show how Famine-related issues have been addressed in a more objective fashion. The Famine also plays an important role in the vast number of works concerning the Irish diaspora and emigration, particularly to North America.⁵⁸ The influx of Irish immigrants played a large role in the development of the American cities, character, their accents; a fact acknowledged by President Barack Obama when he visited Ireland in 2011 – 'we are bound by history.'⁵⁹ This is interlinked with Irish identity, since emigration has become an Irish tradition which the Famine exacerbated.

Lastly, the role of monuments in Famine memorialisation. For example, in her article on Famine memorials, Margaret Kelleher provides an invaluable oversight, analysis and list of major Famine memorials throughout Ireland and abroad in Canada and America. She describes how the Famine is included in 'Holocaust studies' at some American universities and analyses how North-American monuments differ from their European counterparts.⁶⁰ Emily Mark-Fitzgerald analyses how the 'fractious yet immense' history of the Famine has become resolutely material since the 19th century.⁶¹ She describes how physical monuments have been dominated by 'quintessentially Victorian visual iconography' and questions this decision.⁶² However, Mark-Fitzgerald's article misses any mention of the numerous museums around Ireland, and it was the author herself who recommended that this thesis include them, rather than focusing solely on memorials.

⁵⁶ Ó Giolláin, *Irish Ethnologies*, 10.

⁵⁷ Ciaran Brady, 'Ireland: In the shadow of the fond abuser', in: *Histories of Nations* (London 2013) 55–64, aldaar 61.

⁵⁸ Linda Connolly, *The "Irish" Family* (zp 2014); Arthur Gribben, ed., *The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America* (Amherst 1999); Oliver McDonagh, 'Irish Famine emigration to the United States', *Perspectives in American History* 10 (1976) 357–446; Mark McGowan, 'Remembering Canada: the place of Canada in the memorializing of the Great Irish Famine', *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* 11 (2014) 365–382 <doi:10.1080/14788810.2014.937076>; Marie Price en Lisa Benton-Short, ed., *Migrants to the Metropolis: The Rise of Immigrant Gateway Cities* (Illustrated; Syracuse 2008).

⁵⁹ *President Obama Addresses the Irish People*, (Dublin, Ireland 2011) 14.

⁶⁰ Kelleher, 'Hunger and History'.

⁶¹ Emily Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating the Irish Famine: Memory and the Monument* (zp 2013).

⁶² *Ibidem*, 4.

Two of the museums I study have published their own pieces about the history of their area and the Famine. These provide accessible and valuable insight into what kind of story the museums want to portray. The National Famine Museum of Ireland published a book by Stephen J Campbell to coincide with its opening in 1997.⁶³ Terri Kearney and Philip O'Regan also published a book to accompany their Famine Story exhibit in Skibbereen in 2015.⁶⁴ Academic writing, if it mentions Skibbereen, tends to inflate the district's importance in the Famine. There is a myth that the area was the worst affected area in Ireland. The word 'Skibbereen' has become synonymous with Famine suffering,⁶⁵ but this is mainly because there were people there bearing witness and reporting the devastation in the area. In other areas, such as Mayo or Bantry, the conditions were equally horrific. Kearney and O'Regan's book provides a measured account of the Famine in Skibbereen, accompanied by facts and figures.⁶⁶ The most recent significant contribution is the catalogue accompanying the Coming Home exhibition, edited by Niamh O'Sullivan.⁶⁷ This contextualises the Famine art and contains contributions by several prestigious artists and writers.⁶⁸ In these works, we can see how Famine writing has become more objective. I will look at how, or if, these views have been employed practically in heritage sites.

⁶³ Campbell, *The Great Irish Famine*.

⁶⁴ Terri Kearney en Philip O'Regan, *Skibbereen: The Famine Story* (Cunnamore, Skibbereen, West Cork, Ireland 2015).

⁶⁵ Ibidem, 1.

⁶⁶ Kearney en O'Regan, *Skibbereen: The Famine Story*.

⁶⁷ O'Sullivan, *Coming Home*.

⁶⁸ Michael D. Higgins, 'Preface', in: *Coming Home: Art & The Great Hunger* (zp 2018) 1–2; John L. Lahey, 'Foreword', in: *Coming Home: Art & The Great Hunger* (zp 2018) 3–4; Ciarán Reilly, 'Feasting in a Time of Famine', in: *Coming Home: Art & the Great Hunger* (zp 2018) 37–48; Laurence Geary, 'Frightful and fearful havoc around me', in: *Coming Home: Art & The Great Hunger* (zp 2018) 49–61; Breandán Mac Suibhne, 'Entering the Gray Zone', in: *Coming Home: Art & The Great Hunger* (zp 2018) 62–73.

Chapter 2

Famine commemoration in Ireland

How far can the concept of Dark Tourism shed light on commemoration of the Famine?

The Famine was a pivotal period for Irish society; 'the Famine offers a focus on the suffering of the Irish people that is catastrophic, local, diasporic, and relevant to the modern world.'⁶⁹ Dark tourism theory has been criticized for 'surprisingly recently' putting a name on a phenomenon which has 'a long history.'⁷⁰ Stone has also criticized dark tourism sites for simplifying the circumstances under which disasters took place, e.g. the Holocaust.⁷¹ The theory has also been criticized for lumping all dark sites into one basket without acknowledging the levels of darkness within them.⁷² Nevertheless, the theory can be used to analyse and shed light on Famine commemoration sites in Ireland. The following points, this thesis argues, reflect characteristics of modern Famine commemoration.

Firstly, the forging of national identity. Museums and art galleries - run by the government - are argued by Gillian Rose to be where 'citizens' are forged.⁷³ Therefore, the Famine commemoration sites are building Irish citizens. Similarly, this is a key part of dark tourism.⁷⁴ When examining the exhibitions, museums and memorials, this thesis will question what kind of Irish citizen is being forged. The Famine heritage sites in Ireland portray a certain kind of Irish citizen, the starving victim under the boot of the colonial oppressor, at the mercy of forces larger than themselves. This is a key part of forming an Irish national history and character. In Ireland, it is interesting that national character is built around such a tragic event. Frequently, national pride is forged around a grand or impressive event,⁷⁵ but in Ireland differs and this is rare. For example, the revolutions in France⁷⁶ and America⁷⁷ are an important part in building their national

⁶⁹ Gray, 'The Memory of Catastrophe', 12.

⁷⁰ Richard Sharpley en Philip. R Stone, *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism* (zp 2009) 6.

⁷¹ Philip R. Stone e.a., ed., *The Palgrave Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies* (zp 2018) 151–152.

⁷² Katie Heuermann en Deepak Chhabra, 'The Darker Side of Dark Tourism: An Authenticity Perspective', *Tourism Analysis* 19 (2014) aldaar 2 <doi:DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3727/108354214X13963557455766>>; Erik Cohen, 'Thanatourism: A Comparative Approach', in: *The Palgrave Handbook of Dark Tourism* (zp 2018) 157–171, aldaar 158.

⁷³ Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi 2001) 175.

⁷⁴ Stone e.a., *Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies*, 10.

⁷⁵ Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory* (zp 1996); Eric Hobsbawm en Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge 1983).

⁷⁶ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, 'France: The history of the hexagon', in: *Histories of Nations* (London 2013) 84–93, aldaar 90–91.

⁷⁷ Peter Onuf, 'The United States: The land that chose to be without history', in: *Histories of Nations* (London 2013) 174–182.

identities. Indeed, the struggle for independence is a key facet of Irish national identity as well, but the Famine, I argue, plays an equal role in constructing Irish identity.

The Famine has a problematic relationship with Irish independence. In the early years of a newly-born independent state, it was far easier to focus on more uplifting narrative about the Irish rebellions (1798, 1803, 1848, 1867, 1916) and form a national identity around those. In the story of the 1840s, the 1848 Rebellion was considered more significant than the Famine. Famine remained a touchy subject. In 1925, for example, the international media reported that there was a danger of famine in the west of Ireland. The Irish government forcibly denied these claims. Famine had to be something that happened under foreign control; 'Famine under a native government was a category error, an unthinkable, unbearable slur.'⁷⁸

Museums are often tasked with building and supporting a national identity,⁷⁹ and are often occasions of commemoration in themselves. In Kilmainham and Wicklow, and at (Famine) commemoration ceremonies, the following narrative is often harnessed; the oppressed population of Ireland lived in poverty and religious and ethnic persecution (apart from the heroism of revolutionaries in 1798, 1803 and 1916) before the early twentieth century saw a 'return' of Irish national pride and martyrdom, leading to today's free state. Independence is portrayed as inevitable. Commemoration of the Famine also goes along these lines; often the role of the Irish elites (aristocracy or clergy) in the disaster is forgotten or omitted. The Famine is source of mixed emotions for Ireland; on the one hand, 'national pride'⁸⁰ which is key part of dark tourism, and shame and suffering on the other. Many heritage sites concerned with the Famine are 'dark tourism' sites. The potato itself is often cast in the role of the villain (for example Kilmainham Gaol or Wicklow's Historical Gaol), with little context provided as to how the overdependence on this one crop occurred in the first place.

Secondly, 'engineered and orchestrated remembrance' is an important part of Famine commemoration. Remembering happens individually, but 'orchestrated remembrance', like Seaton means, of a large-scale event happens in groups.⁸¹ This can be official anniversary ceremonies, the erection of memorials and monuments or even commissioning of a book like in 1946.⁸² Plaques, memorials and monuments are 'engineered and orchestrated remembrance...the

⁷⁸ Whelan, 'The Revisionist Debate in Ireland', 199.

⁷⁹ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 175.

⁸⁰ Stone e.a., *Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies*, 10.

⁸¹ Ibidem.

⁸² Williams, 'Letter/memorandum for Taoiseach'.

true object of the tourist gaze.⁸³ These show the orchestrated remembrance which Seaton writes about.

Thirdly, the concept of symbolisation in dark tourism can also show insight into the nature of Famine commemoration. Symbolisation is important because those engaging with the commemoration/tourism can never have an encounter with 'actual' death.⁸⁴ Many Famine heritage sites, such as the Jeanie Johnston or the Dunbrody Famine Ship, use mannequins to demonstrate how Famine victims may have looked or to use their stories, for example. However, these figures look well fed, they are not clearly starving. The suffering they *represent* is enough, without showing the actual state that they would have been in. Thereby, the 'commemoration tells us less about the historical event recalled than about the period in which it occurs.'⁸⁵ The change in this symbolism can be seen over time. The cross and religious message are typical of the older memorials.⁸⁶ The more recent monuments, such as the Celbridge monument,⁸⁷ Famine statues⁸⁸ or Kieran Tuohy's sculptures⁸⁹ have more obvious 'Famine' symbols.

Lastly, 'anxiety and doubt', which Lennon and Foley argue dark tourism introduces in the viewer about the state of modernity.⁹⁰ This is a stretch to apply to Famine commemoration, since the authors argue that the incident of dark tourism must relate to something 'within reasonable living memory.'⁹¹ Lennon and Foley use the example of the *Titanic* sinking, because it raised questions about 'technological progress', and because it faded into 'relative obscurity' before being resuscitated into the public consciousness by a 1958 film. The same is true of the Famine, which also faded into 'relative obscurity' in the public sphere/memory during the early twentieth century, before being reanimated before the 150-year commemoration; 'the centenary of the Famine in the 1940s received little academic attention in Ireland or elsewhere.'⁹² This does not mean that the Famine was forgotten before 1997. In the private, it was not repressed; 'the Irish Folklore Commission contains a rich archive of oral tradition relating to the Great Famine.'⁹³ The Famine played a large role in folklore, in the private tales of common people in its immediate aftermath, rather than in the public sphere; 'one literary critic suggest that it may be have been

⁸³ Stone e.a., *Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies*, 14.

⁸⁴ Ibidem, 13.

⁸⁵ Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising Ireland: Easter 1916* (Oxford 2010) 7.

⁸⁶ See Figure 18

⁸⁷ See Figure 18

⁸⁸ See Figures 14, 15 and 16

⁸⁹ See Figures 10-16

⁹⁰ John Lennon en Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Destruction* (zp zj).

⁹¹ Ibidem, 8.

⁹² Crowley, Smyth and Murphy, *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, 589.

⁹³ Ibidem, 2.

easier to caption these [Famine] complexities in fictional rather than historical terms.⁹⁴ However, it was temporarily put aside whilst the Republic was born and developed, before coming back into public consciousness. This is reflected by a graph in the *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine* shows how the number of books written about the Famine leaps up to twenty-two in 1997 from zero in 1992.⁹⁵

However, the Famine can make the twenty-first century observer question modern society. Ireland was, during the 1840s, a state occupied by a colonial power. Colonial rule, it can be argued, is a product of modern society. Some of the facets of modern living are what made the rule possible; administration, policing, segregation – these are all modern concepts. Foucault would argue that we still live in a society with the same disciplinary notions.⁹⁶ The Famine raises questions in Ireland, therefore, and doubts about colonial rule, modern society and modernity. Famine commemoration and tourism make the observer question the (colonial) past of their nation. I argue that many Irish people and Britons are unaware of, or underestimate, the role being a colony played in the development and scale of the Famine in Ireland. So, societal ‘anxiety and doubt’ of dark tourism is introduced by Famine commemoration, but not in the nature that Lennon and Foley meant. This thesis takes issue with the periodisation of dark tourism as defined by Lennon and Foley. It argues that large national traumas can still be cases of dark tourism even if they are beyond the scope of living memory, and that this is the case with heritage sites and monuments to the Famine in Ireland.

Museums and how to analyse them

Museums are spaces for the production of national identity. Analysing them can be complex. Their nature has changed over the years, going from places for social improvement to places of entertainment. They can never be fully objective since they are beholden to the interpretation of the curators. Several authors have outlined how museums and other institutions discipline and educate their visitors. When analysing museums, there are four aspects to consider.

Firstly, the position of museums in society. According to Rose, the history of the museum and art gallery can be split into two phases.⁹⁷ Firstly, what she calls the ‘prehistory’ period; when objects (or living things) were displayed randomly, with no fixed order or purpose. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, this nature develops into the second phase. Rose calls this the ‘irresistible movement towards conformity.’⁹⁸ During this time, museums developed into the

⁹⁴ Ibidem, 589.

⁹⁵ Ibidem, 2.

⁹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (New York 1995) 296.

⁹⁷ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 170.

⁹⁸ Ibidem.

form that we recognise today, organised by period and by school of thought, with a clear organisation and direction. Hooper-Greenhill explains how the partitioning of museums and exhibitions works;

*'Sub-headings indicate the way the exhibition is divided...they break up the totality of the exhibition into manageable parts, and in order to do this, should be limited to about seven in number.'*⁹⁹

Bennett also discusses institutions dealing with visual objects in his exhibitionary complex.¹⁰⁰ Similarly to Foucault, he posits the discipline exuded by these institutions is subtler than a prison or a mental hospital. Rather than restraining the subject physically, they seek to shape the education and mentality of the visitor. In late nineteenth century, museums came to be an 'antidote' to lacking moral values in the average working-class man. They were seen as the way to civilise the people. Government funding for museums and art galleries started in this time, adding a new dimension to the purpose of museums. Museums thus became part of a government struggle to 'reshape the norms of social behaviour' and to reshape how the public viewed certain parts of their own heritage.¹⁰¹

Bennett identifies three subject positions produced in art galleries and museums; the patrons, the scientists and curators, and the visitors. The patrons are usually white, middle-class men, who are given the position of 'expert' through their social position and finances. Secondly, the technical experts, the curators, are those who produce the knowledge on display, giving them more power than the patron. Lastly, the visitors who are meant to benefit morally and educationally from the museum.¹⁰² Rose states that work on visitors to museums is limited, but that it is in the visitors that we can see the effect of surveillance and self-discipline at work.¹⁰³

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992) posits that many important questions are being asked about the continuing nature of museums, and that their presence needs to be justified more than ever; 'in most cases the answers that are given are that museums are educational institutions...knowledge is now well understood as the commodity which museums offer.'¹⁰⁴ But what kind of 'education' is being offered? As government-funded institutions, they can also be training centres for citizens, relating once again to the construction of national identity;

⁹⁹ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors* (Abingdon, Oxon 1994) 133.

¹⁰⁰ Tony Bennett, 'The Exhibitionary Complex', in: *The Birth of the Museum* (Abingdon, Oxon 1995).

¹⁰¹ Ibidem, 6.

¹⁰² Ibidem, 86.

¹⁰³ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 175.

¹⁰⁴ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London 1992) 2.

‘museums...are nation’s memory.’¹⁰⁵ As Rose also points out, the nature of museums and art galleries change by becoming government institutions.

Tony Bennett points out that ‘both prisons and modern museums were born in broadly the same historical period’ and argues that both employ similar disciplining surveillance.¹⁰⁶ In Ireland, the nature of museums and their position in society is slightly different, due to it being an ex-colony. Bennett points out that museums and prisons, in the forms we know today, developed in parallel. He uses the example of Mettray Prison (1840), Pentonville Prison (1842) and the Great Exhibition (1851) to support his point. When I considered a similar timeline in Ireland, it became clear that museums and prisons did not develop in parallel. Although at least six prisons (Limerick, Spike Island, Richmond, Sligo and Cork City Gaol)¹⁰⁷ opened during the nineteenth century in Ireland, I could only find two museums that did, the Natural History and Archaeology museums, both part of the National Museum of Ireland.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, Bennett’s assertion that the two developed in parallel cannot apply in Ireland. The prison system of Ireland was linked to that of Britain,¹⁰⁹ but museums were not. Therefore, one can see how one system may have developed faster than the other. Even in 2018, most Irish museums are concerned with subjects which occurred during or after the 1800s. This further reflects the later development of Irish national character and museum culture.

This does not negate Bennett’s point about parallel developments in Britain and other parts of Europe, but it does say something about the Irish case. This case differs due to Ireland’s position as a colony; ‘the unifying theme of British perceptions of Ireland in the nineteenth century was that the Irish were “alien in race and inferior in culture to the Anglo-Saxons.”¹¹⁰ This was an important feature of British colonial rule. Museums and cultural institutions tend to have a large interest in promoting and shaping national identity, making their visitors into ‘citizens.’¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Seán Popplewell, ed., *The Irish Museums Guide* (Dublin, Ireland 1983) 15.

¹⁰⁶ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 171; Bennett, ‘The Exhibitionary Complex’.

¹⁰⁷ Chris Ridley, ‘Sligo Gaol (Prison)’, *The Sligo Town Website* [<http://www.sligotown.net/sligo-gaol.shtml>]; ‘Cork City Gaol: A Brief History’, , *Cork City Gaol Heritage Centre* [<https://corkcitygaol.com/about/history/>]; Irish Prisons Inspectorate, *Limerick Prison Inspection: 19th-23rd June 2006* (Limerick), Limerick; Henry Heaney, ‘Ireland’s Penitentiary 1820-1831: An Experiment that Failed’, *Studia Hibernica* 14 (1974) 28–39.

¹⁰⁸ ‘History & Architecture of Kildare Street’, , *National Museum of Ireland* [<https://www.museum.ie/Archaeology/History-Architecture>]; ‘History & Architecture of Natural History’, , *National Museum of Ireland* [<https://www.museum.ie/Natural-History/History-Architecture>].

¹⁰⁹ Mary Carpenter, *Reformatory Prison Discipline as developed by the Rt. Hon. Sir Walter Crofton in the Irish Convict Prisons* (London 1872); Shane Kilcommins e.a., *Crime, Punishment and the Search for Order in Ireland* (Ireland 2004); Niamh Howlin, ‘Nineteenth-Century Criminal Justice: Uniquely Irish or Simply “not English”?’ , *Irish Journal of Legal Studies* 3 (2013) 67–89.

¹¹⁰ Howlin, ‘Nineteenth-Century Criminal Justice’, 70; Curtis Lewis Perry, *Anglo-Saxons and Celts; a study of anti-Irish prejudice in Victorian England* (New York 1968) 5.

¹¹¹ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 175.

Yet Ireland was a colony.¹¹² Therefore, the idea of constructing an Irish identity in a museum would only have developed after independence, and this is reflected in the opening dates of the first Irish museums.¹¹³ This is comparatively late to the rest of Europe and explains why the prisons and museums developed at different rates. Prisons built by colonisers are a symbol of colonial power and encroachment on national sovereignty and are important mechanisms for keeping control of a colonised country. For these reasons, Irish prisons developed earlier than Irish museums. In Britain, 'plans for managing the poor were developed alongside the management of the criminal and the insane'¹¹⁴ and these plans (which included the workhouse system) were implemented in Ireland according to the British model. The connection between the institutions of prisons and museums also reflects what Foucault would consider the latter's inherent disciplinary nature.¹¹⁵

Museums' position in society is closely linked to the institutional apparatus, which is the second aspect of museum analysis. According to Foucault, institutions (prisons, schools, mental institutions, governments) use their 'apparatus' and 'technologies' to work and exercise their power.¹¹⁶ Institutional apparatus refers to the forms of power and knowledge which create the institutions, for example guidelines, morals, laws, and governmental regulations.¹¹⁷ In a museum or art gallery, the institutional apparatus would mean the mission statement, the commission, the laws and practices. Bentham's Panopticon was described as an apparatus by Foucault.¹¹⁸ The institutional technologies, conversely, mean the practical techniques exercised to exude the power and knowledge that the institution has.¹¹⁹

Thirdly, on a more practical level, the partitioning of museums and exhibitions is important. This refers to how they are organised. Rose calls this 'technologies of layout.'¹²⁰ The layout of individual rooms and their decoration can play into this. Rose argues that the layout of a museum 'echoes the discourses of science and culture.'¹²¹ Usually, modern museums are organised according to date and school of thought, or by subject of interest. In the form of a

¹¹² Brady, 'Ireland: In the shadow of the fond abuser', 57.

¹¹³ 'History & Architecture of Natural History'; 'History & Architecture of Kildare Street'.

¹¹⁴ Crowley, Smyth and Murphy, *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, 149.

¹¹⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 77.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem, 206.

¹¹⁷ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 166.

¹¹⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

¹¹⁹ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 166.

¹²⁰ Ibidem, 179.

¹²¹ Ibidem, 173.

narrative, visitors start at the earliest event and progress until the most recent. This will be reflected in the museums analysed in the next chapter.

Finally, the organisation of the exhibits themselves on a minute level is significant in museum analysis. Rose refers to technologies of display and textual technologies. Technologies of display are the way in which museums or art galleries organise their knowledge and power for showing to the public. Display cases, open display, reconstructions and simulacra (objects created by the museum to fill a gap in their collection) work together to form museum exhibitions.¹²² Rose considers the use of display cases;¹²³ 'when placed in a case, an object is dislocated from the everyday context that reconstructions attempt to evoke, and is instead placed in the classificatory schema of the museum.'¹²⁴ Whilst cases serve to protect the exhibits, they also detach them from the narrative on display.

In art galleries, the technologies of display include how the lighting works, and the order in which the artwork is exhibited. The room is darkened, with spotlights focusing on the exhibits. The sombre lighting and atmosphere underpins the sombre topic of the history of the Famine. Another technology of display is the framing choices made. How images are framed and hung are also important stylistic choices which affect how visitors view the work, in what order and from what angle.¹²⁵ In *Coming Home*, for example, the paintings are hung around the edge of room, with some sculptures breaking up the space in the middle. The exhibition consists of two rooms, one containing art created before 1980 and the other containing more 'modern' art from the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Rose explains that, by using these techniques, the organisers make clear that certain things are the 'objects to be looked at.'¹²⁶ As Hooper-Greenhill also points out, objects in museums and galleries today are exhibited as if they 'spontaneously emerged', and often the social circumstances surrounding their production are rendered invisible.¹²⁷ This is not the case, and much discussion goes into the display technologies in an exhibition or museum. It is also why panels are important to explain the context of the pieces.

Rose's second point on the organisation of exhibitions are the textual technologies. These refer to the information accompanying the exhibits; the panels, catalogues, labels and captions explaining the origins of the piece - 'although museums and galleries are fundamentally

¹²² Ibidem, 176.

¹²³ See Figures 73 and 77

¹²⁴ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 176.

¹²⁵ Ibidem, 177.

¹²⁶ Ibidem, 170.

¹²⁷ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, 116.

concerned with objects, these objects are always contextualised by words.¹²⁸ These seem innocuous but influence how the piece is interpreted; 'we see things according to what is said about them.'¹²⁹ For example, the title of a museum is what draws the audience in; 'the function of the title...is to attract people...and to let the audience know when they have arrived.'¹³⁰ Historically, the information provided by museums was dominated by the views and interests of the curator. There is inevitable emphasis on information that the producers feel should be conveyed. What is *not* included in these cases, although obviously harder to analyse, is equally important.¹³¹

The title, more than any other technology of display, tells the viewer how the artist themselves intended the work to be viewed, since it is the only text or words which has accompanied the painting from its conception. The title grounds the painting in the context in which it was produced. The gaps and omissions in speech and written language reveal values, opinions, assumptions and attitudes.¹³² Rose wonders what the effect would be of removing all the captions in a museum.¹³³ In the case of the Famine, it must be asked; how subjective is the information provided? How are the victims themselves portrayed? What do these painting contribute to the commemoration of the Famine? What kind of 'citizen' is constructed by these exhibitions?

Most museum panels contain the year of completion, the artists' lifespan, the title of the piece, and the materials used to produce it; such information accompanying exhibits 'has been so naturalised in museums as to be almost invisible.'¹³⁴ Then, a body of text, analysing the exhibit for the observer. At the end of the panels, the names of the sponsors are usually stated. These figures are of course important because they are the ones who make the exhibit available in the first place. These are sometimes individuals but can also be corporate organisations; 'part of the new ethos of corporate involvement in museums and galleries.'¹³⁵ In these ways, museums can be analysed to see what kind of identity they construct.

¹²⁸ Ibidem, 115.

¹²⁹ Ibidem, 116.

¹³⁰ Ibidem, 133.

¹³¹ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 180.

¹³² Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, 115.

¹³³ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 179.

¹³⁴ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, 116.

¹³⁵ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 2.

Chapter 3 - Museums

'The Famine is a central part of our past...it is a motif of powerlessness which runs through our national consciousness, it is also a human drama upon which we, as Irish people, place an enormous value and by which we have been radically instructed.' – Mary Robinson¹³⁶

Museums are an important part of commemoration. As we have seen, Irish museum culture developed relatively late in comparison to its European counterparts, if you compare the first Irish museums with those in England, Scotland and the Netherlands, for instance.¹³⁷ In the absence of being a sovereign nation, there was no 'national identity' to be built; building and supporting a national identity is a key role of museums.¹³⁸ Only after independence was the absence of museums addressed. Many of the new museums concerned the fight for Irish sovereignty, but in the late twentieth century the Famine also captured the national imagination. Hooper-Greenhill writes that 'museums...are at a point of renewal', their nature changing with the advent of the twenty-first century.¹³⁹ The newer 'social' nature of museums moved away from being defenders of 'scholarship, research and collection *at the expense of* the needs of visitors' and more towards being *for* visitors.¹⁴⁰

In this chapter, three museums are analysed. These vary in size, prestige, and location. There are no museums dedicated to the Famine in any of the five largest Irish cities or in Northern Ireland. Therefore, this thesis analyses three museums in rural locations. Whilst museums deal with the Famine locally (e.g. Thurles Famine Museum, Doagh Island, Donaghmore Famine Museum), the disaster is underrepresented in urban locations. This is difficult to account for, but with regards to the capital:

*'Dublin...presents a very complex face to the realities of the Famine. Regions of the city and its suburbs remained unaffected by its reach and life went on comfortably as usual. In contrast, its western inner-city communities suffered even more.'*¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Mary Robinson, 'Preface', in: *The Great Irish Famine* (zp 1994) 7.

¹³⁷ 'Ashmolean Museum', , *The Invention of Museum Anthropology, 1850-1920* [, <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/sma/index.php/primary-documents/primary-documents-ashmolean-museum.html>]; 'The Hunterian - History', , *The Hunterian* [, <https://www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian/about/history/#d.en.190639>]; Marjan Scharloo, ed., *Teylers Museum : a journey in time* (Haarlem, the Netherlands 2010).

¹³⁸ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*.

¹³⁹ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, 6.

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem, 1.

¹⁴¹ Crowley, Smyth and Murphy, *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, 327.

The complex social structures and trading networks within the Dublin city region meant that the rich were relatively unaffected by the Famine, whilst the poor suffered more, in the slums and 'squalor of the Liberties'.¹⁴² The social structure was 'deeply stratified', meaning this increased suffering would have gone unnoticed by the elites.¹⁴³ Those fleeing the Famine from elsewhere often congregated in the Liberties¹⁴⁴ or moved on swiftly, to ships to take them out of Ireland. Leinster had a higher proportion of people emigrating than people dying during the Famine – 'Leinster was to experience one person dying from famine-related causes to c.2.4 person emigrating.'¹⁴⁵ This inevitably influences the nature of commemoration in Leinster. All the five largest cities are coastal, so this higher ratio of emigration may have repeated itself on a smaller scale in each of these cities, accounting for the lack of dedicated Famine museums in these towns. The titles, organisation, framing choices and panels of the museums are analysed, whilst considering what kind of Irish citizen is being built. These symbols are key in understanding what character they are giving Famine commemoration.

National Famine Museum of Ireland

The National Famine Museum of Ireland was opened to the public in 1994, in the wave of Famine museums and monuments opened in the lead-up to the 150-year anniversary. The museum is in Strokestown, county Roscommon, in north-west Ireland. This may, at first, not seem a logical location for the National Famine Museum, but 'over the Famine decade, County Roscommon lost 31% of its population, the highest population loss of any county in the country.'¹⁴⁶ In 1997, the museum published a book entitled *The Great Irish Famine*, with a preface by Mary Robinson.¹⁴⁷ The final chapter, entailing the Famine's aftermath, is entitled 'a conspiracy of silence'.¹⁴⁸ This is how the curators of the museum view the Irish handling of the Famine, and something which they seek to combat; 'this Famine Museum shows us that history is not about power and triumph nearly so often as it is about suffering and vulnerability.'¹⁴⁹

The Museum's title gives it significant authority. The use of 'National Museum' gives the place prestige and sounds official. The implication is that this is the 'true' and official version of the Famine. The museum is the only national museum in Ireland fully dedicated to the Famine, whilst still dealing with the local and regional impact. The Museum itself is housed in one of the

¹⁴² Ibidem, 330.

¹⁴³ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁵ Ibidem, 332.

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem, 308.

¹⁴⁷ Campbell, *The Great Irish Famine*.

¹⁴⁸ Ibidem, 51.

¹⁴⁹ Robinson, 'Preface'.

side buildings on the Strokestown estate.¹⁵⁰ Visitors are free to wander around as they choose. Many of the texts and panels in the Museum are taken from the accompanying book.¹⁵¹ Effort has been made to make the museum engaging; for example, there is a replica of a coffin ship bunk¹⁵² and a gun¹⁵³ which was used to assassinate a lord of the estate. The museum is laid out as follows:

1. Ascendancy Life¹⁵⁴
2. Cottier Life¹⁵⁵
3. The Potato – Arrival of the Blight¹⁵⁶
4. Famine Relief¹⁵⁷
5. Workhouses & Kitchens¹⁵⁸
6. The sign for section 6 seemed to be missing from the museum, but it seems that this consists of the film room.¹⁵⁹
7. Emigration¹⁶⁰
8. Eviction¹⁶¹
9. Dissent & Agitation – Assassination¹⁶²
10. Contemporary Famine¹⁶³

The final part consists of a temporary exhibition. In early 2018, the temporary exhibition was about a Famine in Finland in the 1860s, and in summer 2018 about the Irish diaspora in Canada. This space is regarded as very important, since it draws attention to the suffering of others globally and throughout history. This space is the physical manifestation of Mary Robinson's statement that 'we can honour that survival best...by taking our folk-memory of this catastrophe into the present world with us and allowing it to strengthen and deepen our identity with those who are still suffering.'¹⁶⁴

The organisation of the museum is quite simple. The museum uses a pale colour scheme – greys, whites and beiges.¹⁶⁵ Windows run along one wall, and the facing wall is rustic grey brick.¹⁶⁶ This is reminiscent of what the Irish peasants' homes may have been made of, and a design choice

¹⁵⁰ See Figure 85

¹⁵¹ Campbell, *The Great Irish Famine*.

¹⁵² See Figure 72

¹⁵³ See Figure 76

¹⁵⁴ See Figure 59

¹⁵⁵ See Figure 60

¹⁵⁶ See Figure 61

¹⁵⁷ See Figure 62

¹⁵⁸ See Figure 63

¹⁵⁹ See Figure 78

¹⁶⁰ See Figure 64

¹⁶¹ See Figure 65

¹⁶² See Figure 66

¹⁶³ See Figure 67

¹⁶⁴ Robinson, 'Preface'.

¹⁶⁵ See Figure 83

¹⁶⁶ See Figure 84

also made at the Skibbereen Heritage Centre. It is also reminiscent of many of the workhouse walls which survive throughout Ireland.¹⁶⁷ Otherwise, the walls are all white. They don't draw focus from the exhibits. The panels have simple black lettering on a white background,¹⁶⁸ not very dramatic and easy to read.¹⁶⁹ There are also interactive videos and touch-screen displays available to supplement the texts, 'offering a great deal of material for those who wish it, in an unobtrusive way.'¹⁷⁰

The museum uses display cases, reconstructions, labels, captions and panels to display the exhibits. The only instance of open display (as opposed to display cases) in the museum is the soup pot, original from the 1840s. The panel above lists the recipe of Soyer's Soup.¹⁷¹ Alexis Soyer, a French chef, opened a soup kitchen in Dublin in 1847, with a recipe for 100 gallons of soup which could be made for less than £1.¹⁷² The soup, however, was not nutritious and certainly not enough to live on. At the opening of the soup kitchen, the rich could pay five shillings to come and watch starving paupers feeding.¹⁷³ The inclusion of this incident in the museum not only casts yet more shame on those in power at the time but is effective at putting the visitor in the Famine victims' shoes. Faced with the recipe of what they had to eat, the twenty-first century visitor thinks 'I would be hungry too'. The overall effect is to underline how low the Irish people had fallen, and how far they have come. The pot is not displayed as centrally as the pistol, it is in a corner, and yet its size makes it hard to miss. Why is it on the side-lines and not as central as the pistol is? The soup pot is a reminder: of an attempt to provide food to starving people; that they needed help in the first place; how the relief efforts were below par. It was, after all, the government who invited Soyer to open the soup kitchen¹⁷⁴ and start a system which was replicated around the country, even though 'the health benefits of the soup were questioned.'¹⁷⁵ With regards to Famine commemoration, it reminds of the failures of the elite, both Irish and English, in mitigating the Famine.

¹⁶⁷ Crowley, Smyth and Murphy, *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, 123.

¹⁶⁸ See Figures 70 and 75

¹⁶⁹ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, 134.

¹⁷⁰ Ibidem, 135.; See Figures 78 and 82

¹⁷¹ See Figure 70

¹⁷² Donal Fallon, 'Soyer's Soup Kitchen', *Come Here to Me!* (zp 2014) [, <https://comeheretome.com/2014/04/11/soyers-soup-kitchen-1847/>].

¹⁷³ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁴ Helen Soutar Morris, *Portrait of a Chef: The Life of Alexis Soyer, Sometime Chef to the Reform Club* (Cambridge 2013) 78.

¹⁷⁵ Fallon, 'Soyer's Soup Kitchen'.

Also displayed in cases are letters,¹⁷⁶ a miniature replica of a Famine ship¹⁷⁷ and maps. The Famine Museum in Strokestown has an extensive archive of original Famine sources, including letters from tenants begging not to be evicted, some of which are on display.¹⁷⁸ The letters introduce anxiety and doubt into the equation; it isn't often that the Famine story is told through the words of the actual victims. They induce sympathy and pity in the viewer. A reconstruction is also offered of a peasant 'bed', which is essentially a wooden box filled with straw,¹⁷⁹ and of the Famine ship bunks.¹⁸⁰ The ship bunks are a common feature of Famine commemoration which are reconstructed in many Irish museums (Wicklow's Historical Gaol, Jeanie Johnston, Dunbrody Famine Ship). The bunks are a clear way of symbolising the conditions and significance of the coffin ships and of emigration. Emigration makes up a tenth of the Museum's exhibits, contrasting with the Dunbrody which focuses almost exclusively on it, and with Skibbereen where it plays a far smaller role.

One significant exhibit is the pistol used at the height of the Famine to kill Major Denis Mahon, a lord of the Strokestown estate. This is displayed in a case in the centre of the space.¹⁸¹ This is significant; the most central object in the space is one associated with rebellion and therefore with agency. The impression is that the Irish, starving and cowed as they were, still had the rebellious spirit they needed to revolt against their (English) overlords, and to claim some autonomy. This is not the place to analyse the murder, but in any case, the true culprit of the assassination was never discovered.¹⁸²

The potato plays a large role in the exhibition, and a larger still symbolic role in commemoration of the Famine generally. In the absence of depicting actual suffering, Famine commemoration must use symbols to convey their message. The jars of potatoes are reminiscent of biological specimens.¹⁸³ The potato helped to build Ireland, with the population growing exponentially until 1845, largely due to the nutrition the plant offered.¹⁸⁴ Yet it also let Ireland down, causing widespread suffering. Consuming the plant is still an Irish stereotype and is still associated with Famine remembrance; as the plant 'left the country socially and emotionally

¹⁷⁶ See Figures 79 and 80

¹⁷⁷ See Figure 71

¹⁷⁸ See Figure 81

¹⁷⁹ See Figure 68

¹⁸⁰ See Figure 72

¹⁸¹ See Figure 76

¹⁸² Olivia McCormack, 'Background to the murder of Major Denis Mahon, Strokestown Park, County Roscommon on 2 November, 1847.' (Department of Modern History Maynooth, Ireland 1994).

¹⁸³ See Figure 69

¹⁸⁴ Mac Con Iomaire en Óg Gallagher, 'The History of the Potato', 5.

scarred for well over a century.¹⁸⁵ It symbolises suffering and how the Irish persevered despite the hardships, as does its presence in the museum.

The type of Irish-ness created by the museum is therefore one of a deeply stratified class system, before focusing on them as victims. The National Famine Museum takes a different turn to the other two cases by focusing partially on increased nationalism after the Famine in section 9,¹⁸⁶ which Dunbrody and Skibbereen ignore. They emphasize the rebellious spirit of the Irish, by placing an assassination weapon in the centre of the space and dedicating a whole section to nationalist spirit post-Famine. A different kind of Irish character is portrayed, with agency and courage, despite their victimhood.

Dunbrody Famine Ship Experience

The Dunbrody Famine Ship Experience opened to the public in May 2001.¹⁸⁷ The current ship in New Ross, county Wexford, is a replica of the original, which sunk in 1875;¹⁸⁸ it serves as a 'tribute to captain and ship.'¹⁸⁹ The Dunbrody and the Jeanie Johnston are the only two Famine ships on display in Ireland; both are replicas and floating museums commemorations to the Famine. The Dunbrody is more extensive than its Dublin counterpart, with a museum, shop and café. The ships, perhaps surprisingly, are run independently from one another and have no cooperation. The Dunbrody has been selected for analysis because of the accompanying museum, and the construction of Irish identity through its exhibits.

The original Dunbrody was employed to bring emigrants to Canada. It had a favourable reputation, a sympathetic captain and low death rates. It is by far not the average Famine ship story; the ships were not called 'coffin ships' for no reason. It is interesting to consider why such a philanthropic ship was selected to exhibit the emigrant experience. Hundreds of ships left Ireland during the Famine, and death rates could be as high as 50%.¹⁹⁰ The story puts the Dunbrody on a moral high ground over the other ships and distances the museum from the narrative that Famine emigrants were only victims.

The title of the site moves away from the museum label. The use of the word 'experience' removes the viewer from a purely observational role and makes them part of the story, making visiting seem more interactive and attractive. It adds authenticity to the Dunbrody's tale, making

¹⁸⁵ Ibidem, 6.

¹⁸⁶ See Figures 66 and 77

¹⁸⁷ See Figure 17

¹⁸⁸ 'The History of Dunbrody', , *Dunbrody Famine Ship Experience and Restaurant* [, <https://www.dunbrody.com/visitor-info/the-history-of-dunbrody/>].

¹⁸⁹ See Figure 92

¹⁹⁰ McGowan, 'Remembering Canada', 372.

it seem less like a constructed narrative and more truthful. If it was called 'Dunbrody Famine Story' or 'Dunbrody Famine Museum', the implication would be less intimate. The implication is that the victims were 'just like us', bringing the Famine closer. 'Experience' also has an entertainment value to it. Regarding Famine commemoration, the use of the word 'experience' brings the disaster closer. The name says that the viewer can experience what it was 'really like', which, of course, they cannot. The squalor of the real famine ship experience is beyond the scope of imagination of most people who visit the Dunbrody.

The Dunbrody museum is divided into six parts;

1. An introduction to the Famine museum
2. An introduction to the Famine and New Ross in a film, after which the curtain dramatically opens to reveal the ship floating outside.¹⁹¹
3. A guided tour of the ship
4. Irish Emigrant Wall of Honour¹⁹²
5. Irish America Hall of Fame¹⁹³
6. Emigrant Flame, which is a memorial outside the museum.¹⁹⁴

This organisation makes sure visitors see the grim facts of the Famine, before ending on a high note, impressing visitors by the achievements of the Irish emigrants despite their ordeal. The lighting is dark, which emphasizes the attitude visitors are supposed to have towards the Famine; reflecting a time of moral and literal darkness, a period which was sombre and difficult, but not without hope. The importance of 'correctly modulated lighting' is substantial and can show which objects are to be looked at in what way.¹⁹⁵ For example, the spotlights on the photographs displayed in the Hall of Fame illuminate the figures and show us that they are to be looked and admired. The literal, ethical and moral darkness of the Famine period is reflected in the exhibits.

The twelve panels are written in white text on coloured backgrounds, and they are harder to read than those at the National Famine Museum. The texts mainly focus on emigration as the legacy of the Famine. In Famine commemoration, the victims often go unnamed. This is often due to lack of records. In the case of the Dunbrody, a passenger list remains from April 1849 detailing names, ages and occupations. Therefore, the museum can relate their story to real people, include their words, and make the stories more relatable.

¹⁹¹ See Figure 17

¹⁹² See Figure 87

¹⁹³ See Figures 94 and 95

¹⁹⁴ See Figure 86

¹⁹⁵ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 114.

The panels concern the importance of New Ross as a port, the Dunbrody ship, her passengers, and the experiences of the emigrants, in both Ireland and North America. The narrative is that the migrants were resourceful, enterprising and often went on to make great lives for themselves, such as Thomas Hamilton Oliver; 'he thrived in the New World and became one of Quebec's leading shipbuilders.'¹⁹⁶ Another '11-year-old boy, Patrick Sinnot...travelled alone.'¹⁹⁷ Although mentions are made of those 'who continued to suffer in desperate poverty',¹⁹⁸ the focus is on the immigrants who had more positive experiences. The narrative of helpless victims with no agency is therefore less prevalent in the Dunbrody museum. Although many people also emigrated to Great Britain and Australia, the focus is on those who went to North America. The victims are more individual, due to the use of names – George Bitchie, Mary Keefe, Ellen Fitzgerald, Willy Mason, Ann Morrissey – which separates them from the masses, such as 'engineer James Little, who wished to 'try his fortune' in America.'¹⁹⁹ The image of James Little pursuing a new future evokes quite a different image to the Strokestown peasants staggering down Custom House Quay towards the emigrant ships.

The panels immerse visitors in the story, making them less passive and more of a participant. One panel promises that visitors can 'meet the passengers.'²⁰⁰ The panels draw a vivid picture of emigration at the time, rooting their Famine commemoration in it. In New Ross, the contribution the Famine made to the building of Irish national identity is the tradition of emigration. This is repeated in many other museums around the country. It makes sense for a museum centred around a Famine ship to portray the Famine's legacy in this way. A 'guilty party' is not named and the tone of the museum is objective. For the descendants of Famine emigrants coming to the museum, however, it casts doubt about the circumstances in which their ancestors left Ireland.

Reconstructions are used to help the imagination to help construct the 'famine experience', and this is an important part of the Dunbrody ship. Reconstructions are helpful in symbolising suffering and are important in the organisation of the museum; 'reconstructions depend on the presence of 'real' artefacts in an 'accurate' combination, and this makes their display seem truthful.'²⁰¹ The entire Dunbrody ship is a reconstruction but reconstructing also happens on a smaller scale. For example, the use of mannequins, which several museums use to

¹⁹⁶ See Figure 88

¹⁹⁷ See Figure 89

¹⁹⁸ See Figure 91

¹⁹⁹ See Figure 90

²⁰⁰ See Figure 89

²⁰¹ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 176.

depict the Famine victims. Again, these do not depict starving figures; the *representation* of suffering is enough.

Reconstruction is also offered through actors; after descending into the hold of the ship, the visitors are invited to sit and listen to 'true stories' of people who travelled on the Dunbrody, acted out by employees of the museum. Hereby, the museum puts faces to the stories. Regarding the use of actors, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill describes how 'historic houses become more historic and more 'real' by employing actors.'²⁰²

The actors are both women, the first telling the story of a second-class family and the second telling the story of a couple in first-class. The first woman is dressed plainly, with a dirty apron and clutching a fake baby. She describes the squalor, darkness, hunger and disease in the hold; a story of starvation, helplessness and poverty familiar to the Famine narrative. The second woman's dress is more grand and clean, and she adds a new angle to the Famine story, of well-to-do people who did not die during the Famine, but who lost their livelihoods and had to make lives elsewhere, and who could afford decent passage. These people rarely feature in the Famine commemoration narrative, as they have more agency and are less helpless. The effect is to make the stories more 'real' and the actors interact with the spectators, especially the children, to make them seem more involved in the 'experience'. It makes the Famine commemoration and experience human, not just facts and figures but real-life stories with real-life consequences.

The tradition of emigration is particularly Irish, existing long before the Famine but exacerbated by it.²⁰³ One million Irish people emigrated between 1815 and 1845, and the same number emigrated between 1845 and 1855.²⁰⁴ The difference is that, pre-Famine, many emigrants went to Great Britain²⁰⁵ and that, during the Famine, most emigrants went to North America.²⁰⁶ Emigration continued apace after the Famine, and did not tail off until the 1990s. A further 2 million departed Ireland before 1911. Many museums mention the emigration tradition and the Irish diaspora (e.g. EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum, the Jeanie Johnston). The 'coffin ships' of the Famine symbolise this tradition and the narrative of the plucky Irish seeking their fortunes elsewhere in the face of hardship. The conditions of the coffin ships and in the New World were often as bad as Ireland. Emigrants could be transported alongside the corn being

²⁰² Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 203.

²⁰³ Crowley, Smyth and Murphy, *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, 591.

²⁰⁴ Ibidem, 214.

²⁰⁵ Ibidem, 591.

²⁰⁶ Ibidem, 214.

exported from Ireland, which could have fed them.²⁰⁷ 'The 1847 exodus was less an emigration than a 'headlong flight of refugees', which 'bore all the marks of panic and hysteria.'²⁰⁸

At the Dunbrody Famine Ship Experience, there is an entire room called the 'Irish America Hall of Fame', dedicated to the 'great' people descended from Irish immigrants, such as John F Kennedy, Grace Kelly, Henry Ford and Michael Flatley.²⁰⁹ The Irish thereby lay claim to these famous historical figures and this again shows the perseverance of the Irish spirit; despite all the colonial overlords inflicted on them, they survived and produced these important people. The ship bunks displayed in Strokestown also have this message, symbolising how the Irish would go on to do great things in the New World.

The museum makes little mention of the deceased Famine victims, including those who died aboard the coffin ships. The panels barely mention the dead and this is a departure from the other museums. Emigrants are only part of the Famine story and this is reflected other museums. The Dunbrody has a monument component, but this is also dedicated to emigrants. The remembrance at the Dunbrody is therefore 'engineered and orchestrated' towards commemorating the migrants of the Famine, at the cost at all the other victims. The impression of Irish-ness created by this museum is that they were enterprising, resourceful and ready to face the challenges emigration brought. The burden of victimhood is lifted somewhat by this impression, and the helpless, dependant rhetoric of other monuments carries less weight.

Skibbereen Heritage Centre

Skibbereen and West Cork are widely considered to be the region worst affected by the Famine.²¹⁰ The scenes from this town gained notoriety during and since the Famine, but 'conditions were at least as awful in other districts, such as west Connacht and the north midlands.'²¹¹ Nevertheless, the word 'Skibbereen' has become synonymous with Famine suffering.²¹² This is due to several witnesses publishing accounts of suffering in the area, 'focusing worldwide attention on the disaster.'²¹³ Therefore, the Skibbereen Heritage Centre has dedicated half its museum and much of its resources to the 'Famine Story'.

²⁰⁷ Ibidem, 237.

²⁰⁸ McDonagh, 'Irish Famine emigration to the United States', 440–441.

²⁰⁹ See Figure 95

²¹⁰ Kearney en O'Regan, *Skibbereen: The Famine Story*, 1.

²¹¹ Gribben, *The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America*, 181.

²¹² Emily Mark-Fitzgerald, 'Commemoration and the Performance of Irish Memory', in: *Crossroads: Performance Studies and Irish Culture* (London 2009) 86–99, aldaar 93.

²¹³ Terri Kearney, 'Great Irish Famine', *Skibbereen Heritage Centre* [, <http://skibbheritage.com/great-irish-famine/>].

The Skibbereen Heritage Centre opened to the public in 2000, again as part of a wave of new Famine museums which opened after the 150-year anniversary in 1997.

*'The centre was created primarily as an engine of cultural tourism – a collision of Famine memory and economic regeneration that would serve to push Skibbereen to the forefront as a national focal point for Famine commemoration.'*²¹⁴

The museum is smaller than the previous two analysed, comprising of only two rooms, one of which is dedicated to the Famine. Yet this small space manages to cram a large amount of information into it.²¹⁵

As mentioned previously and by several authors,²¹⁶ Skibbereen is seen as the 'epicentre of horror' for the Famine.²¹⁷ Therefore, the inclusion of the name in the title of the museum is significant and likely to interest people. The population of the town is roughly 2500 and it is the southernmost town in Ireland, remote and rural. Therefore, for many people, the only connotation they have of 'Skibbereen Heritage' is the Famine. Likewise, for the 'Skibbereen Famine Story'. The use of the word 'story', as with the word 'experience' in Dunbrody, moves away from the museum concept. It sounds immersive and interactive, more fun than the official-sounding 'National Famine Museum'. It also refers to the fact that the story the museum tells is constructed narrative. Unlike the Dunbrody, this does not necessarily reflect the content of the exhibit, which uses display cases, drawings, video and panels in much the same way as Strokestown.

The 'Famine Story' consists of one bright room. The visitor is encouraged to view the exhibits in the 'correct' order through footprints on the floor, which Rose calls 'spatial routeing'.²¹⁸ The visitor starts with the scene being set of the Irish peasant way of life in pre-Famine times.²¹⁹ The organisers manage to fit an astonishing amount of information into the small space, covering the potato blight,²²⁰ press reports,²²¹ relief work,²²² the workhouse,²²³ soup

²¹⁴ Mark-Fitzgerald, 'Commemoration and the Performance of Irish Memory', 96.

²¹⁵ See Figure 20

²¹⁶ Mark-Fitzgerald, 'Commemoration and the Performance of Irish Memory', 96; Biggs, *A Pocket History of the Irish Famine*, 251; Gribben, *The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America*, 181.

²¹⁷ Mark-Fitzgerald, 'Commemoration and the Performance of Irish Memory', 95.

²¹⁸ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 182.

²¹⁹ See Figures 27, 29 and 33

²²⁰ See Figure 28

²²¹ See Figures 32 and 34

²²² See Figure 35

²²³ See Figures 38 and 39

kitchens,²²⁴ Soyer's Soup,²²⁵ foreign aid,²²⁶ disease,²²⁷ population changes,²²⁸ emigration,²²⁹ burial practices,²³⁰ and modern famines²³¹ all in one room.

The information panels, in clear black text on white backgrounds, balance text and illustration well, hung side-by-side 'so that it is possible to contemplate each of them individually.'²³² The panels move away from the narrative of the Famine victims being a mass, nameless and lost in the numbers. Whilst they do make use of graphs, maps and statistics²³³ they also zoom in on individual figures to make the 'story' more relatable, such as 'Mr James Mahony, of Cork',²³⁴ Dr Daniel Donovan, 'a doctor and surgeon of exceptional ability',²³⁵ or the workhouse inmates; 'Regan, Ellen. Walsh, Mary. Carey, Owen.'²³⁶ This makes the Famine commemoration less abstract and more human. The use of graphs and statistics makes the information seem authoritative and trustworthy.

The 'storybook' nature of some of the panels can be seen in 'West Cork cottages'.²³⁷ The illustration would not be out of place in a children's story, and the reconstruction of the materials used helps to fill gaps in the museums' collection.²³⁸ There are samples of the rock, straw and wood on display to be touched and to make the 'story' seem more realistic. The overall impression is quite romantic, with the cottage looking stable and rural. This is not entirely truthful; the hovels of the Irish peasantry 'continually appalled foreign travellers in Ireland.'²³⁹ Even in the 1860s, there was no compensation for tenants for improvements made, and the houses could be in dire straits.²⁴⁰ The rustic stone²⁴¹ is used repeatedly in many of the Famine museums, and also on the outside of the Skibbereen Heritage Centre.²⁴² This stylistic choice

²²⁴ See Figure 37

²²⁵ See Figures 42 and 43

²²⁶ See Figure 44

²²⁷ See Figure 46

²²⁸ See Figures 48 and 49

²²⁹ See Figure 51

²³⁰ See Figure 50

²³¹ See Figure 52

²³² Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 177.

²³³ See Figures 25, 28, 38, 48 and 49

²³⁴ See Figure 31

²³⁵ See Figure 36

²³⁶ See Figure 38

²³⁷ See Figure 27

²³⁸ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 176.

²³⁹ Samuel Clark and James S Donnelly, *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780–1914* (Wisconsin, USA 2003) 327.

²⁴⁰ Ibidem, 233.

²⁴¹ See Figure 27

²⁴² See Figure 24

suggests that the Irish haven't changed that much, that this happened to 'our' people, drawing a link between the victims and the contemporary Irish.

The Story uses glass cases and reconstructions as technologies of display.²⁴³ The museum uses a mixture of visual materials – photographs, videos, texts, objects – and audio materials – recordings, songs – to display their 'story'; they present a narrative. Consequently, the preferred textual technology is text, diagrams and illustrations. These texts are replicated in the book accompanying the museum, and they translate into book form almost seamlessly, showing their narrative nature.²⁴⁴

The number of actual objects on display is limited; a hooded cloak,²⁴⁵ two soup pots,²⁴⁶ a writing slope²⁴⁷ and a travelling trunk.²⁴⁸ Several of the material exhibits in Skibbereen are familiar from the National Famine Museum - the cloak,²⁴⁹ the trunk²⁵⁰ and the pots.²⁵¹ The travelling chest emphasizes the importance of emigration in Famine commemoration, which plays less of a role in Skibbereen. This is despite the fact that the museum has been visited by 'many, many thousands of people whose ancestors left Skibbereen during the Great Famine.'²⁵² In Skibbereen, emigration is a smaller cog in the larger wheel of the Famine story. In Skibbereen, Famine commemoration refers to several smaller parts contributing to make the disaster, whereas in Strokestown there is more focus on emigration and on the unrest in the years that followed the Famine. Both focus on their own localities, roughly 375km apart, yet have commonalities regarding material exhibits.

As mentioned in the Strokestown section, the soup pots, or 'boilers', are synonymous with the Famine. Many of the pots were from donors, like the Turkish Sultan and American Quaker groups.²⁵³ These pots symbolise, among other things, the ineffectual way in which relief was handled and the quality of workhouse food. Many of the soups brewed in them, including Soyer's Soup,²⁵⁴ lacked nutrition and were responsible for the spread of scurvy.²⁵⁵ They were well-intentioned donations, and since they didn't rot away like many objects used in 1845, they have

²⁴³ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 175.

²⁴⁴ Kearney en O'Regan, *Skibbereen: The Famine Story*.

²⁴⁵ See Figure 40

²⁴⁶ See Figures 26 and 43

²⁴⁷ See Figure 47

²⁴⁸ See Figure 45

²⁴⁹ See Figure 74

²⁵⁰ See Figure 97

²⁵¹ See Figure 96

²⁵² Kearney en O'Regan, *Skibbereen: The Famine Story*, 83.

²⁵³ 'Famine Pots', , *The Irish Memorial: Leacht Cuimhneacháin Na Ngael* [, <http://www.irishmemorial.org/famine-pot/>].

²⁵⁴ See Figures 42 and 43

²⁵⁵ 'Famine Pots'.

come to symbolise the Famine.²⁵⁶ Two are displayed in Skibbereen, one relating to the infamous Soyer's Soup²⁵⁷ and the other a donation.²⁵⁸

What kind of Irish-ness is being built by this museum? The Irish are undoubtedly cast in the role of victim, yet some are cast as heroes. Dr Daniel Donovan,²⁵⁹ who was 'the first Medical Officer of Skibbereen workhouse', the other doctors Somerville and Hadden,²⁶⁰ and James H. Swanton, a miller who set up an emigration scheme and soup kitchen.²⁶¹ These four are cast as philanthropic figures who helped those in need. Skibbereen also pays tribute to the contribution of those who went to West Cork to bear witness and report back about the devastation there, such as Elihu Burritt who came from Connecticut to investigate conditions in Cork.²⁶² Generally, the tone of the museum is slightly more distanced from the victims. The Dunbrody had a clear narrative of the Irish as plucky, resourceful characters, whereas in Skibbereen the tone is more reserved.

²⁵⁶ Leslie Lyons, 'The Famine Pot', *Oughterard Heritage* (zp 2016) [, <http://www.oughterardheritage.org/content/topics/the-great-famine/the-famine-pot>].

²⁵⁷ See Figures 42 and 43

²⁵⁸ See Figure 26

²⁵⁹ See Figure 36

²⁶⁰ See Figure 47

²⁶¹ See Figure 47

²⁶² Kearney en O'Regan, *Skibbereen: The Famine Story*.

Chapter 4 - Exhibitions

In this chapter, I will consider two temporary exhibitions on display in Dublin in spring 2018. Firstly, I will analyse the Coming Home exhibition of Famine art, running from 8th March to 22nd June in Dublin Castle. Secondly, the Dark Shadows exhibition in CHQ building, running from 22nd March until 4th April. The second exhibition consisted of twenty-three sculptures by the Irish artist Kieran Tuohy. These exhibitions are both temporary, relating to the Famine, moving to other parts of Ireland after the capital. Dark Shadows moved to Portumna in Galway, where its run was extended until September 2018,²⁶³ and Coming Home moved to Skibbereen and then Derry in 2019. I will examine the technologies of display, the technologies of layout and textual technologies of the exhibition as a framework for my analysis. I will look at the titles of the pieces, the framing choices, the information panels and their positioning within the exhibition, to see what they say about Famine commemoration.

Before analysing the exhibition, I will briefly consider the title Coming Home;

‘the function of the title of the exhibition is to attract people to the exhibition and to let the audience know when they have arrived. The title should use familiar vocabulary and should stimulate and motivate.’²⁶⁴

The Coming Home art exhibition consists of pieces which usually reside in Canada, on the subject of the Famine, often by Irish artists. In a sense, these pieces are literally Coming Home, back to the land of their subject origin and the nation of their creators. However, it is not just the art which is coming home. In Ireland, the concept of ‘home’ is an important one. Even if you have never lived in Ireland, extended Irish family will refer to your Coming Home whenever you visit.

‘Irish society was considered to be a demographic outlier for much of the twentieth century...and to have embraced more secular values in personal and intimate life late...the divorce rate remains low and the overall fertility rate is comparatively high’²⁶⁵

The values of family, tradition and home values are important in Irish culture. The grip of the Catholic Church has, in part, contributed to this; its influence can be seen in the quote above, with the low divorce and high fertility rates. The tradition of emigration has also played a role in the idea of Coming Home; a huge proportion of tourists in Ireland are descended from Irish

²⁶³ Judy Murphy, ‘Shedding light on dark days’, *Connacht Tribune* (zp 2018) [, <https://connachttribune.ie/shedding-light-on-dark-days-123/>].

²⁶⁴ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, 133.

²⁶⁵ Connolly, *The “Irish” Family*, 2.

emigrants, particularly from the United States and Canada.²⁶⁶ Those still living who have left Ireland within living memory tend to return frequently to visit their (usually large) families. The tradition of emigration is further explored in other chapters. For the abovementioned reasons, *Coming Home* is a particularly apt title for an exhibition about Ireland coming to Ireland. The art is also a reflection on how the Irish historically see themselves and their experiences;

‘The art, spanning 170 years, is far from merely illustrative, and affords reflective expressions of who we once were, and how we came to be who we are today, each piece chosen for its quality as art as well as its capacity to bear witness.’²⁶⁷

This quotation shows that a vital role of the exhibition is ‘to bear witness’. This is interesting, since bearing witness only occurs usually in relation to a crime being committed. Is it then the view of the curator of the exhibition that a crime happened? For example, *Black ’47* has someone literally on trial for their role in the disaster. Blame is frequently present in discussions of the Famine. Sometimes it is underlying, sometimes more overt, but it is there and so it is in this exhibition.

The exhibition generally is quite dark, with spotlights on the artwork. The darkness is in keeping with the tone of the exhibition; serious, thought-provoking and sad. The victimisation of the Irish peasantry is a point driven home in nearly all the artworks. This theme, as previously mentioned, is recurring the Famine commemoration. As shown by *Statistic I & Statistic II*, the numbers affected are too huge to comprehend, and only *Famine Mother and Children* gives a voice to people who were affected by the Famine. This mass is given no voice of its own.

Coming Home Famine Art Exhibition

Textual technologies

Textual technologies refer to the written and visual works displayed in conjunction with other technologies to form the exhibit.²⁶⁸ Panels are the preferred method of textual technology at *Coming Home*. Every painting is accompanied by one, detailing the origins of the piece.²⁶⁹ People view things according to what is said about them.²⁷⁰ The titles play a large role in how the art will be viewed. They also reflect how the Famine is viewed by the exhibition. In the case of *Black ’47*, for example, the title indicates it is depicting a ‘dark’ event, in both the literal and the

²⁶⁶ Sean Connick, ‘Dunbrody Famine Ship Experience’ (zp 2018).

²⁶⁷ O’Sullivan, *Coming Home*, 35.

²⁶⁸ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 178.

²⁶⁹ See Figure 2 for an example.

²⁷⁰ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, 302.

moral sense, and that 1847 was the worst year of the Famine, after two years of potato crop failure and widespread disease and starvation.²⁷¹

The panels construct an Irish citizenhood through their texts. They do this by using the art subjects to represent the Irish and their Famine suffering. For instance, the following quote from the *Irish Peasant Children* panel shows what kind of Irish citizen the exhibit is trying to portray;

*'The children on the rocky outcrop could be said to represent three faces of Ireland: beautiful, mischievous and potentially dangerous. The alluring girl in the red skirt and plaid shawl has that Spanish look found in the west of Ireland; the boy behind the rock is quick and wily, and probably a handful: the girl on the left has seen terrible things and has a desperate air (the bottle in her hand is cocked like a gun). Alone outdoors, all does not bode well for them, and there and no guardians to care for them.'*²⁷²

Why have the writers chosen to portray the characters in this way? Hooper-Greenhill argues that 'words do more than merely name; words summon up associations, shape perceptions, indicate value and create desire.'²⁷³ It is important that the (Irish) viewer can identify with the figures. For example, the girl on the left is described as 'having a desperate air' and holding the bottle 'like a gun'. The insinuation is that this girl more dangerous than she at first appears. The visitor therefore draws a conclusion about this figure from the text that they would otherwise not have. If these figures represent the Irish, then it gives them agency, which is often not given to the representations of Famine victims. For example, the figure representing Ireland holding the bottle 'like a gun', gives the impression that Ireland, though cowed, can still fight back, still has a feisty spirit.

The fact that children are representing Ireland in this piece is significant. You would rarely have a child representing ancient states like France or Spain, for example. The impression is that Ireland is young and still developing, still finding its way and its identity. It is defenceless, but still with spirit, as shown by the boy who is 'probably a handful.'²⁷⁴ Children in art also often represent innocence, which connects back to the concept of 'blame'. This also reflects the way the Famine was portrayed by academics as something which occurred under British rule, rendering Ireland innocent in the whole disaster.

²⁷¹ Campbell, *The Great Irish Famine*.

²⁷² O'Sullivan, *Coming Home*, 141.; See Figure 2

²⁷³ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, 118.

²⁷⁴ See Figure 2

The foremost girl is described as having a 'Spanish look', and again ideas are implied about this figure that are not necessarily intended. But *why* do the organisers choose to tell the audience that the girl has a Spanish look? There is a legend that the Spanish Armada in 1588, defeated and forced to take the long way back to Spain around Ireland, hit a storm. Some of the ships were wrecked in Ireland and the descendants of the survivors still live in the west of Ireland today.²⁷⁵ Perhaps the exhibit is harkening back to this story, but what other connotations does 'Spanish look' have? The Spanish are fiery, revolutionary and, most importantly, *not British*. This creates a cultural difference between Ireland and Britain, which the Irish are keen on.

The three figures appear relatively healthy, but the panel states that they represent Famine victims. When *Irish Peasant Children* was painted, the fashion in art was to make signs of suffering less obvious.²⁷⁶ There are no emaciated figures, no trauma or suffering, instead 'the conceptual frames of reference of the time led artists to adopt shorthand features' to symbolise what they meant.²⁷⁷ This established artist, using the established style of painting, legitimises the event and the painting. Therefore, the accompanying information infers more for the viewer than in the case of the younger art, where depictions of the Famine are more overt; the technologies of display play a larger role in interpreting the piece for the viewer.

We can see here how Famine commemoration contributes to the construction of Irish identity. Another panel also participates in this, of the *Black '47*²⁷⁸ by Michael Farrell, an Irishman and a 'fervent nationalist'²⁷⁹.

*'His views on the Irish Famine...were unequivocal. By focusing on the failure of the British government to address the Famine, Farrell vested in the assistant secretary to the British Treasury in London (with responsibility for relief) all the spleen he could muster.'*²⁸⁰

The painting depicts a large, overbearing Charles Trevelyan, who is reported to have viewed the Famine as 'a mechanism for reducing surplus population.'²⁸¹ He is presiding over a table with potatoes and a skull on it. Trevelyan is 'in the dock before a jury of the dead, arraigned for his mismanagement of the Famine – a fate he escaped in real life.'²⁸² The painting depicts, to his right, a pit filled with skeletons, presumably of Famine victims.

²⁷⁵ O'Farrell, *An Utterly Impartial History of Great Britain*, 207.

²⁷⁶ O'Sullivan, *Coming Home*, 141.

²⁷⁷ Ibidem.

²⁷⁸ See Figure 4

²⁷⁹ O'Sullivan, *Coming Home*, 111.

²⁸⁰ Ibidem, 112.

²⁸¹ Ibidem.

²⁸² Ibidem, 35.

The background has an audience and judge, resembling a courtroom. Some members of the audience point at the Famine victims, whilst the English members turn their backs on the proceedings, ignoring them. The spotlight shines straight on Trevelyan, casting the skeletons into dark and shadow. A landlord looks down at the skeleton pit with a satisfied expression. The Irish again are cast as the victims, reliant on other parties to get justice for them. Although they have been wronged, the guilty parties will eventually get their comeuppance. This harkens back to national identity building, with Ireland being the wronged party which eventually got the independence which, the narrators would have you believe, was always struggled towards.

The panel next to the painting influences the interpretation of the painting, by stating that Farrell studied Holocaust photography from the Second World War.²⁸³ The linking of the painting to the Holocaust through the panel heightens the drama and gravity of the piece. The connection is not unfamiliar to Famine discourse. The Holocaust is seen as the 'ultimate evil' in our society. The Holocaust, the industrialised killing of huge numbers of people, is the ultimate expression of the evils of modernity, technology and bureaucracy.²⁸⁴ There is also a link to colonialism, with a military power exterminating the peoples of the lands they conquer. This exhibition and this painting are not the first to draw the link between the Holocaust and the Famine.²⁸⁵ This association adds moral weight to the Famine. The setting of the painting is reminiscent of the Nuremberg trials which followed the Second World War. This adds a moral dimension to the painting, the idea that you can never get away with your crimes (although of course, Trevelyan did). Indeed, it does look as if Trevelyan is on trial for his crimes, with the skeletons being simultaneously the witnesses and the evidence. Just as the shoes are sometimes all that are left over from victims of the Holocaust, there are shoes in the mass grave in the painting too, a reminder of the humanity and tragedy of the victims.

Through these two examples, we can see how the Irish are constructed; as victims of larger forces than themselves, such as Trevelyan and the landlords, but nevertheless with spirit to revolt and fight for justice, which can be seen in the 'like a gun' reference and in the trial. Generally, Famine victims are voiceless, forcing others to speak for them, their own accounts vanished into history. Only one panel at Coming Home contained words from a victim, Bridget O'Donnell. Here, the panel differs in that it only has Bridget's own words from an *Illustrated*

²⁸³ See Figure 5

²⁸⁴ Rosemary H.T. O'Kane, 'Modernity, the Holocaust and politics', *Economy and Society* 26 (2006) 43–61, aldaar 46 <doi:10.1080/03085149700000003>.

²⁸⁵ Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating the Irish Famine*, 233; Kelleher, 'Hunger and History', 250; Liam Kennedy, 'The Great Irish Famine and the Holocaust', *Irish History Live* [, <https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/irishhistorylive/IrishHistoryResources/Articlesandlecturesbyourteachingstaff/TheGreatIrishFamineandtheHolocaust/>].

London News article;²⁸⁶ 'I had not a bit for my children to eat when they took [the corn] from me'²⁸⁷. I argue that this kind of testimony does far more to make observers empathise with the figures depicted. Visitors are not told how to interpret the piece, but only have Bridget's own words to interpret the sculpture with. If we do indeed 'see things according to what is said about them', then the effect here is to increase empathy with the three figures.²⁸⁸

The panels communicate the nature of Famine commemoration in Ireland. The linking to the Holocaust, for example, shows how seriously they take the subject. The texts are replicated in the exhibition catalogue, which has a more extensive description and context about each artwork.²⁸⁹ The panels show how Ireland takes ownership of the tragedy, and how there is still anger and shame over the disaster.

Technologies of display

The technologies of display at *Coming Home* are very simple. There are no glass cases, no reconstructions and no simulacra.²⁹⁰ The paintings are simply hung side-by-side on the outer walls and the sculptures are displayed on simple rectangular plinths, or 'open display. This does not mean that visitors can touch the sculptures, and there are wardens on duty to prevent this from happening; the Foucauldian interpretation of this is that this disciplines the visitors through being watched, producing 'a visitor who looks rather than touches.'²⁹¹ These simple display techniques do not detract attention from the artworks. Rose argues that putting objects in glass cases 'dislocates' them from their 'everyday context' and distances them from what they are trying to portray.²⁹²

An important technology of display at *Coming Home* is the framing choices. The literal framing choices of pieces are 'practical techniques used to articulate particular forms of power/knowledge.'²⁹³ For example, *Irish Peasant Children* is framed in a grand, golden, carved frame.²⁹⁴ The golden colour of the frame contrasts with the duller colours in the painting itself. The implication is that this painting is grander and more important than the more modestly-framed art at the exhibition. If the painting was framed in simple wood, the overall effect would be very different. Whereas the painting *Gorta* is framed much more simply with wood.²⁹⁵ *Black*

²⁸⁶ 'The Condition of Ireland', , *Illustrated London News* (London 15 december 1849).

²⁸⁷ O'Sullivan, *Coming Home*, 91.

²⁸⁸ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, 116.

²⁸⁹ O'Sullivan, *Coming Home*.

²⁹⁰ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 175.

²⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 181.

²⁹² *Ibidem*, 176.

²⁹³ *Ibidem*, 186.

²⁹⁴ See Figure 1

²⁹⁵ See Figure 3

'47 was also simply framed; the drama of these two pieces are enough by themselves. Similarly, with the sculptures *Famine Mother and Children*, *Statistic I & Statistic II* and *Famine Funeral*, which are alone on plinths with single spotlights. These scenes are striking enough.

Technologies of layout

The technologies of layout at *Coming Home* are difficult because the exhibition had to work with the parameters dictated by being housed in buildings which existed before the exhibition. Dublin Castle, for example, exhibited *Coming Home* in two rooms, dividing the older art from the newer. The Uilinn West Cork Arts Centre in Skibbereen, however, divides the exhibit over two floors. The arrangement will again be different in Derry. Dublin Castle is quite dark, with no windows and dark walls, whereas Uilinn has maroon walls, plenty of windows and a lot of light.²⁹⁶ This changes the nature of the exhibition in the two locations. For example, Dublin Castle had spotlights on the artworks, whereas Skibbereen had no need for them, making Dublin more dramatic and sombre. Nevertheless, there were some commonalities. Both exhibitions divide the painting by date, with the newer art dominating the exhibition. Both had similar spatial routeing, with the visitors being encouraged to view the art in the 'correct' order.

Both had *Black '47* dominating one room, taking up an entire wall. Trevelyan glares down at visitors from a great height. In both cases, this was the first painting that greeted visitors, being angled towards the entrance. It is interesting that, in both locations, the most accusatory piece was selected to be the dominating feature. The painting is also one of the easiest to interpret, with overt representation of the Famine victims. It clearly casts the Irish in a voiceless, victimised role. In the narrative presented by *Black '47*, there is clearly a hero and a villain.

Famine commemoration in art

There are three other artworks which communicate important facets of Irish Famine commemoration. The first is *Gorta* (1946), by Lillian Lucy Davison.²⁹⁷ Three wretched creatures are depicted, and they all have the exaggeratedly emaciated look which many modern depictions of Famine victims have; 'the figures seem to look past one another into nothingness.'²⁹⁸ The landscape is dark, bleak, unpromising and unyielding. The painting is showing a burial of a dead baby on un-consecrated ground in a society as religious as Ireland, which denotes desperation or illegality; 'a more desolate, hopeless place would be hard to imagine.'²⁹⁹ This suggests a *cillín*, where unbaptized, illegitimate or stillborn children, and others deemed unworthy to be buried in

²⁹⁶ See Figure 93

²⁹⁷ See Figure 3

²⁹⁸ O'Sullivan, *Coming Home*, 35. See Figure 6

²⁹⁹ Ibidem, 109.

consecrated ground by the Catholic Church, were buried elsewhere.³⁰⁰ The Famine here is represented as utterly ravaging the landscape, the people and their norms, and that is how it commemorates the disaster.

As we will see later with the sculpture of the dog in *Famine*, terrible deeds were committed during the Famine which led to a 'conspiracy of silence.'³⁰¹ People betrayed each other, dependants were abandoned, funerary traditions were ignored as hunger and disease ravaged the country. *Gorta* therefore demonstrates an important part of why the Famine took so long to be commemorated in the public consciousness: shame. The title of the painting also demonstrates another legacy of the Famine, loss of the native Irish language. Many of the victims spoke Irish as a first language and the Famine hastened its decline. There were 4 million first-language Irish speakers in 1841, but only 680,000 by 1891.³⁰² As with the population of Ireland itself, the population of Irish speakers has never recovered. As the painting portrays grief and pain, the title and its inclusion in the exhibition represents the loss of the Irish language, which has fewer speakers with every census taken.

Secondly, the 'conspiracy of silence' is also communicated in *Famine Funeral* by John Coll.³⁰³ The title of the piece highlights firstly how a Famine funeral is worthy of mention, and thereby show something unusual. It depicts how the traditions in Ireland were attacked by the Famine. In Ireland, funerals are vital part of the culture. Burial rites and death ceremonies are very important; Nina Witoszek calls it a 'persistent, centuries-old preoccupation with death.'³⁰⁴ The sculpture is small, no more than a foot high. It depicts four bronze figures carrying a dead body wrapped in cloths like a mummy (indeed, they are run through by the corpse). The four standing beings seem hardly in a better state than the corpse; they 'are less than skin and bone, the extirpation imminent.'³⁰⁵ The sculpture also shows the dehumanisation of the dead; 'the dead body is tightly bound and gagged – representing fear of contamination by loved ones.'³⁰⁶ In a country where funerary traditions are considered so vital, we can see how the breakdown of these ways would have contributed to the culture of shame left behind in the Famine's wake.

Thirdly, the sculptures of *Statistic I & Statistic II* by Rowan Gillespie show us the difficulty of commemorating people who left little behind. We have seen how museums have some records

³⁰⁰ O'Sullivan, *Coming Home*, 108.

³⁰¹ Robinson, 'Preface'.

³⁰² Maureen Wall, 'The Decline of the Irish Language', in: *A View of the Irish Language* (zp zj)aldaar 84.

³⁰³ See Figure 11

³⁰⁴ Nina Witoszek, 'Ireland: A Funerary Culture?', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 76 (1987) 206–215, aldaar 207.

³⁰⁵ O'Sullivan, *Coming Home*, 99.

³⁰⁶ Ibidem, 100.

remaining, but generally Famine commemoration refers to ‘a million dead, 1.25 million emigrated.’³⁰⁷ It is difficult to imagine such numbers, so stories of few have been harnessed to represent the many. The thought-provoking piece’s title reflects how people became statistics. The piece consists of two tables.³⁰⁸ The first has a female figure standing on it in the corner, and the other has a reconstruction in sculpture of the Bridget O’Donnell sketch in the bottom-right corner, and a corpse in the top left-hand corner. The surfaces of the tables themselves are completely covered, inscribed with the names, ages and causes of death (typhus, phthisis, cholera, bilious fever, dysentery, hepatitis, albuminuria, pneumonia³⁰⁹) of Irish who died in quarantine on Staten Island in New York. The panel contains a statement from the artist himself.³¹⁰ Gillespie states that by carving the names into the table, he sought to ‘take time to contemplate the horror behind these statistics’ and the tables help to show the scale of the disaster, as it is stated that 5000 such tables would be needed to inscribe the name of every Famine victim.³¹¹

Dark Shadows

The nature of the display at the Custom House Quay Building (henceforth CHQ) in central Dublin was quite different to *Coming Home*. It was smaller and less exhaustive than at Dublin Castle, consisting of one room. Tuohy’s exhibit at the CHQ consisted of 23 sculptures. All were made of bog oak, unearthed from the bogs of Ireland. Some of the oak in Tuohy’s work has been dated by the Paleoecology Centre, Queen’s University, Belfast as between 1705 and 1389 BC.³¹² The material is steeped in history; ‘Tuohy uses oak and yew to tell the stories of...the past, as well as the Famine, from which, he believes, Ireland has never fully recovered.’³¹³

Textual technologies

The textual technologies at Dark Shadows were limited. There were no panels, just a basic booklet, an A4 sheet folded in half.³¹⁴ All the titles were quite dramatic, and the booklet provided an explanation for some of them. Through the booklet, it becomes clear how Tuohy commemorates the Famine with his work;

³⁰⁷ O’Farrell, *An Utterly Impartial History of Great Britain*, 372. See Figure 30

³⁰⁸ See Figure 12 showing *Statistic I*

³⁰⁹ O’Sullivan, *Coming Home*, 121.

³¹⁰ See Figure 13

³¹¹ O’Sullivan, *Coming Home*, 121.

³¹² Ibidem, 185.

³¹³ Ibidem.

³¹⁴ See Figure 7

‘These powerful and provoking pieces transport one’s mind to a scene of damp, stench-ridden and wailing sounds of utter devastating cruelty as he expresses the enormity of the famine and its devastating consequences on our ancestors’³¹⁵

This shows us what Tuohy focuses on in his work and harks back to the ‘conspiracy of silence’ after the Famine. As the sole textual technology, the booklet provides the only means by which to interpret the exhibition. Cruelty and injustice plays large roles in his pieces. This is the overriding theme of Famine commemoration. The title refers to the dark shadows, moral and literal, which the potato blight cast on Ireland, and on Ireland’s future and national character. Many people alive around the world today are descended from those who survived the Famine,³¹⁶ and it would have cast a very dark shadow over their lives; ‘many witnessed and/or committed terrible deeds to carry on’.³¹⁷ This also fits in with the idea of shame, the Irish humbled by what had occurred.

Technologies of display and of layout

Many museums and galleries have a set route which visitors are supposed to follow; Rose calls this ‘spatial routeing.’³¹⁸ Visitors should pass the exhibits in an order predetermined by the museum, whether using maps, arrows or walls. Generally, visitors should start at the earliest point of history and finish at the most recent. At Dark Shadows, each artwork is numbered and named to give the visitor an idea of which order the sculptures should be viewed in, but there is no fixed route, and everyone can wander as they please. The sculptures are evenly spaced around the room, with roughly two squared metres surrounding each one. The space is very light. With walls either of glass or painted white and with the light floor, the dark colour of the sculptures is thrown into sharp relief, making the sculptures seem like literal Dark Shadows. The commemoration of the Famine at Dark Shadows is quite angry, sad and emotional.

Famine commemoration in art

A certain type of Irish-ness is being built by this exhibit. The Irish are cast in the role of victim, to be sympathised with and pitied. The ‘hands’ of death are constantly present, and the Irish cannot escape them. However, they are shown to not have lost their moral compass, seen in their continued help of each other, whether it be helping someone drink soup or carrying them when they are too weak to walk. This contrasts with the British, who are shown to be robbing food from Ireland and setting up the shadow of the poorhouse. This again implies that the Irish were (and perhaps still are) inherently different to the British, even morally superior. The Irish are

³¹⁵ See Figure 7

³¹⁶ Irish Abroad Unit, ‘Irish Emigration Patterns and Citizens Abroad’.

³¹⁷ Crowley, Smyth and Murphy, *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, 2.

³¹⁸ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 182.

portrayed as nameless, helpless, starving, weak, but still with survival spirit. There is an underlying current of anger and accusation with many of the sculptures, which is repeated in many forms of Famine commemoration. The titles speak for themselves; 'From the mouths of children'; 'In the midst of plenty';³¹⁹ 'They washed their hands';³²⁰ 'Neither God or Trevelyan were listening'.

The workhouse features frequently in this exhibition. The theme of inadequate relief repeats itself regularly in Famine commemoration. Three of the sculptures³²¹ concern the institution and indeed the idea of entering the poorhouse would have been a very dark shadow on the lives of those suffering through the Famine:

*'The criteria for receiving workhouse relief was that the recipients were destitute and entered the establishment in entire family units. Within the workhouse, life was to be 'less eligible' than life outside, through the adoption of an inferior and monotonous diet, and the enforcement of discipline, regimentation and labour. This constituted what was known as the 'workhouse test', the purpose of which was to deter all but the genuinely destitute from applying.'*³²²

'The poorhouse gates' shows the ominous, looming shadow of the gates, cowering the three figures approaching.³²³ The poorhouse system in the 1840s Ireland was still developing and was quickly overpopulated and overrun with destitute, weak and diseased. Many facilities were unable to cope. Many of the Famine dead perished in the poorhouse. The numbers passing the 'workhouse test' surpassed all expectations. The two histories of the Famine and the workhouses are interlinked.

This exhibit has far more explicit blame than Coming Home. The way the Irish are portrayed clears them of all responsibility and the blame is placed squarely on the British, the elite, the government, the Church, all of whom, Kieran Tuohy feels, could have alleviated the situation. The Irish elite are omitted completely. 'They washed their hands' clearly shows this; this expression means to refuse to have anything more to do with something or someone.³²⁴ The elites here are accused of turning their backs on peoples in need and forcing them into destitution and starvation. The contribution of Kieran Tuohy to Famine commemoration is thought-provoking artwork which emphasizes the themes of shame, resourcefulness of the Irish, injustice and

³¹⁹ See Figure 8

³²⁰ See Figure 9

³²¹ See Figures 11 and 13

³²² Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 150.

³²³ See Figure 10

³²⁴ See Figure 9

cruelty. He uses his ancient material to 'ensure that we never forget the turmoil and suffering that engulfed this country, our country.'³²⁵

³²⁵ See Figure 7

Chapter 5 - Monuments

It would be remiss to write a thesis about commemoration of the Famine without considering monuments. This chapter will analyse two spaces which contain monuments to the Famine. As was the case with museums, the number of memorials to the Famine increased substantially leading up to and after the 1997 150-year anniversary. The older monuments tend to be simpler, for example just a plaque or a Celtic cross. The newer monuments often employ the use of sculpture and statues, embodying the Famine's victims rather than abstractly referring to them. 'Older' here refers to the memorials erected during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, before the Famine's revival in the public sphere caused by the 150-year anniversary. 'Newer' here refers to those monuments erected or commissioned since 1990. Those analysed here vary, as the museums did, in cost, prestige and location. Skibbereen is considered again, and Dublin. As in other chapters, the titles, framing, organisation and information panels will be analysed to answer the question of how they contribute to Famine commemoration.

Famine

This piece of art, simply called *Famine*, consists of seven sculptures (six human figures and one dog). The group is located on the Custom House Quay in the Dublin Docklands, next to the River Liffey. The sculptures were privately commissioned by philanthropist Norma Smurfit 'in remembrance of all who suffered' and gifted to the city of Dublin to mark the Famine's 150th anniversary in 1997.³²⁶ They were designed and sculpted by Rowan Gillespie, who also had sculpture works exhibited at the Coming Home Famine art exhibition in Dublin Castle.

The statues' location was carefully selected as the quay was where 'many emigrants departed from...during the Famine en route to Liverpool and the New World.'³²⁷ Emigration is as much a part of commemorating the Famine as death is. People emigrated and died in almost equal numbers; the country was described as an 'emigrant nursery.'³²⁸ Emigration, as explained in the previous chapters, remains an integral part of Famine legacy, with rates remaining high, experiencing 'periodic peaks, often associated with difficult economic conditions.'³²⁹ Numbers peaked in 1994, after which net immigration rose to compete with slowing net emigration. Still, many Irish families have blood ties with relations in America, Canada, Australia, Great Britain and elsewhere,³³⁰ and Ireland's economic situation, as well as the high cost of living, indicates that the

³²⁶ Kelleher, 'Hunger and History', 261.

³²⁷ Ibidem.

³²⁸ Price en Benton-Short, *Migrants to the Metropolis*, 226.

³²⁹ Ibidem.

³³⁰ Irish Abroad Unit, 'Irish Emigration Patterns and Citizens Abroad'.

new generation may continue the tradition of emigration; 'an expectation of emigration, or at least the normalisation of departure, became embedded in the life choices of young people.'³³¹

In a radio interview about the sculptures in 2005, Rowan Gillespie explained the following about his creations:

*'They're not close together, they're sort of separated out to give the isolation of each person's story. It's not as if you've got a family leaving, there's no indication of whether there's a relationship between the people or not [...] Many people thought, well, why don't you have some more children to evoke more of the sort of feeling which people will naturally have towards a starving child, but in fact the proportions are correct, that there were very few children leaving the country.'*³³²

It is clear that Gillespie did his research and tried to depict a realistic version of the people who would have been emigrating. The sculptures depict figures of indeterminate genders, emaciated, elongated so that they tower over the head of anyone walking by them;³³³ 'six gaunt, larger-than-life figures.'³³⁴ One carries a child, who may be alive or dead. The sculptures are reminiscent of an earlier monument, on St Stephen's Green in Dublin by Edward Delaney. This one also depicts three figures who are also accompanied by a dog. What is the dogs' significance?

According to Mark-Fitzgerald, the presence of the 'cowering dog...lends a sinister element to the work, suggestive of the desecration of the Famine graves that so horrified contemporary observers at the time.'³³⁵ This is a departure, since dogs in art frequently represent faith and loyalty, for example *The Arnolfini Wedding* (1434) by Jan van Eyck.³³⁶ However, the dogs are the most controversial parts of both sets of sculptures; the one at St. Stephen's Green was actually stolen in 1969.³³⁷ They add an element of fear and aggression which must have been prevalent at the time, and the loss of (burial) traditions. The dog also signifies the shame and silence which surrounded the Famine in its aftermath.

The choice of title was deliberately made by Gillespie because he did not want to construct the Famine as a genocide or make the sculptures political.³³⁸ The simple title *Famine* can

³³¹ Crowley, Smyth and Murphy, *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, 595.

³³² Kay Sheehy, 'Rays of Light?', *Programme 2: Rowan Gillespie's Famine Memorial: Rays of Light?* (Dublin, Ireland 2005), Dublin, Ireland.

³³³ See Figures 14, 15 and 16

³³⁴ Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating the Irish Famine*, 219.

³³⁵ Ibidem, 222.

³³⁶ Robert Baldwin, 'Marriage as a Sacramental Reflection of the Passion: The Mirror in Jan van Eyck's "Amolfini Wedding"', *Oud Holland* 98 (1984) 57–75, aldaar 67.

³³⁷ Kelleher, 'Hunger and History', 260.

³³⁸ Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating the Irish Famine*, 222.

evoke an emotional memorial to famine and starvation victims immemorial. In fact, Gillespie used a photograph of woman from Holocaust as inspiration for the first female character.³³⁹ The linking with the Holocaust is not new to commemoration of the Famine, or this thesis, and complies with the dominant narrative of the oppressed and persecuted group of people at the mercy of their invaders. Although, 'Professor Liam Kennedy has shown [that] comparisons between the Famine and the Holocaust are never considered in a detailed and rigorous way...such comparisons are ultimately both facile and futile,' the imagery continues to be employed as a point of comparison.³⁴⁰ This heightens the drama of the Famine and inspires images of the Famine, of which we have no photographs, by referring to the Holocaust, a disaster whose images we are familiar with.

In this case study, framing and organisation are much the same thing. As pointed out by Gillespie, the figures are spaced out as if they are strangers, and many of those who emigrated made the journey alone. The statues' surroundings have changed since the original unveiling; the framing has therefore developed and adapted. The River Liffey has of course remained, but Dublin has grown around the Famine sculptures. Whereas originally the beautiful Custom House would have been in the background, now the International Financial Services Centre towers over *Famine*.³⁴¹ The light grey paving around the sculptures highlights the statues' bronze colour, especially when the sun shines on them. The statues are open to the elements as the actual emigrants would have been. Hundreds of people made the journey on foot from the countryside to Dublin to get to the ships, including those evicted from the Strokestown estate where the National Famine Museum of Ireland is. Through Longford, Westmeath, Meath and Kildare until they reached Dublin. Gillespie's statues combine the themes of suffering and emigration which are emphasized by other monuments and by Famine commemoration. The Irish are shown to be suffering, struggling, but whilst still having the spirit and forbearance to make their way to the ships to carry them away.

Abbeystowry Famine Graveyard

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Skibbereen is a particularly important location for Famine commemoration. The Famine graveyard and memorial are located approximately three kilometres outside the town of Skibbereen, next to the river Ilen. There are no less than seven different plaques and monuments dedicated to the Famine within the space.³⁴² The graveyard

³³⁹ Ibidem, 221.

³⁴⁰ Crowley, Smyth and Murphy, *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, 598.

³⁴¹ Kelleher, 'Hunger and History', 262.

³⁴² See Figures 18-23 and 55-57

continued to be used after the Famine and is still in use today.³⁴³ Several individual graves are located there, but so is the mass grave for Famine victims; 'an estimated 8-10,000 lie buried in nine mass burial pits.'³⁴⁴ The analysis of this space is rather more challenging because there is little literature available about the various monuments within the site. Emily Mark-Fitzgerald covers the graveyard and monuments briefly but does little more than describe them and give a history, but generally the site is neglected in literature.

Variations of the spelling of the cemetery's name are used in literature and online. Abbeystrewry, Abbeystewery and Abbeystrowry are all variations, and the latter will be used here. Some authors³⁴⁵ do refer to the graveyard, but only referring to John O'Rourke's visit there in the late 1860s, which he reported in his 1875 book on the Famine.³⁴⁶

*'A difficulty arose in my mind with regard to the manner of interment in those pits. Great numbers, I knew, were interred in each of them; for which reason they must have been kept open a considerable time. Yet surely, I reflected, something resembling interment must have taken place on the arrival of each corpse, especially as it was coffinless. The contrivance, as I afterwards learned, was simple enough. A little sawdust was sprinkled over each corpse, on being laid in the pit, which was thus kept open until it had received its full complement of tenants.'*³⁴⁷

This quote expresses John O'Rourke's relatively distanced description of how the important Irish burial traditions were neglected during the Famine. O'Rourke was a priest who was one of the first to write an account of the Famine after the fact. He was by no means an unbiased spectator, as has been demonstrated in Chapter 1. In fact, Kevin Whelan describes him as 'appropriating the Famine dead as Catholic martyrs' and 'recruiting the dead for the Catholic nationalist cause.'³⁴⁸ Nevertheless, his quote shows how desperate the place must have been during the Famine. Nowadays, the cemetery is in a paradoxically idyllic spot, peaceful and rural. During the Famine, it would have been practically located outside the town to prevent the spread of disease.

The idea of 'standing stones' to commemorate the dead is not new. For example, headstones are used to commemorate individual graves, and 'visits to standing stones at

³⁴³ Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating the Irish Famine*, 142.

³⁴⁴ Ibidem, 141.

³⁴⁵ Christian Noack, Lindsay Janssen en Vincent Comerford, ed., *Holodomor and Gorta Mór: Histories, Memories and Representations of Famine in Ukraine and Ireland* (London and New York 2014) 53; Kelleher, 'Hunger and History', 26.

³⁴⁶ O'Rourke, *History of Great Irish Famine*, 158.

³⁴⁷ Ibidem.

³⁴⁸ Whelan, 'The Revisionist Debate in Ireland', 198.

Drombeg in Cork, Lough Gur in Limerick and the Famine cemetery in Abbeystrowry in Skibbereen further reinforced...the idea of commemorating the Famine through the image of a 'field of stones.'³⁴⁹ Generally, monuments to the Famine seem to be moving more towards the use of metal rather than stone (St Stephen's Green, *Famine*, the National Famine Memorial in Murrisk). Older monuments often make use of stone, but in Skibbereen the use of stone in monuments continues. The eleven standing stones, five with text, which are the most recent addition to the site, show this.

The standing stones³⁵⁰ commemorate the 'hundreds of dead lying in the iconic famine pit at Abbeystrowry cemetery.'³⁵¹ From left to right, the first stone contains an Irish-language text;

*I gcuimhe na mílte a fuair bás go mall righin sa Ghorta Mhór i gceanntar an Sciobairín 1845-1850 Go Dtuga dia suaimehneas dá n-anamacha.*³⁵²

'In memory of the thousands of people who died slowly in the Great Famine in the Skibbereen district 1845-1850. May God grant mercy on their souls.'³⁵³

Here again, we see the religious language and harkening back to the Irish language. We see the term 'gorta' again, albeit spelled differently, harkening back to the painting by Lillian Lucy Davison and showing the Irish language revival in Famine commemoration. The relatively simple message holds more gravity in Irish. The texts on each stone do not seem to be related to one another and have no coherence. The second stone has a poem by Lady Jane Wilde.³⁵⁴ The fourth stone has a quote from a poem by Thomas Hood.³⁵⁵ Yet the poems aren't referenced and there is no clue that these aren't original words. The final stone is similar tribute text to the first, but in English.³⁵⁶ Visually, the eleven stones are impressive, but the texts are disorganised.

Generally, the seven various monuments at Abbeystrowry mesh together uneasily. The field is vast, yet all seven individual monuments are grouped close together. Some are newer, and the field gravestone³⁵⁷ reports a different date for the Famine to the wall plaque.³⁵⁸ There is a

³⁴⁹ Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating the Irish Famine*, 202.

³⁵⁰ See Figure 23, 24, 54, 56 and 57

³⁵¹ Noack, Janssen en Comerford, *Holodomor and Gorta Mór*, 53.

³⁵² See Figure 56

³⁵³ Translation by Kate Noonan, 09-08-2018

³⁵⁴ Leo Varadkar, 'Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr. Leo Varadkar, T.D. at the Famine Commemoration in the Warehouse, Ballingarry', *MerrionStreet.ie* (zp 2017) [, https://merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/Speeches/Speech_by_the_Taoiseach_Mr_Leo_Varadkar_T_D_at_the_Famine_Commemoration_in_the_Warehouse_Ballingarry.html].; See Figure 20

³⁵⁵ Thomas Hood, 'The Song of the Shirt', *The Victorian Web* (zp 1843) [, <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/hood/shirt.html>].; See Figure 19

³⁵⁶ See Figure 57

³⁵⁷ See Figure 25

³⁵⁸ See Figure 18

small grammatical mistake on the wall plaque – the wrong form of ‘its’ – and overall the impression is that newer monuments were added over the decades without much consideration for what was already there. Whilst, for example, the nine standing stones have been carefully planned,³⁵⁹ there is little attempt to create a coherent whole with the many smaller monuments. The other individual gravestones from after the Famine add to the sense of haphazard confusion.³⁶⁰ This thesis’ framework of analysing title, organisation/framing and information panels is therefore more difficult to apply, since the organisation does not seem to particularly well considered, even the title’s spelling is contested, and there is no flow between the different texts.

Through these two monuments, we can see how the nature of memorials has changed, and how the location affects this. *Famine* is in the city centre of Dublin, whereas Abbeystowry is remote and rural. The former has attracted far more attention, yet both are relevant examples. Abbeystowry shows both the older style and the new, and how this can go wrong when sandwiched together. They reflect the shift in the twentieth century explained in Chapter 1. *Famine* shows how the Famine victims have been personified and embodied as something other than just a mass of people, and how the newer forms of commemoration move away from religious imagery.

³⁵⁹ See Figures 23, 24, 54, 56 and 57

³⁶⁰ See Figures 53 and 58

Conclusion

The past three chapters have looked at museums, memorials and exhibitions to ascertain the nature of Famine commemoration. They have harnessed the theory of dark tourism as stipulated by Hooper and Lennon and been analysed using the visual methodologies of Rose, Hooper-Greenhill and Bennett.³⁶¹ These help to shed light on Famine commemoration in heritage sites. In this final section of the thesis, I will highlight the significance of these places in Famine commemoration and in scholarship about Ireland and Irish history.

Ireland has long been 'in the shadow of a fond abuser.'³⁶² As Great Britain slowly retreats from the European peace project, a gap is left which Ireland may fill, making the country and its story more relevant. The rest of European history is no stranger to famine either, but the scale of the havoc the Famine wreaked on Ireland is unique. Museums have historically had a role in building national identity and showing the kind of national character desirable by the institution. The framework of analysing their titles, organisation, framing and information panels is particularly useful in tracing this process. It is interesting to see how different localities and circumstances are reflected in the museums' differences. This thesis is not only interested in how they are different, but also in how they are the same.

The first chapter of this thesis outlined the historical context of Ireland, the Famine and its commemoration up until now. It also provided an overview of the academic discussion on the topic up until now, which has mostly focused on either memorials or museums and rarely both. The exhibitions, which are brand-new, have nothing written about them in academia. The second chapter established the theoretical background of dark tourism, as well as Foucault, Rose, Hooper-Greenhill and Bennett's writings about museum and visual analysis methodologies. Through using these ideas, I was able to create a framework by which to analyse my case studies. The third chapter went on to analyse the heritage sites in New Ross, Strokestown and Skibbereen, and the fourth the exhibitions. The final chapter covered the monuments in Dublin and Skibbereen. This was all with the aim of establishing the nature of Irish national identity displayed in museums and of Famine commemoration. The way that these sites display the national character is generally not conscious, but there are nevertheless trends which repeat themselves, such as the mass of nameless victims and the portrayal of the Irish as resourceful, independence-orientated and strong in the face of terrible circumstances.

³⁶¹ Glenn Hooper and John Lennon, *Dark Tourism: Practice and interpretation*. New Directions in Tourism Analysis (London and New York 2017); Rose, *Visual Methodologies*; Bennett, 'The Exhibitionary Complex'.

³⁶² Brady, 'Ireland: In the shadow of the fond abuser', 55.

To return to the research question of this thesis, we have seen that the nature of Famine commemoration has changed over time. During the early twentieth century, very little took place to commemorate the disaster, whereas there was an explosion of dedicated museums and memorials during and after the 1990s. The older monuments have more religious imagery, more prayers and Celtic crosses, whereas the newer monuments, as we have seen, move far more towards artistic projects. The inclusion of the tradition of emigration has also become prevalent, playing a large role in the museums and exhibitions. The use of disproportionately elongated figures, who resemble the suffering of the Famine victims, has become quite common, and can be seen in the *Famine* sculptures and Famine art.³⁶³ A revival of the Irish language in Famine monuments is also noticeable.

Another theme is the importance of bearing witness, whether it be the Famine art at Coming Home or the visitors to Skibbereen. What becomes clear is that the Famine victims are less helpless than at first glance, a narrative which the Dunbrody and the National Famine Museum also employ. They use their museums to make the victims more human, give them some agency, and demonstrate the indomitable spirit attributed to the Irish character. This in turn contributes towards the construction of Irish citizenship, by building an identity of victimhood and persecution, but simultaneously one of spirit and rebellion. Eventual independence is portrayed as inevitable.

Future research on this topic could include a more extensive study of more museums or memorials of the Famine in Ireland, since this thesis has only scraped the surface. Another topic could be a similar study of Famine commemoration in countries with a large Irish diaspora, such as the United Kingdom, America or Canada. Indeed, some work has already been done towards this end.³⁶⁴ As we approach the 200-year anniversary of the Famine, it is likely that it will once again experience a revival, and inspire exhibitions, monuments and museums.

³⁶³ See Figure 14, 15 and 16

³⁶⁴ Mark-Fitzgerald, 'Commemoration and the Performance of Irish Memory'; Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating the Irish Famine*; Mark-Fitzgerald, 'Irish Famine Memorials'; McGowan, 'Remembering Canada'.

Appendix 1 – Figures

The figures below relate to the figures referenced in the thesis. Nearly all of the photographs were taken by me, with a few exceptions. These are the photographs of the information panels and interior of the Dunbrody Famine Ship museum,³⁶⁵ which were taken and sent by Kelly Coppola, who works at the Dunbrody. The other exceptions are the photographs of *Famine*, which were taken and sent to me by Robert Foster.³⁶⁶



Figure 1: *Irish Peasant Children* by Daniel Macdonald (1846), taken 5th April 2018

³⁶⁵ See Figures 87-92, 94 and 95

³⁶⁶ See Figures 14-16

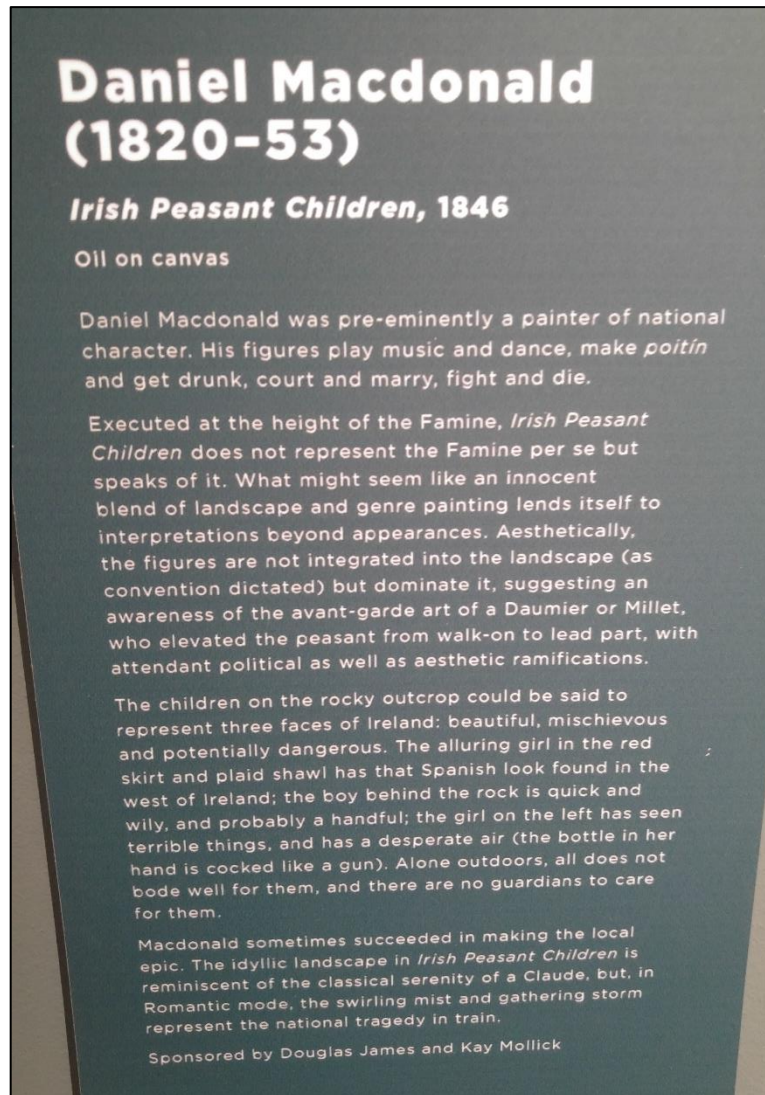


Figure 2: *Irish Peasant Children* information panel, Coming Home exhibition, taken 5th April 2018



Figure 3: *Gorta* by Lilian Lucy Davison (1946), taken 5th April 2018



Figure 4: *Black '47* painting by Micheal Farrell, taken 5th April 2018

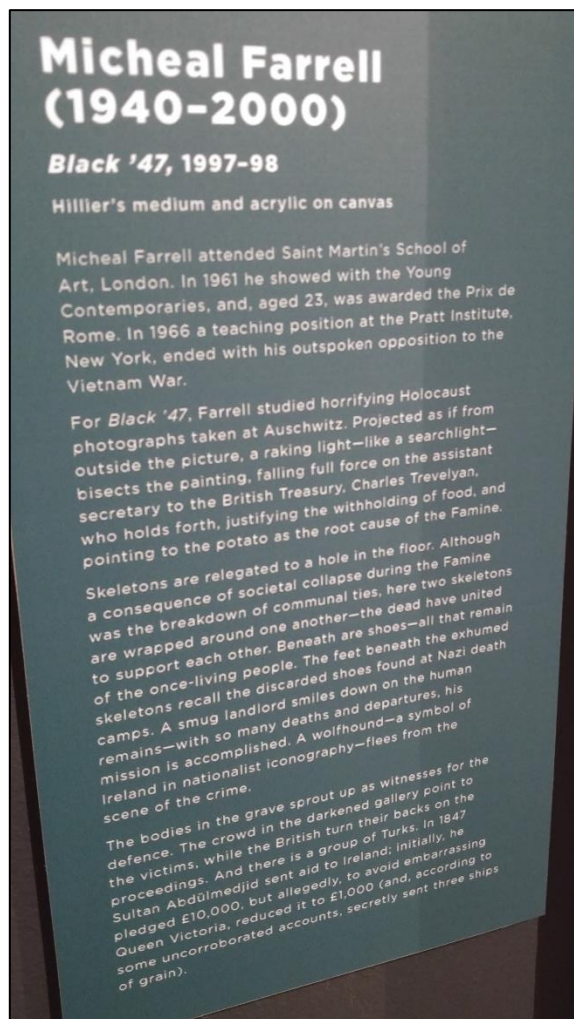


Figure 5: *Black '47* information panel accompanying painting, taken 5th April 2018

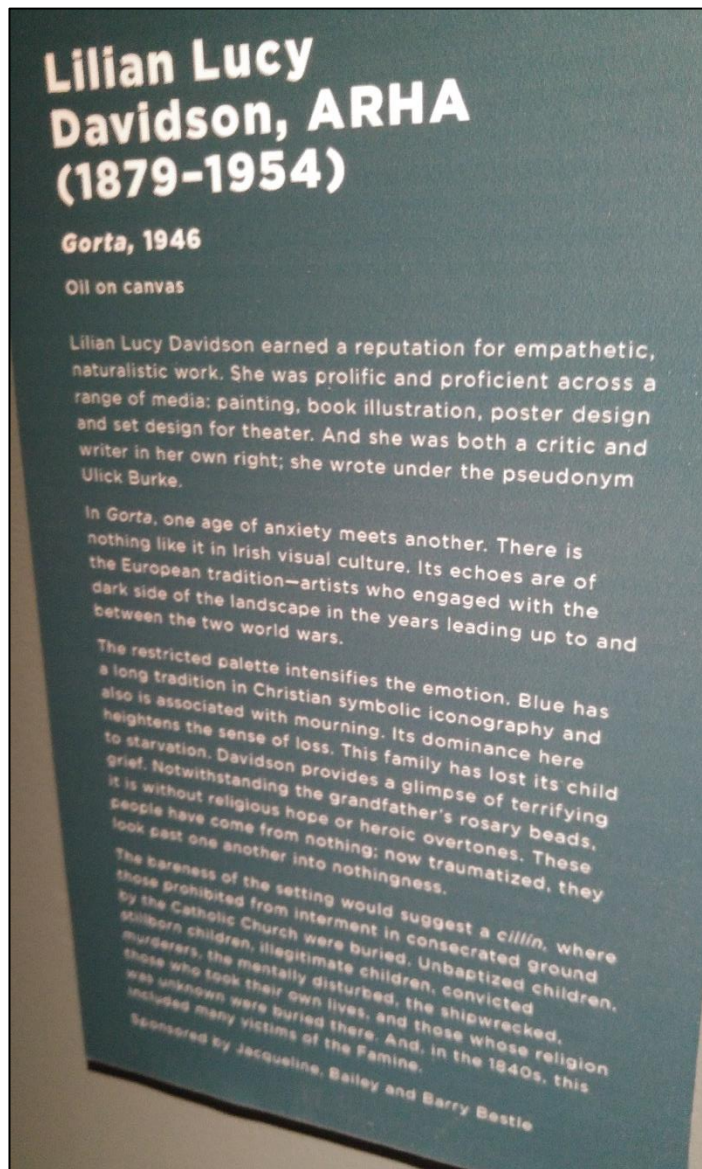


Figure 6: Information panel accompanying *Gorta*, taken 5th April 2018

A modest and skilled craftsman, Kieran, who began life as a carpenter, has unearthed a medium from the bogs of Ireland through which he has reflected many mystical and remarkable images. His passion for expressing Ireland's sometimes colourful but most often tragic past is both evocative and exhilarating.

His current solo exhibition "**Dark Shadows**" once again demonstrates Kieran's ability to play on the senses of the observer. These powerful and provoking pieces transport one's mind to a scene of damp, stench ridden and wailing sounds of utter devastating cruelty as he expresses the enormity of the famine and its devastating consequences on our ancestors.

Exhibit No.5, a heartbroken man tightly clutches his family sighing "*I have to go, I don't want to go*". Will he ever see them again? Will he even survive his journey? Protruding bones, sunken eyes, caved jaws and buckling legs of "*A legacy of rags and bones*" are the worthless people not worth feeding. "*Oh Christ is this a Christian land*" as the hand of death takes away the innocent. Where is God now? Where is the government? We cry "*In the midst of plenty*" as a man has to carry home his dying wife. He is standing on sacks and barrels of grain ready for export. He is starved with hunger and emotion. Is this a famine or torture at the hands of the world's wealthiest nation?

Kieran's "*Line for the soup*" is a scene of hunger, cold and despair as we see starved and sick young and old queuing for soup. One man feeds his wife as she is too fragile to feed herself. But there is no more soup left and many still remain clinging to their empty bowls with anguished faces. As the hands of death slither up the sides of the cauldron, we know and they know that death is at arm's reach. The missing piece of the cauldron? It is already swallowed by death. The emptiness, the heartache, no soup can save them now.

There is only one piece within this collection that is not related to the famine and that is "*Choctaw trail of tears*". In Kieran's previous solo exhibition, he created a piece entitled "*Thank you to the Choctaw*", giving thanks to the Choctaw nation for donating money to the Irish during the famine. In this current piece Kieran now tells the plight of what the Choctaw nation endured as they were evicted from their lands and forced to trek for miles. Their suffering and devastation draws great parallels with the Irish famine.

Kieran has ensured we never forget the turmoil and suffering that engulfed this country, our country in a medium that is thousands of years old. **Dark shadows of our past, dark shadows of our people.**

Figure 7: Dark Shadows information booklet, taken 3rd April 2018



Figure 8: *In the midst of plenty*, Dark Shadows exhibit 8, taken 3rd April 2018



Figure 9: They washed their hands, Dark Shadows exhibit 10, taken 3rd April 2018



Figure 40: The poorhouse gates, Dark Shadows exhibit 23, taken 3rd April 2018



Figure 51: Famine Funeral by John Coll, taken 5th April 2018



Figure 12: Statistic I & Statistic II (2010) by Robert Gillespie, taken 5th April 2018

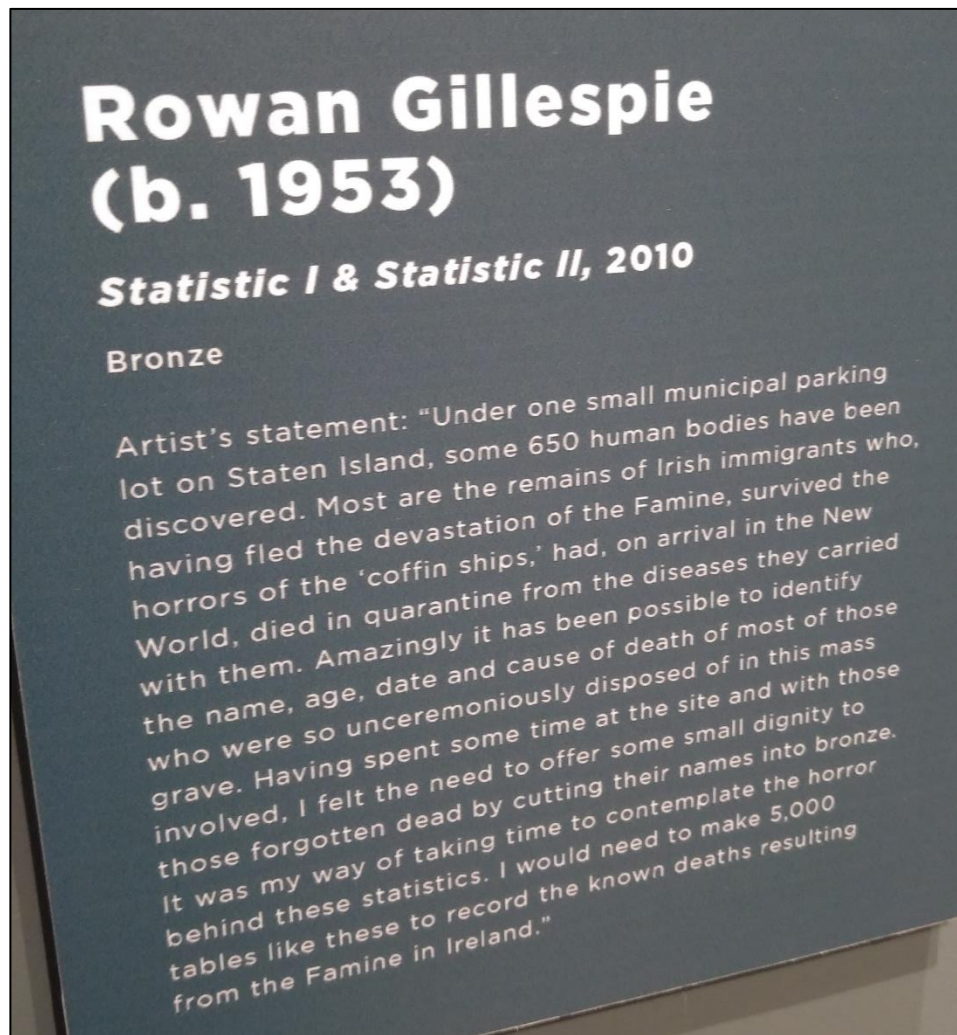


Figure 13: Information panel for Statistic I & Statistic II, taken 5th April 2018



Figure 14: Rowan Gillespie's Famine sculptures on the Custom House Quay (1997) , sent by Robert Foster on 12th May 2018

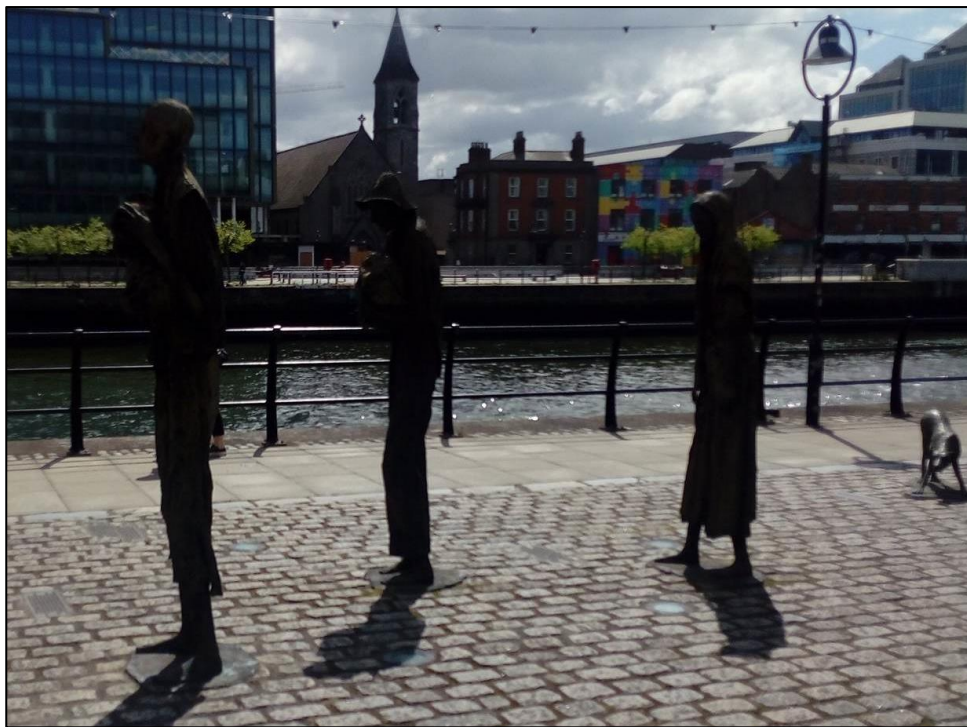


Figure 15: Famine sculptures, sent by Robert Foster on 12th May 2018



Figure 16: Close-up of Famine sculpture CHQ, sent by Robert Foster on 12th May 2018



Figure 17: Dunbrody Famine Ship, taken 13th February 2018



Figure 18: Skibbereen Famine memorial, taken from Emily Mark-Fitzgerald's website³⁶⁷

³⁶⁷ Mark-Fitzgerald, 'Irish Famine Memorials'.



Figure 19: 2 of the 5 parts of the Famine monument, Skibbereen, taken on 26th July 2018

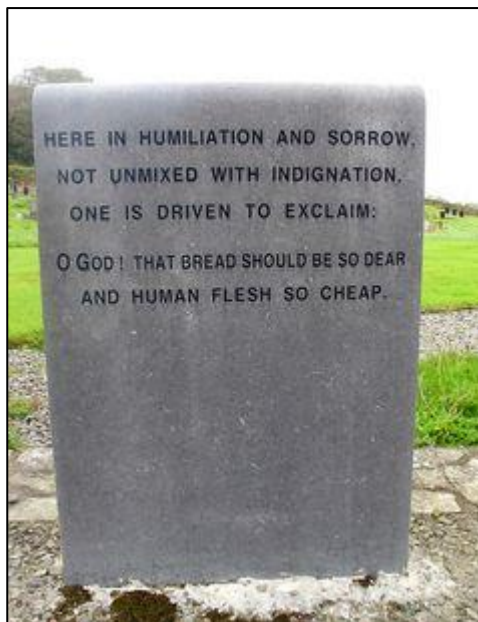


Figure 20: Another of the 5 Famine headstones, taken on 26th July 2018



Figure 21: Skibbereen monument, taken on 26th July 2018



Figure 22: Skibbereen graveyard sign, taken on 26th July 2018



Figure 23: Skibbereen Celtic cross memorial, taken on 26th July 2018



Figure 24: Exterior of the Skibbereen Heritage Centre, taken on 24th July 2018

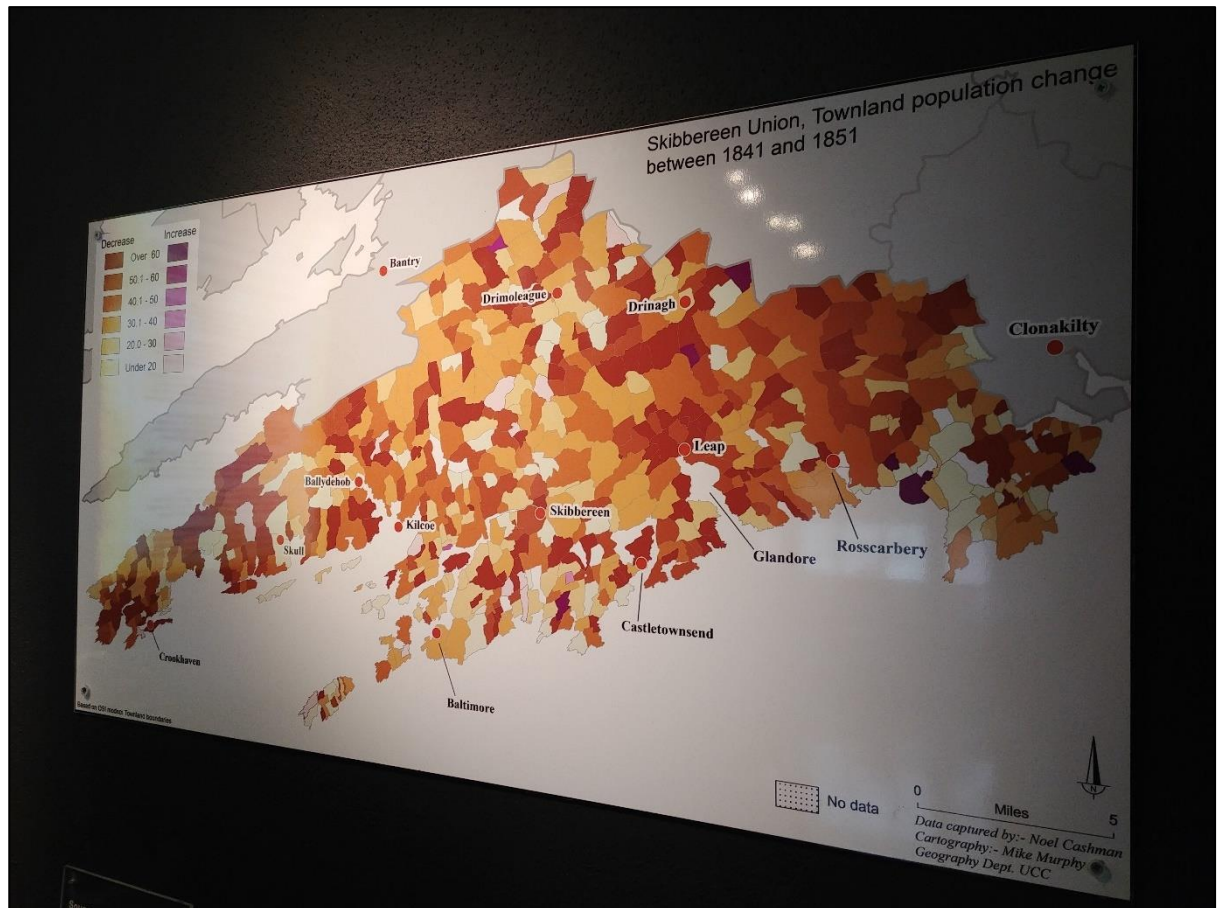


Figure 25: Map of Skibbereen Union population change on display in the Heritage Centre, taken on 24th July 2018



Figure 26: Soup pot on display, Skibbereen Heritage Centre, taken on 24th July 2018



Figure 27: Information panel Skibbereen Heritage Centre 'West Cork Cottages', taken on 24th July 2018

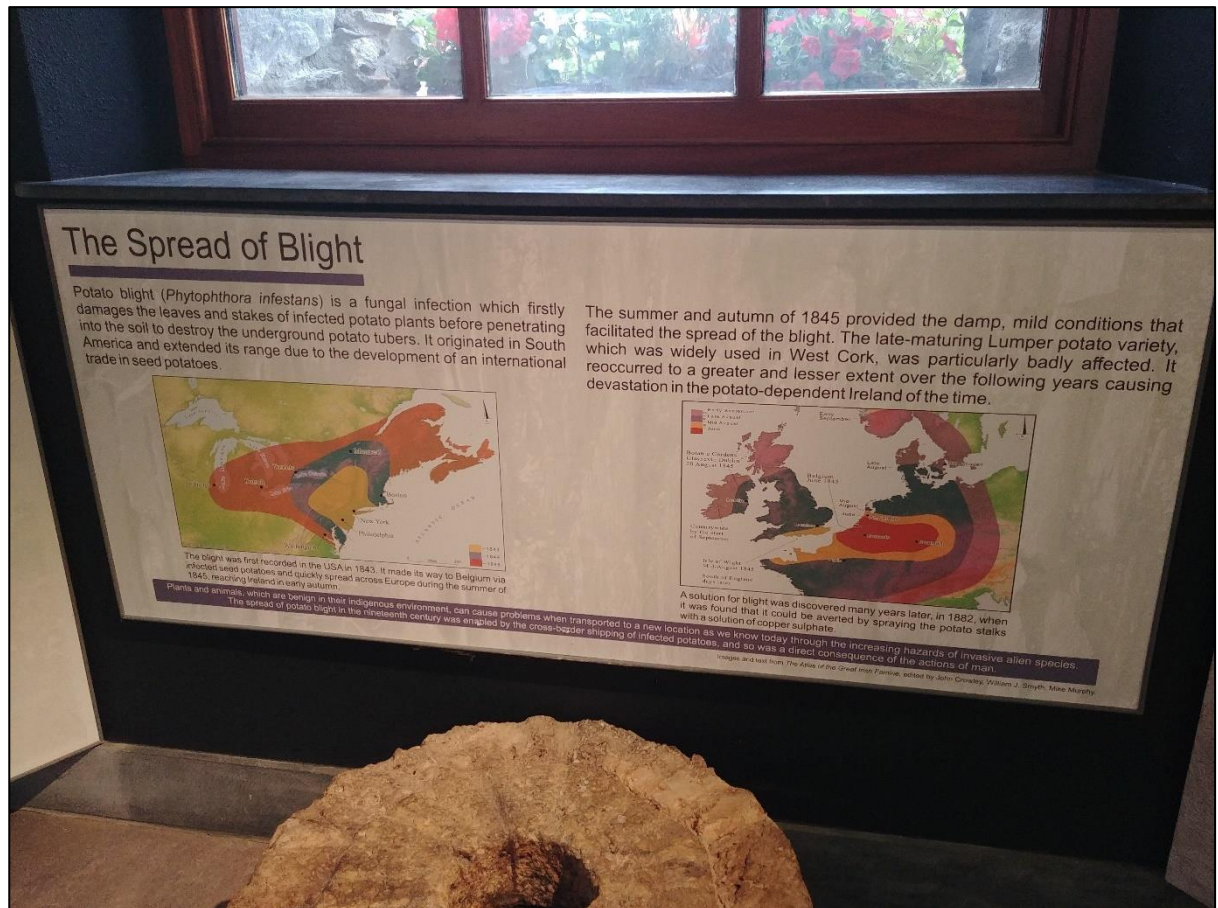


Figure 28: 'The Spread of the Blight' information panel Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

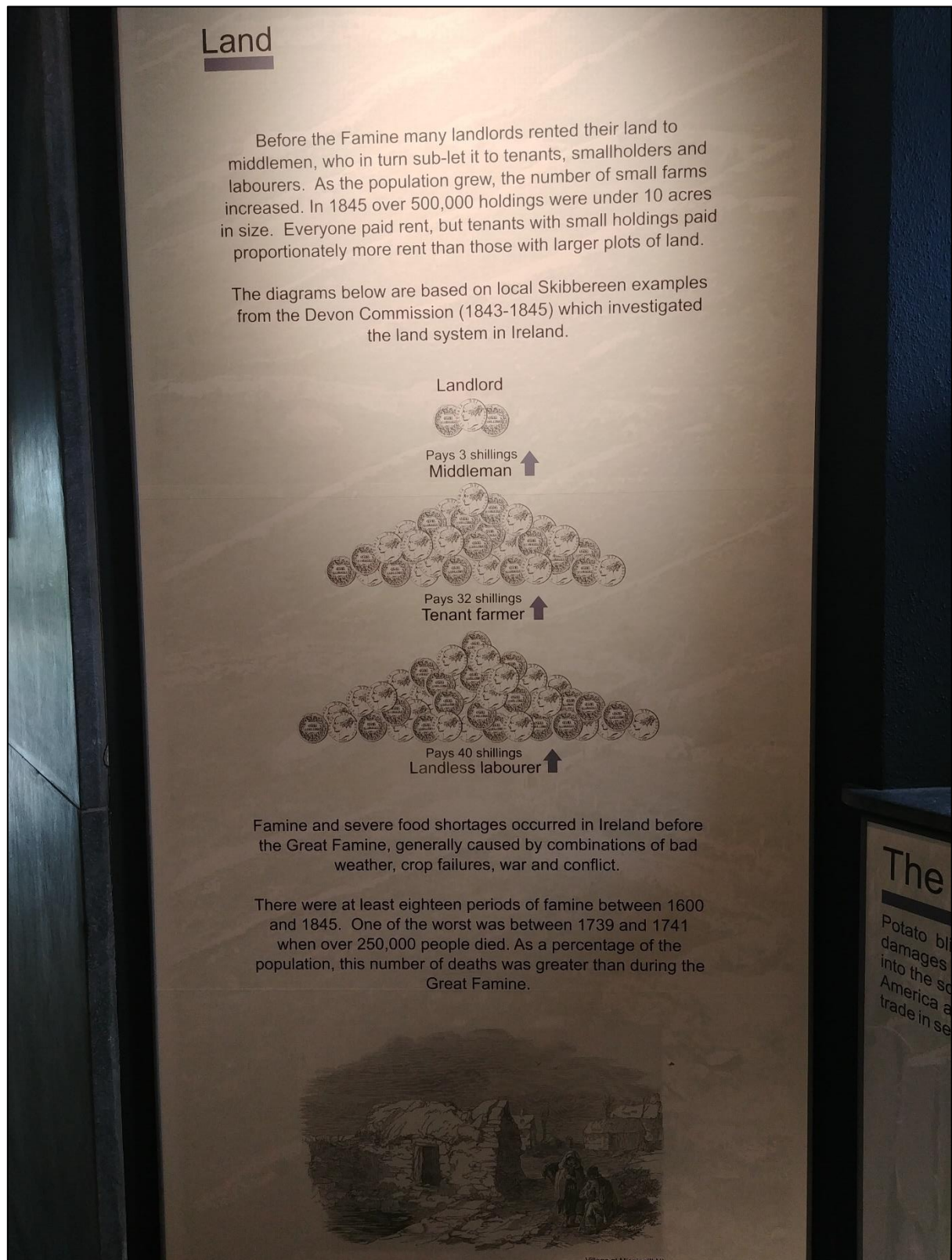


Figure 29: 'Land' information panel, taken on 24th July 2018



Figure 30: Information panel in Skibbereen - the first one upon entering the museum, taken on 24th July 2018

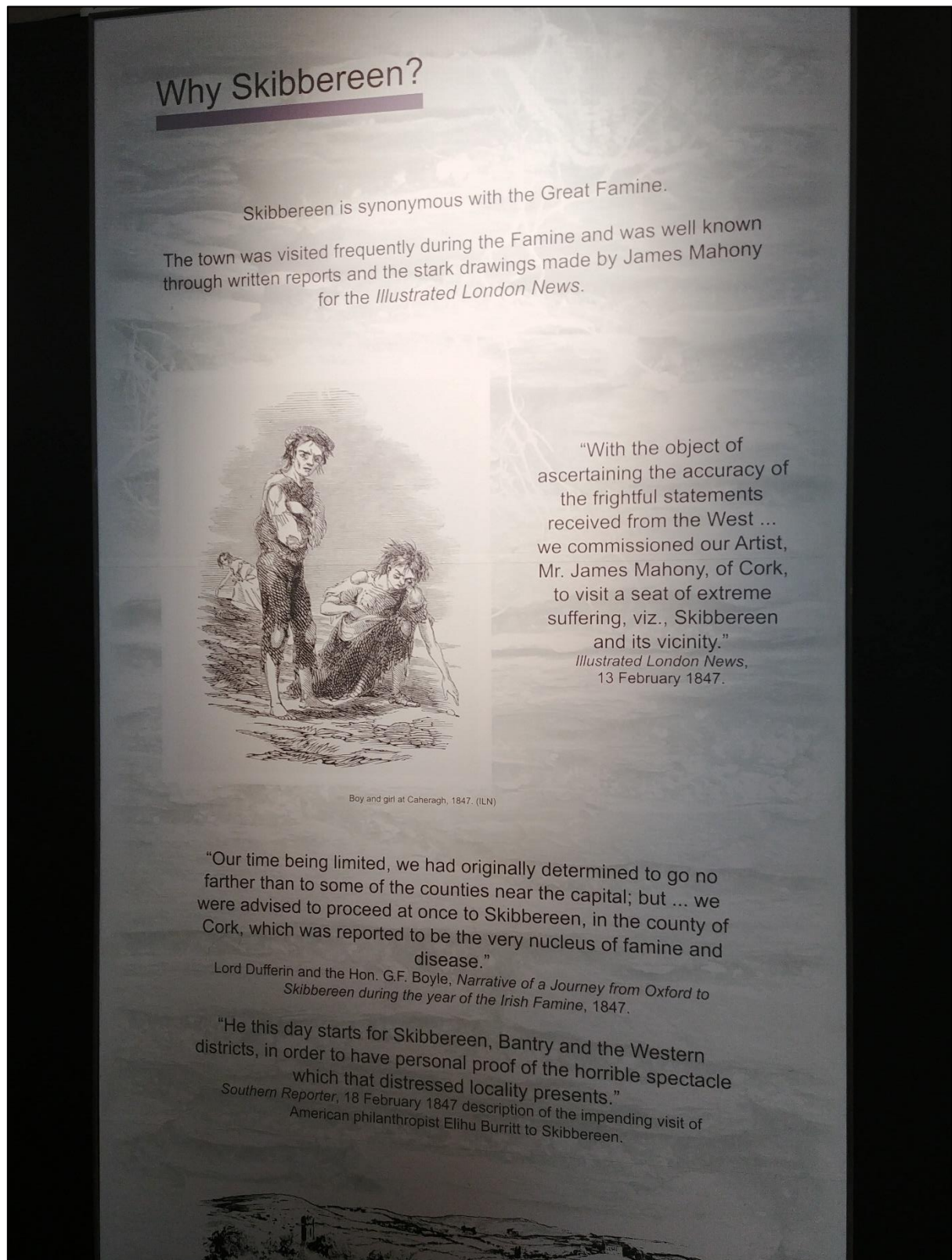


Figure 31: 'Why Skibbereen' information panel, taken on 24th July 2018

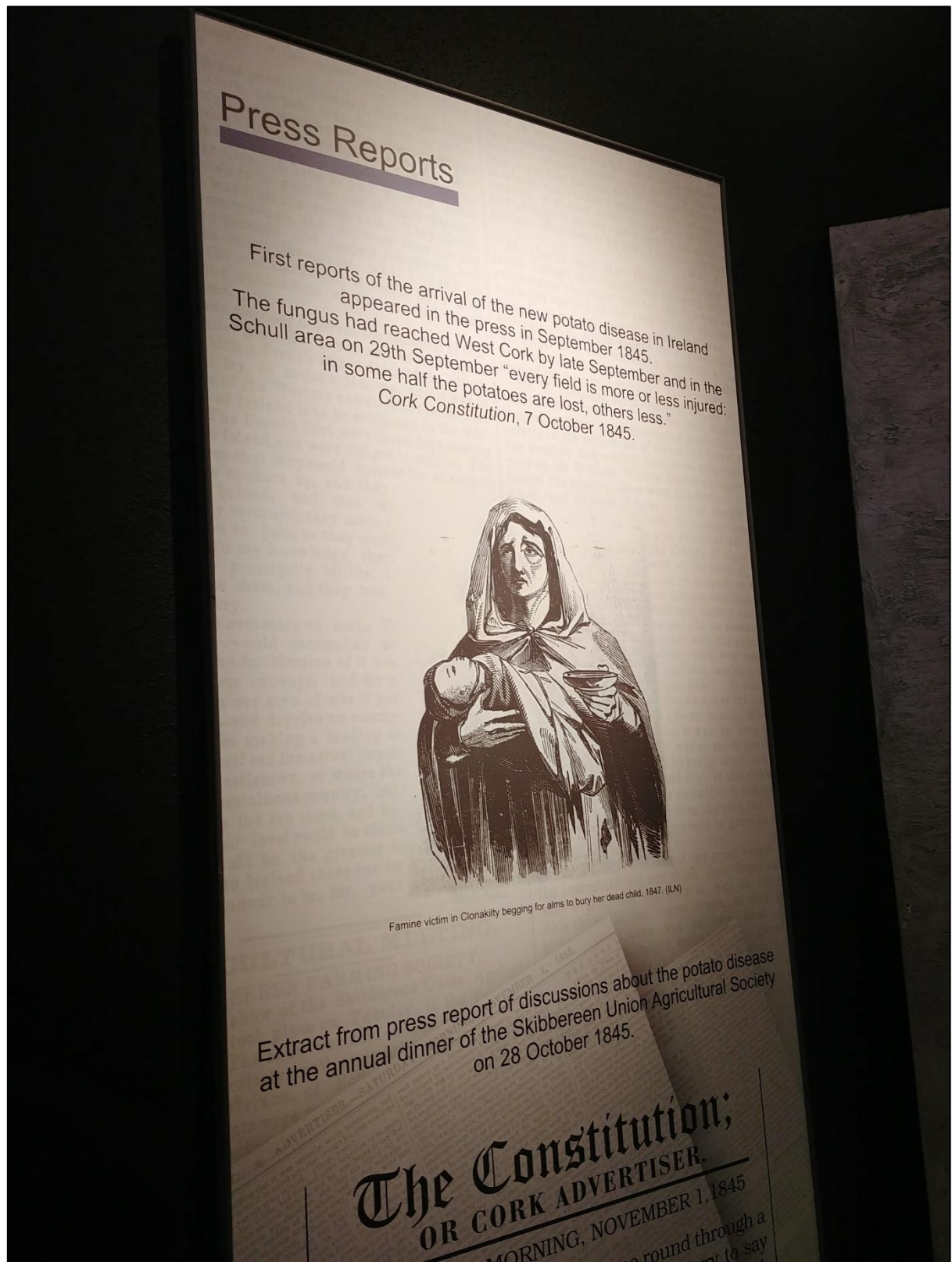


Figure 32: 'Press reports' information panel Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

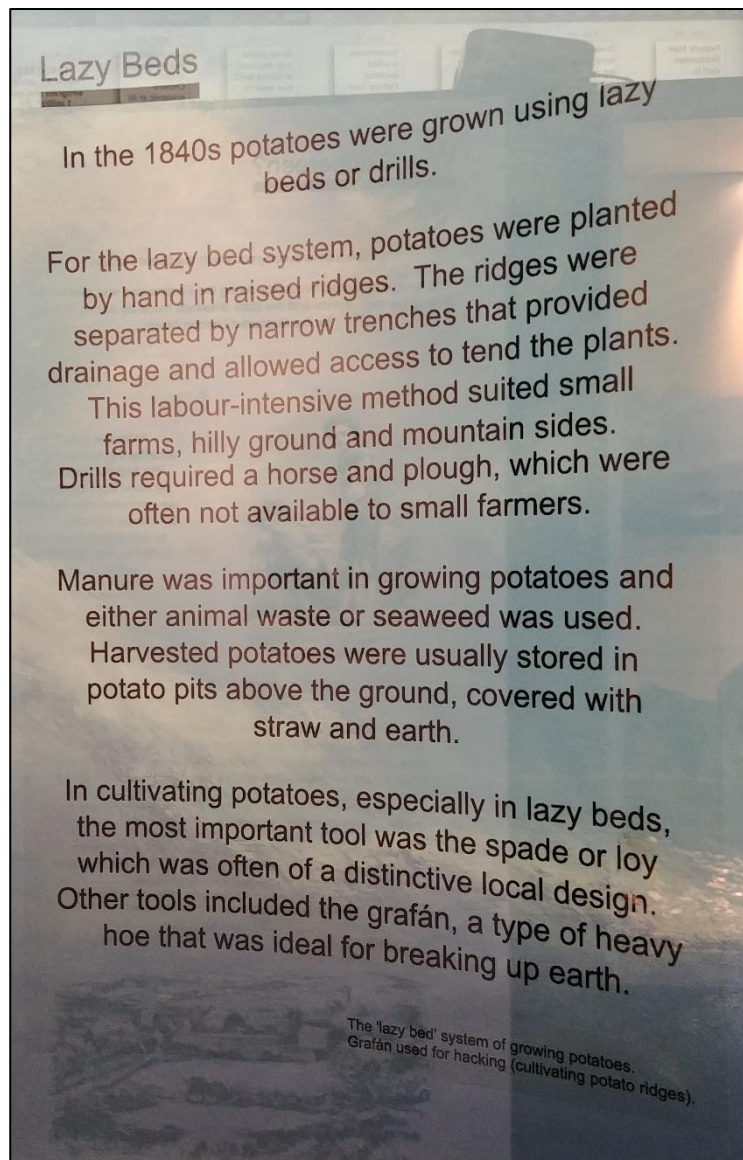


Figure 33: 'Lazy beds' information panel Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

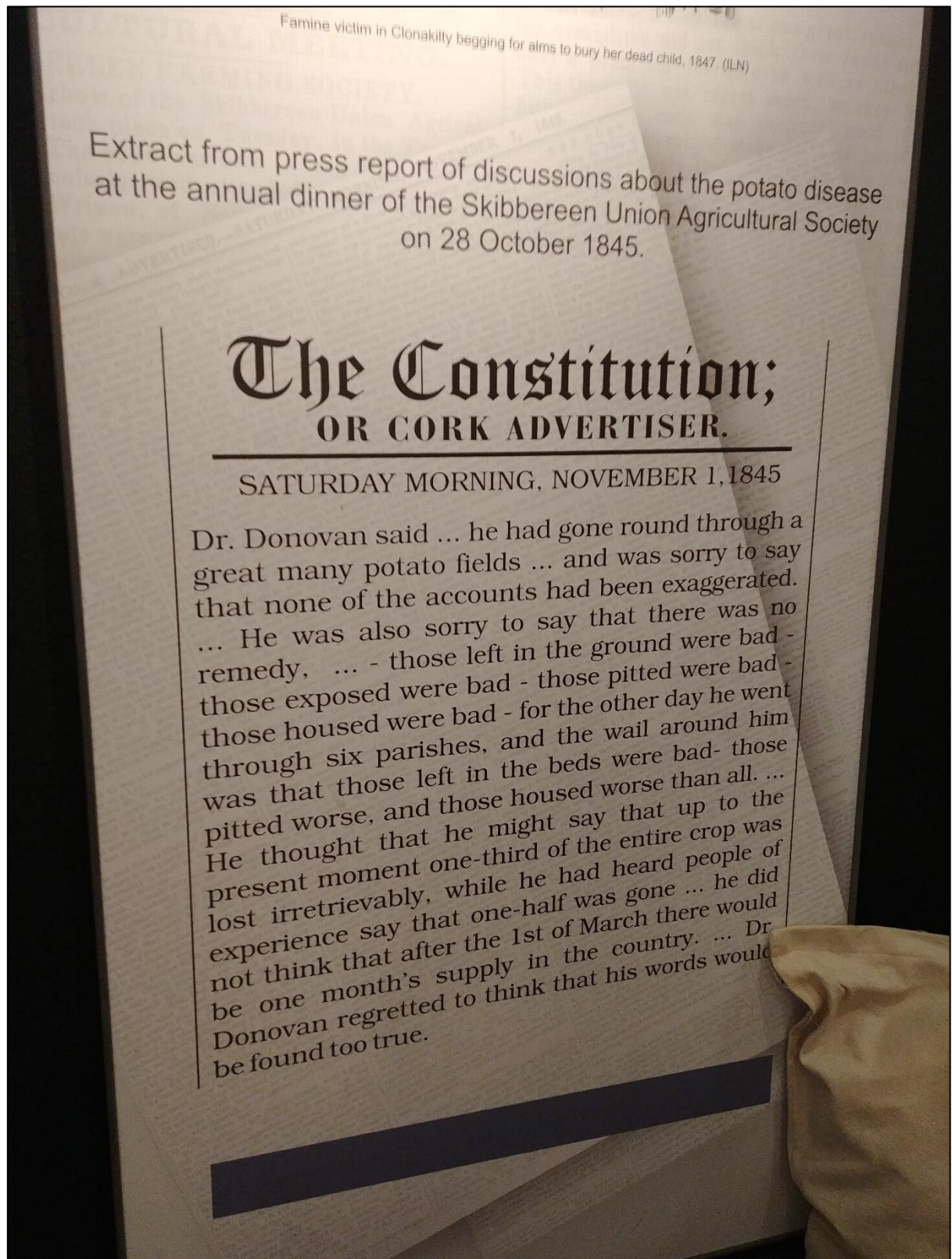


Figure 34: Press report from 1845, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

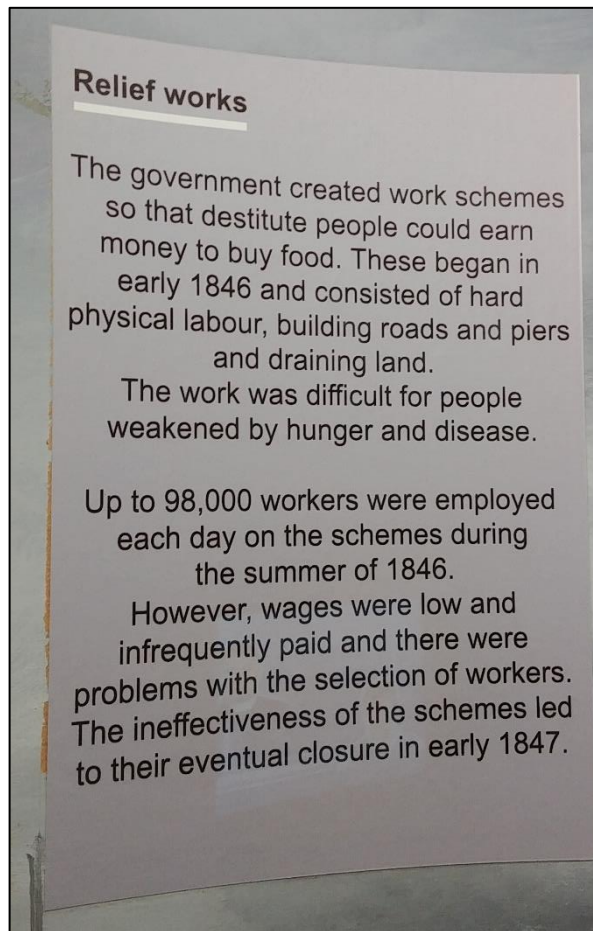


Figure 35: 'Relief works' information panel, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

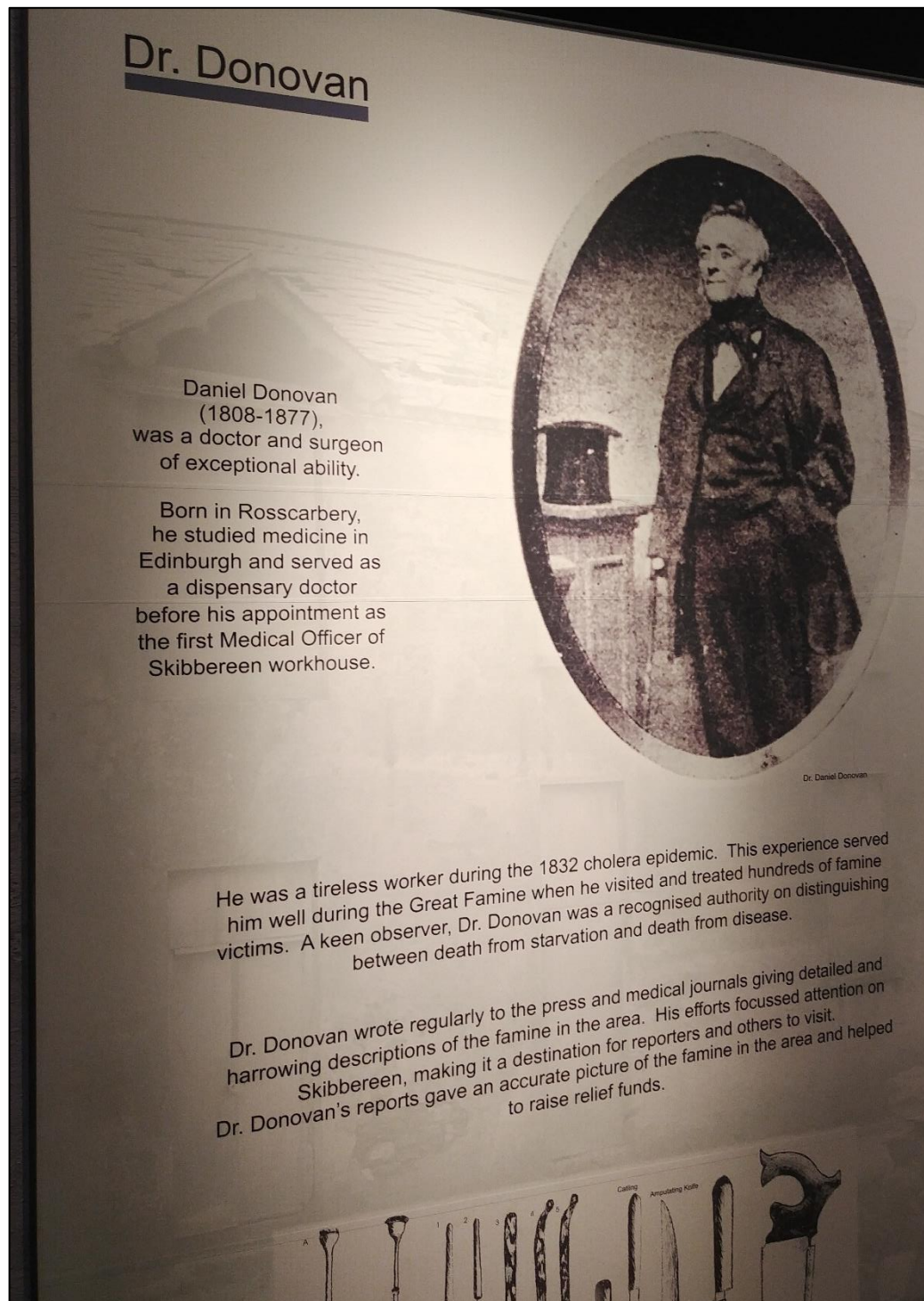


Figure 36: 'Dr Donovan' information panel, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

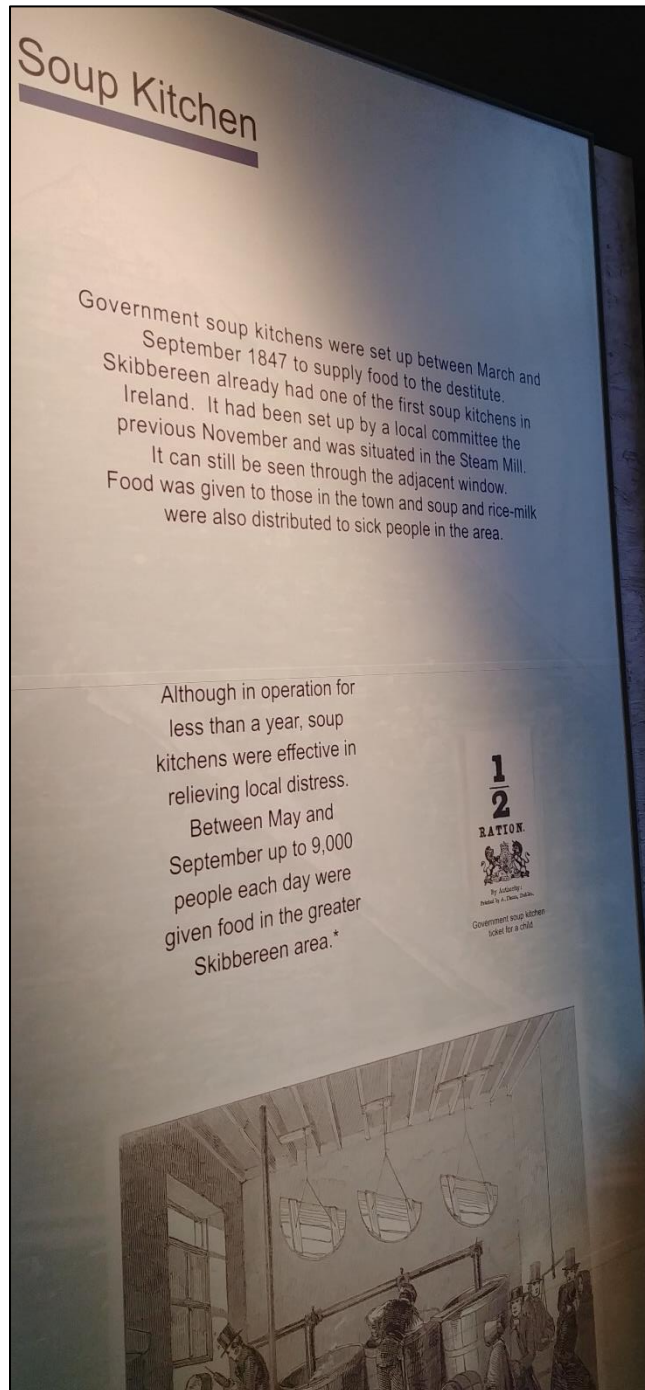


Figure 37: 'Soup Kitchen' information panel, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

Skibbereen Workhouse

Those worst affected during the Great Famine were the elderly and the very young, as can be seen here on the 'Return of Deaths' for Skibbereen Workhouse in December 1846.

RETURN of DEATHS in week ending Wednesday, December 23, 1846.							
Date of Death.	Names.	Age.	Date of Admission.	Date of Death.	Names.	Age.	Date of Admission.
1846		Years.	1846	1846		Years.	1846
Dec. 18	Regan, Tim . . .	48	July 9	Dec. 24	Leahy, Kitty . . .	3	October 12
"	Hegarty, Norry . . .	10	November 19	"	Walsh, Richard . . .	5 weeks	November 19
"	Regan, Ellen . . .	4	October 2	"	Bourke, Mary . . .	70	November 23
"	Walsh, Mary . . .	16	October 5	"	Houriham, Ellen . . .	8	October 23
"	Carey Owen . . .	2	December 3	"	Hicky, Mary . . .	3 months	December 10
"	Donovan, Jerry . . .	35	July 23	"	Murray, Timothy . . .	10	October 10
"	Collins, Abbey . . .	73	July 23	Dec. 25	Sullivan, Catharine . . .	4	October 22
"	Hegarty, Ellen . . .	1	April 23	"	Bourke, Mick . . .	5	October 29
"	Sealey, Mary . . .	6	November 5	"	Coakly, Mary . . .	30	November 19
Dec. 19	North, Bill . . .	60	December 10	"	Collins, Ellen . . .	6	December 10
"	Carthy, Mary . . .	60	October 23	"	Sullivan, Joan . . .	10	November 29
"	Twomey, Joan . . .	80	May 4	"	Horan, Timothy . . .	60	December 10
"	Allen, John . . .	7	December 19	Dec. 26	Leary, Peggy . . .	10	February 26
"	Connolly, Jude . . .	5	October 14	"	Carthy, Kit . . .	9	November 19
"	Brickley, Daniel . . .	45	December 18	"	Collins, Mary . . .	33	April 7
"	Dwier, Pat . . .	30	December 16	"	Connell, John . . .	69	April 16
"	Barry, Patrick . . .	8	May 21	"	Collins, Mick . . .	56	June 17, 1845
Dec. 20	Wholey, John . . .	2	October 21	"			1846
"	Scannel, Pat . . .	64	December 3	"	Shea, Catharine . . .	3 days	December 6
"	Donoghue, Mary . . .	39	October 15	"	Hegarty, Joan . . .	5	November 19
"	Walsh, Mary . . .	35	November 19	"	Crowley, John . . .	40	November 6
"	Donoghue, Dennis . . .	5 weeks	October 15	Dec. 27	Coughlan, Owen . . .	70	July 30
"	Dwyer, William . . .	60	December 16	"	Flinn, Jude . . .	80	October 30
Dec. 21	Buckley, Mary . . .	9 months	December 2	"	Kearny, Daniel . . .	70	November 4
"	Moaxley, John . . .	7	May 7	"	Hickey, James . . .	2	September 17
"	Coakley, Pat . . .	3	November 19	"	Glossin, Jane . . .	80	December 24
"	Coholan, Simon . . .	8	November 19	"	Daly, Peg . . .	9	December 16
"	Sullivan, Mick . . .	10	November 19	"	Hurley, Andrew . . .	64	May 7
Dec. 22	Duggan, Margaret . . .	4 months	October 29	Dec. 28	Ninicholas, John . . .	2	November 12
Dec. 23	Canty, John . . .	70	March 12	"	Brown, Charles . . .	2	December 10
Dec. 24	Sheehan, John . . .	8	November 4	"	Hurley, Biddy . . .	40	December 3
"	Sullivan, Charles . . .	12	November 7	"	Sullivan, Biddy . . .	15	November 12
"	Reohan, Nell . . .	2	October 8	Dec. 29	Crowley, Patrick . . .	63	October 14
"	Wholohan, Jane . . .	15	November 17	Dec. 30	James, Morgan . . .	75	March 26

December 31, 1846.

D. FAHNEY,
Master of the Workhouse.

Figure 38: 'Skibbereen Workhouse' information panel, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

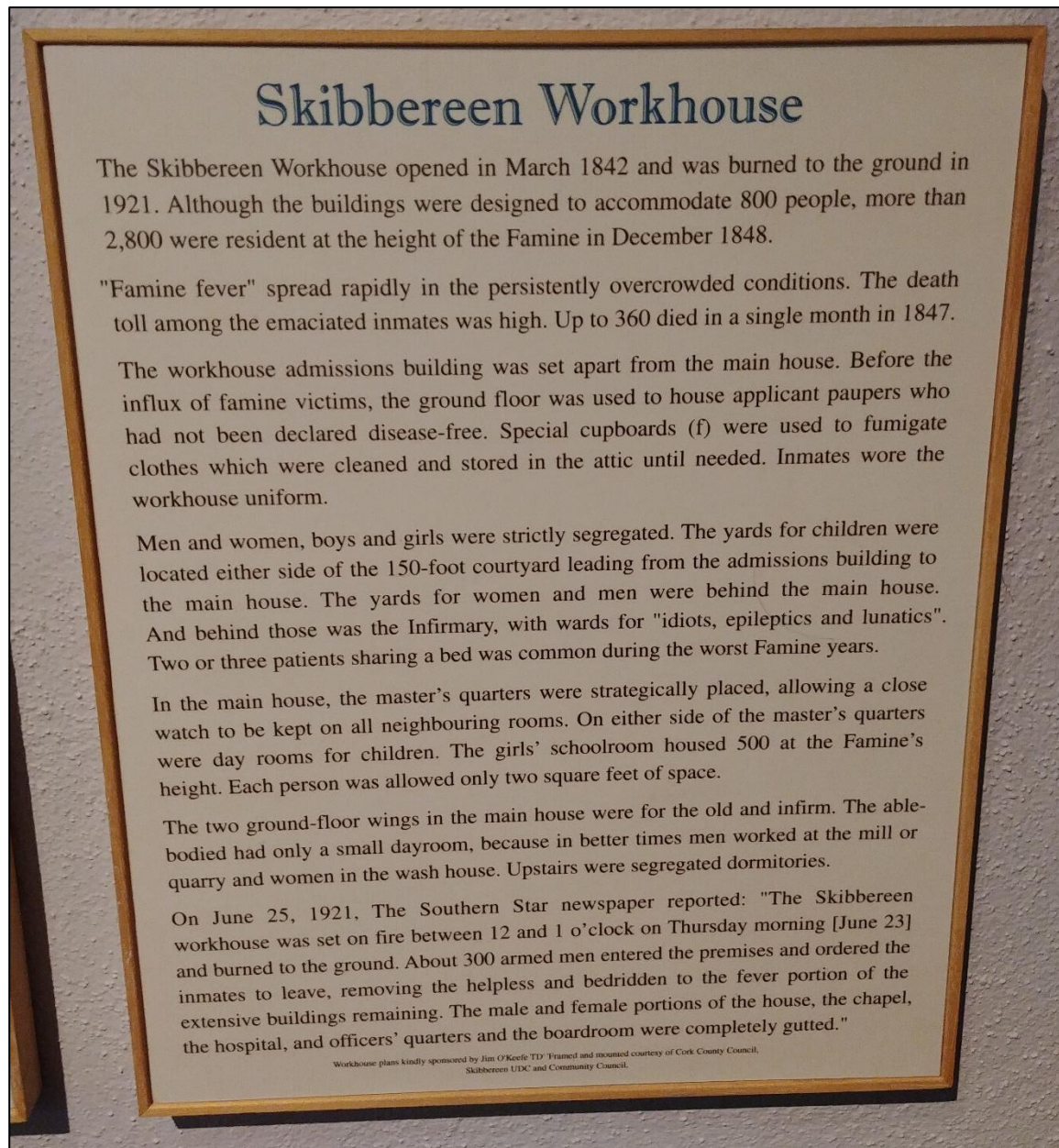


Figure 39: 'Skibbereen Workhouse' information panel 2, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018



Figure 40: Typical clothing at the time, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

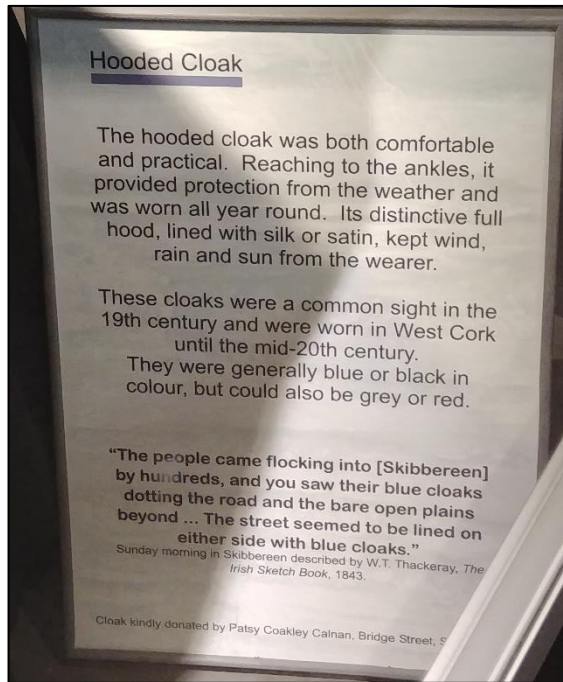


Figure 41: 'Hooded Cloak' information panel, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

Soyer's Soup

M. Soyer was a French chef at the highly prestigious Reform Club in London during the Famine. He devised a soup recipe for Famine victims and opened a Model Soup Kitchen in Dublin in April 1847.

His soup was widely attacked for its lack of real nutritional value. The soup dispensed by the Quakers as relief had six times the amount of meat contained in Soyer's Recipe No 1.

Soyer asserted that his soup had 'been tasted by numerous noblemen, members of Parliament and several ladies ... who have found it very good and nourishing'.

- 2 gallons of water
 - A quarter pound of leg of beef
 - 2 ounces of dripping
 - 2 onions and other vegetables
 - A half pound of flour, seconds
 - A half pound of pearl barley
 - 3 ounces of salt
 - A half an ounce of brown sugar
- Total cost 1s. 4d

By July 1847, over three million people were being fed daily in the soup kitchens of Ireland. In the Skibbereen Union, 51,184 people queued for soup in a single day – almost half the total population.

This soup pot was used in an auxiliary workhouse in the centre of Skibbereen town. Known as 'Swanton's Store', it was mentioned by A.G. Stark in his Journal of 1850:

The shrill sound of female voices that reached my ear, as I passed [Swanton's Store] – as if nothing reigned within except discord and pain.

Figure 42: 'Soyer's Soup' information panel, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

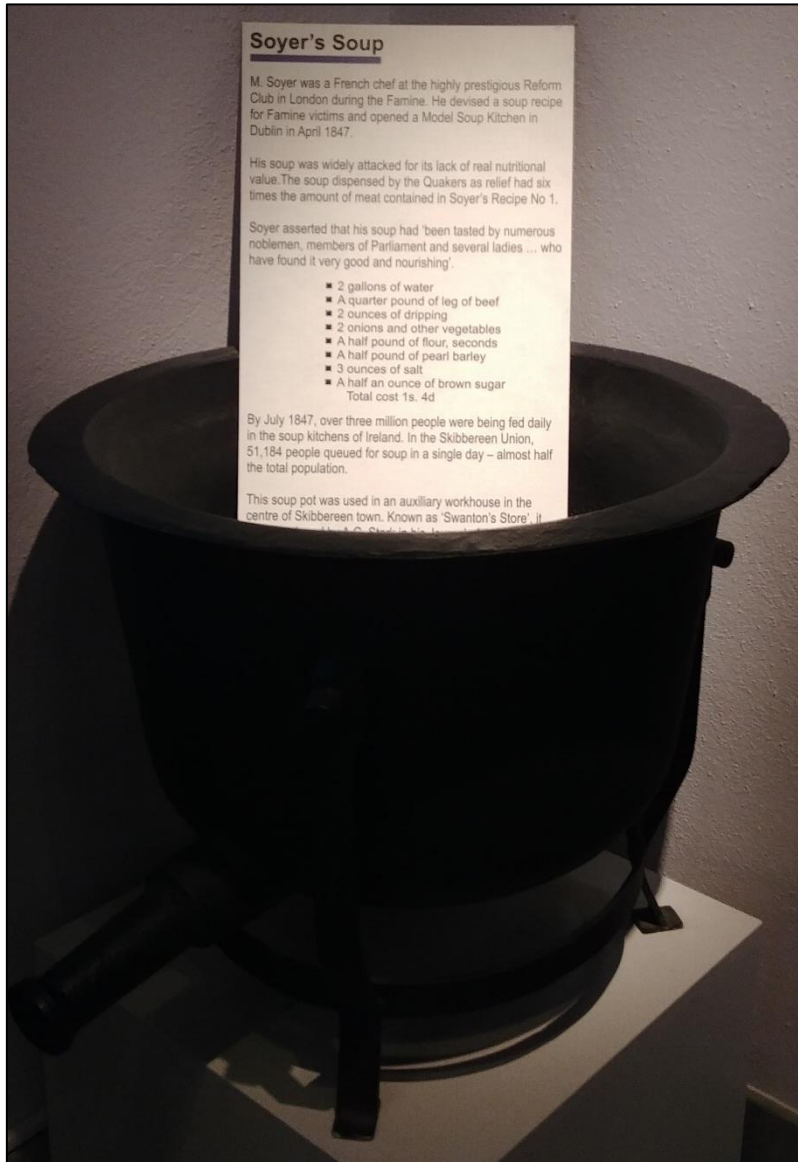


Figure 43: 'Soyer's Soup' panel and pot, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

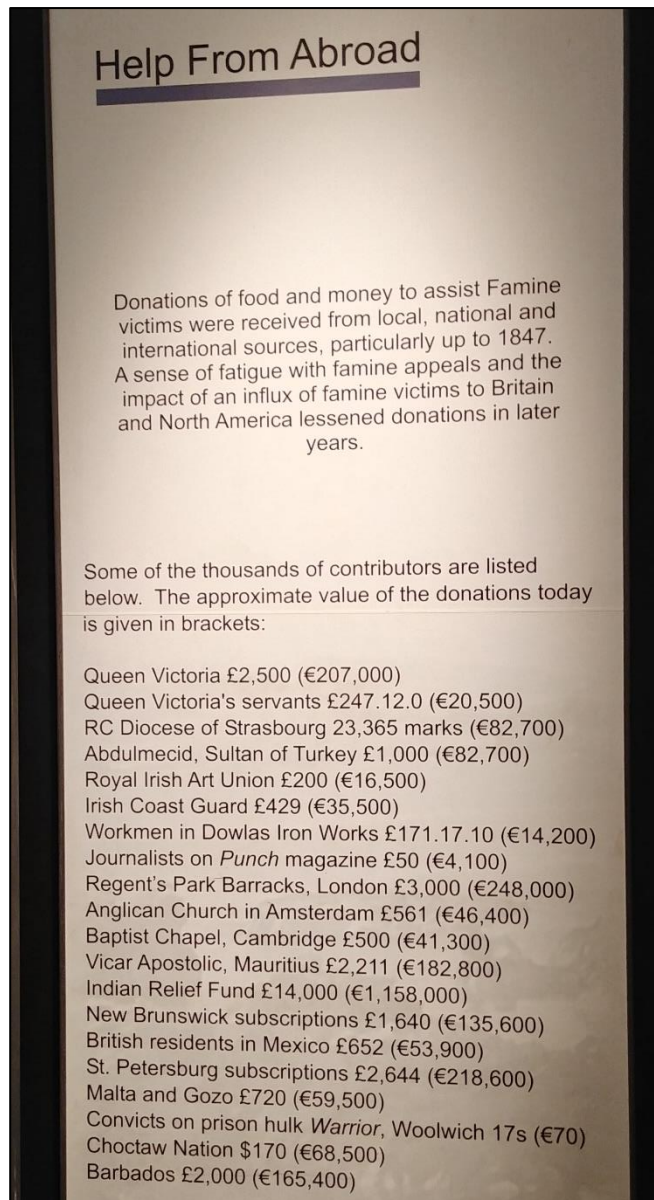


Figure 44: 'Help from Abroad' information panel, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018



Figure 45: Clothing and travelling chest on display, Skibbreen, taken on 24th July 2018

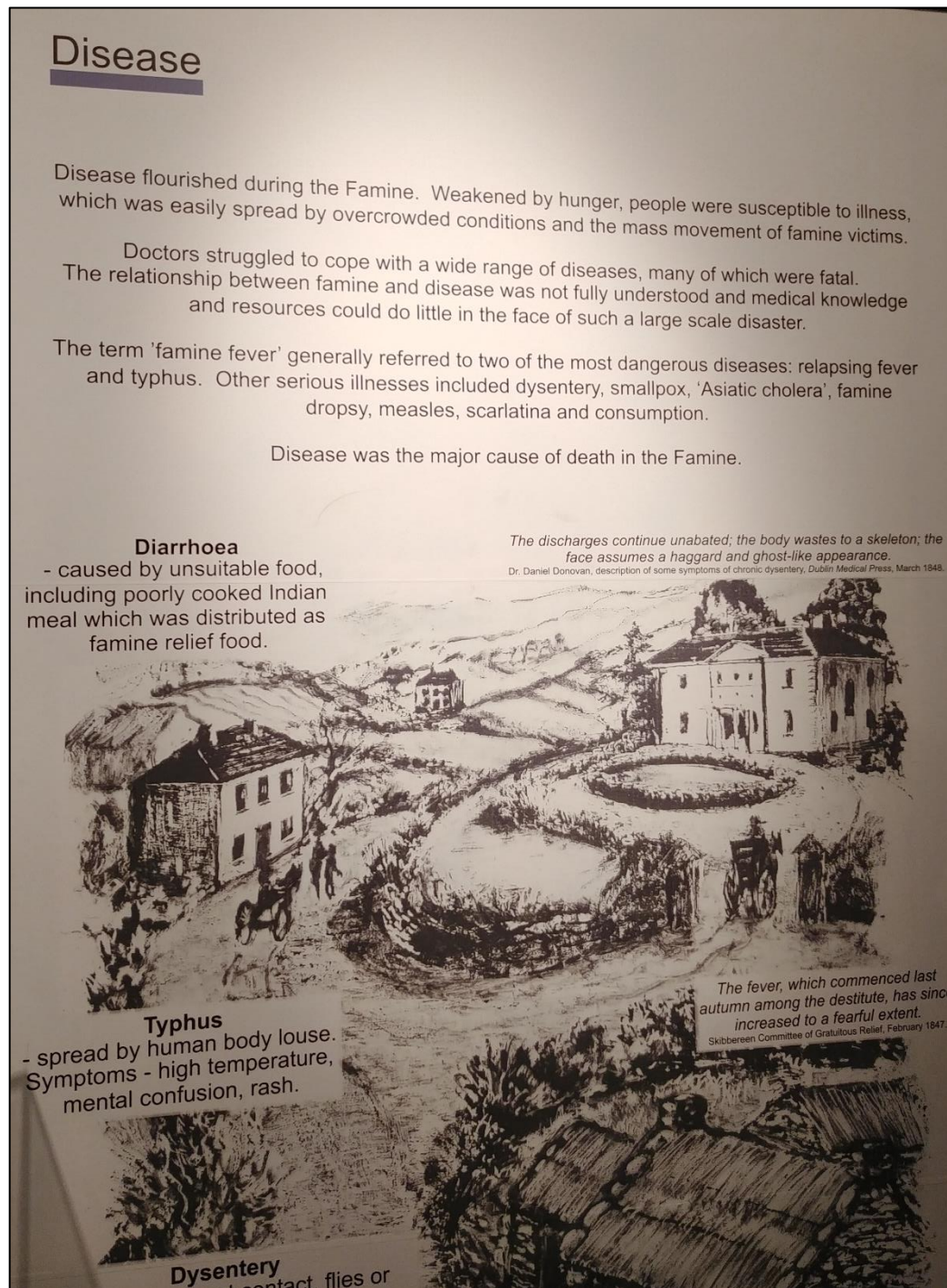
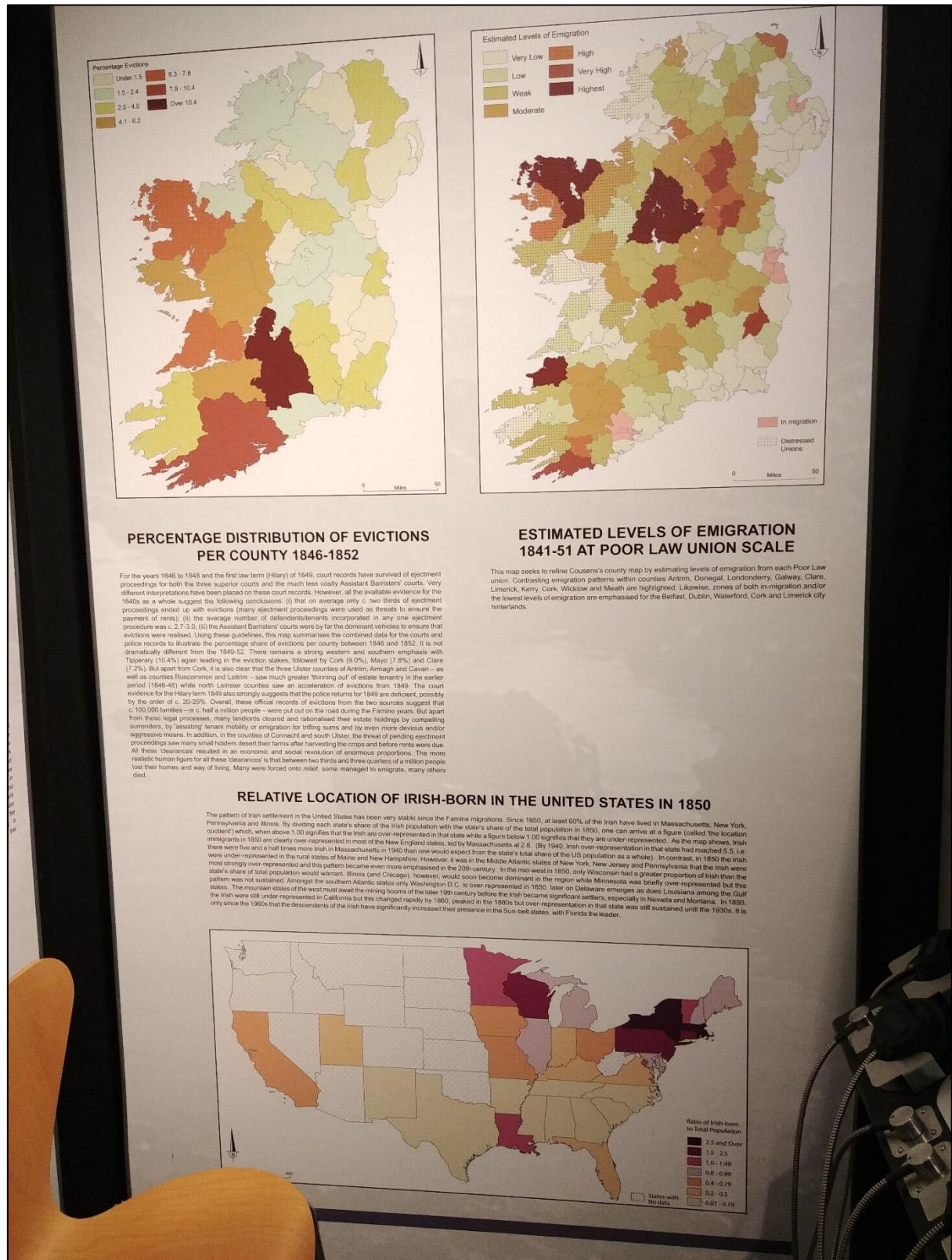
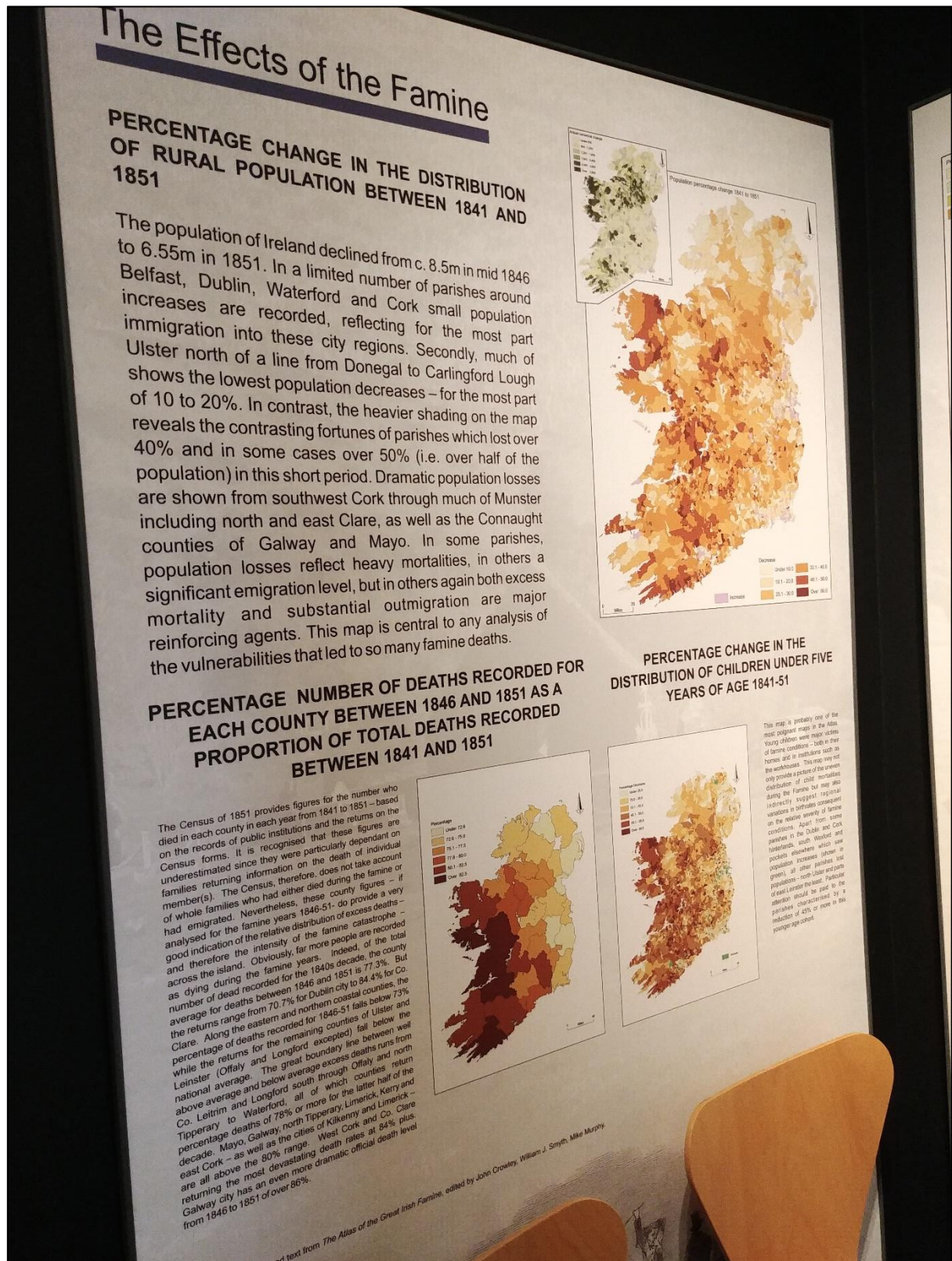


Figure 46: 'Disease' information panel, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018



Figure 47: 'Writing Slope' information panel and display, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

Figure 48: Emigration statistics information panel, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

Figure 49: 'The Effects of the Famine' information panel, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

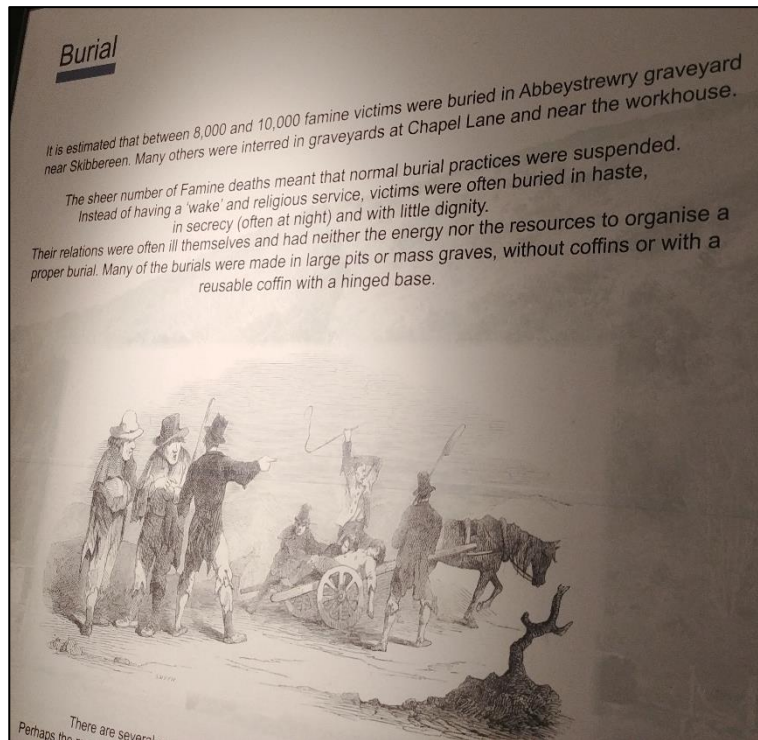


Figure 50: 'Burial' information panel, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

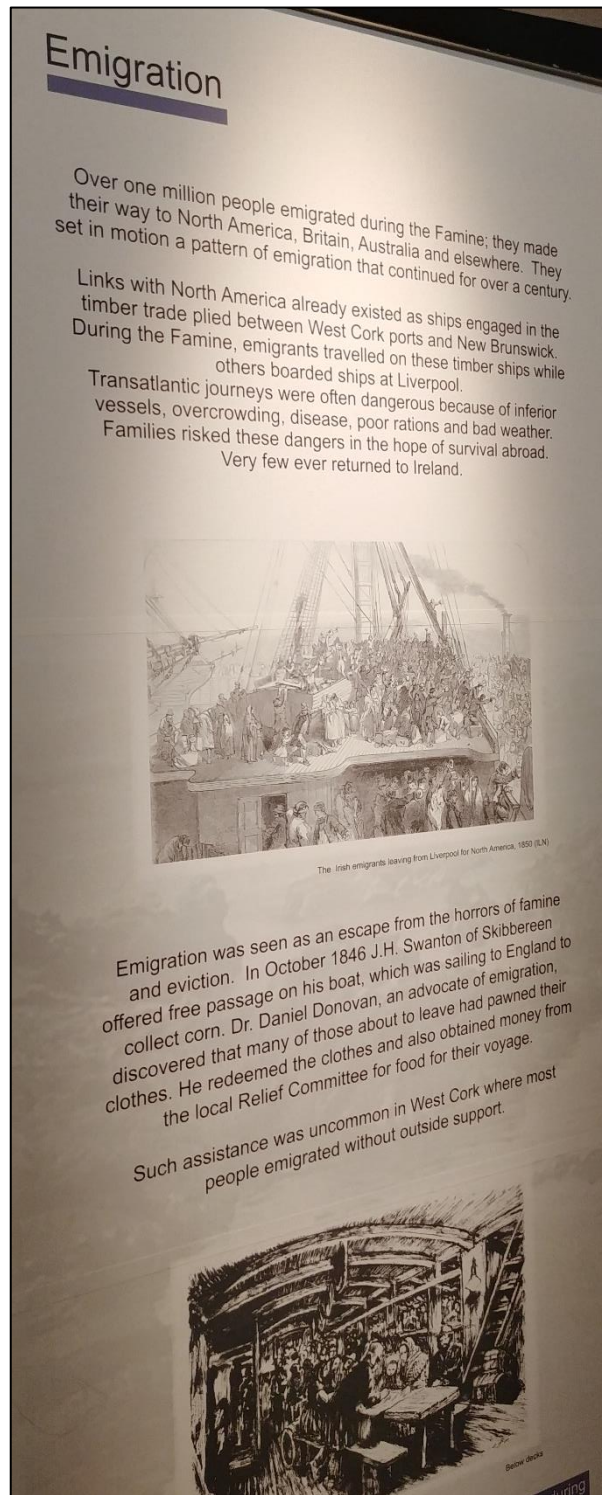


Figure 51: 'Emigration' information panel, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018

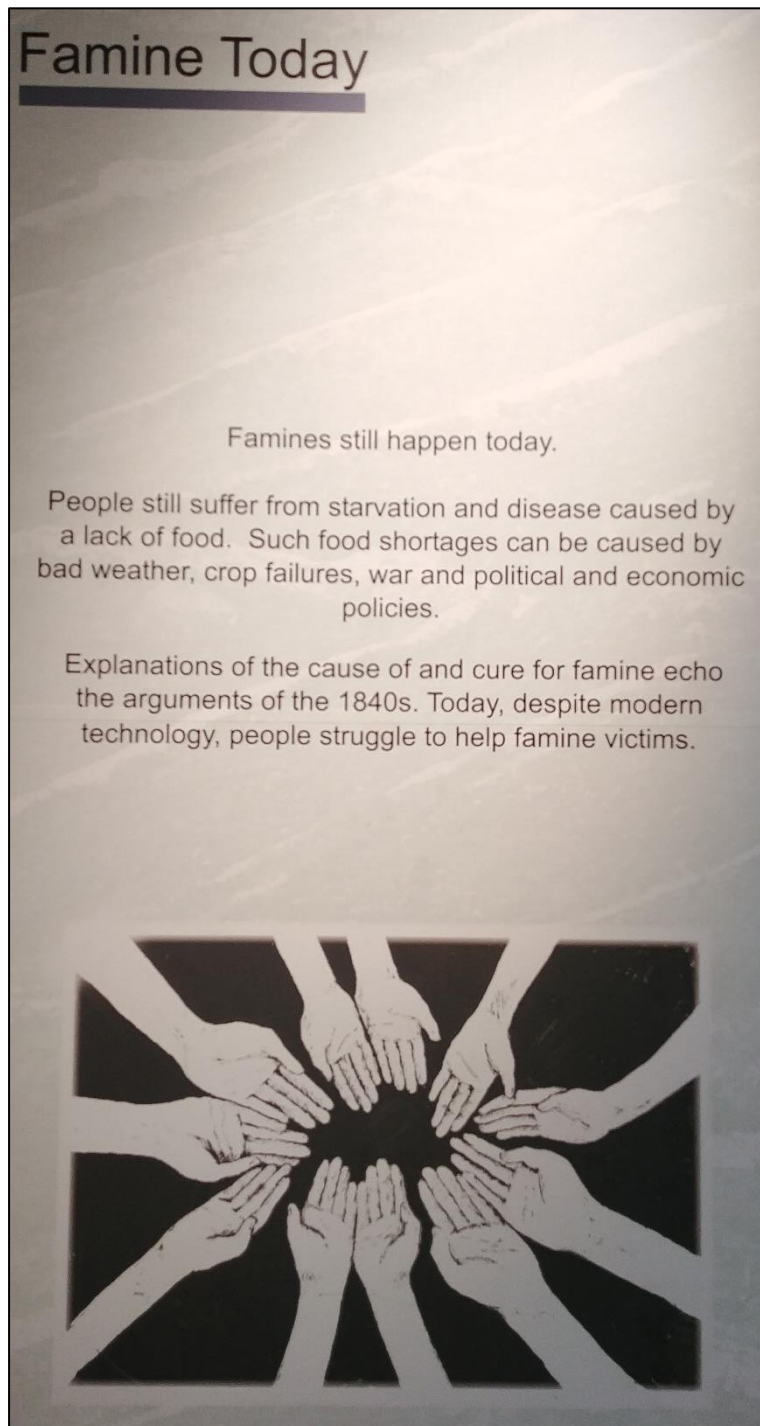


Figure 52: 'Famine Today' information panel, Skibbereen, taken on 24th July 2018



Figure 53: Abbeystrowry Famine Graveyard, taken on 26th July 2018



Figure 54: The standing stones at Abbeystrawry, taken on 26th July 2018



Figure 55: One of the monuments at Abbeystrowry, taken on 26th July 2018



Figure 56: One of the standing stones, Abbeystowry, taken on 26th July 2018

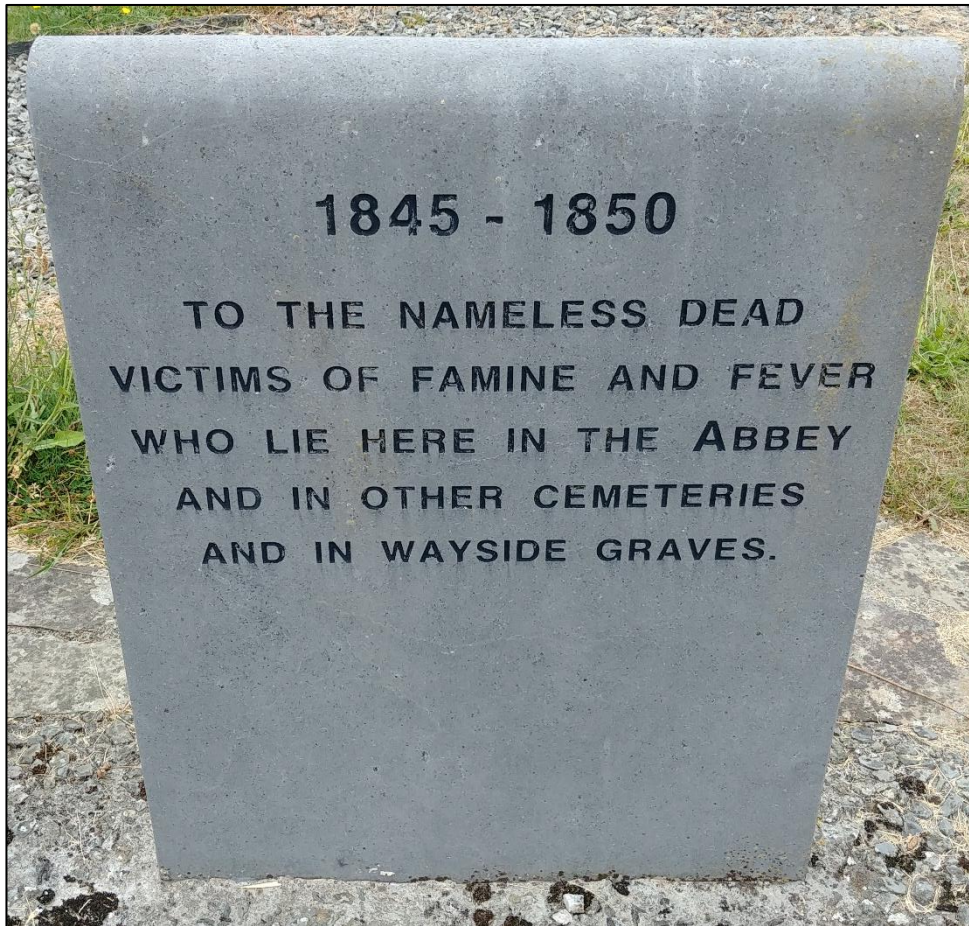


Figure 57: One of the standing stones, Abbeystrowry, taken on 26th July 2018



Figure 58: Abbeystrowry Famine Graveyard, taken on 26th July 2018

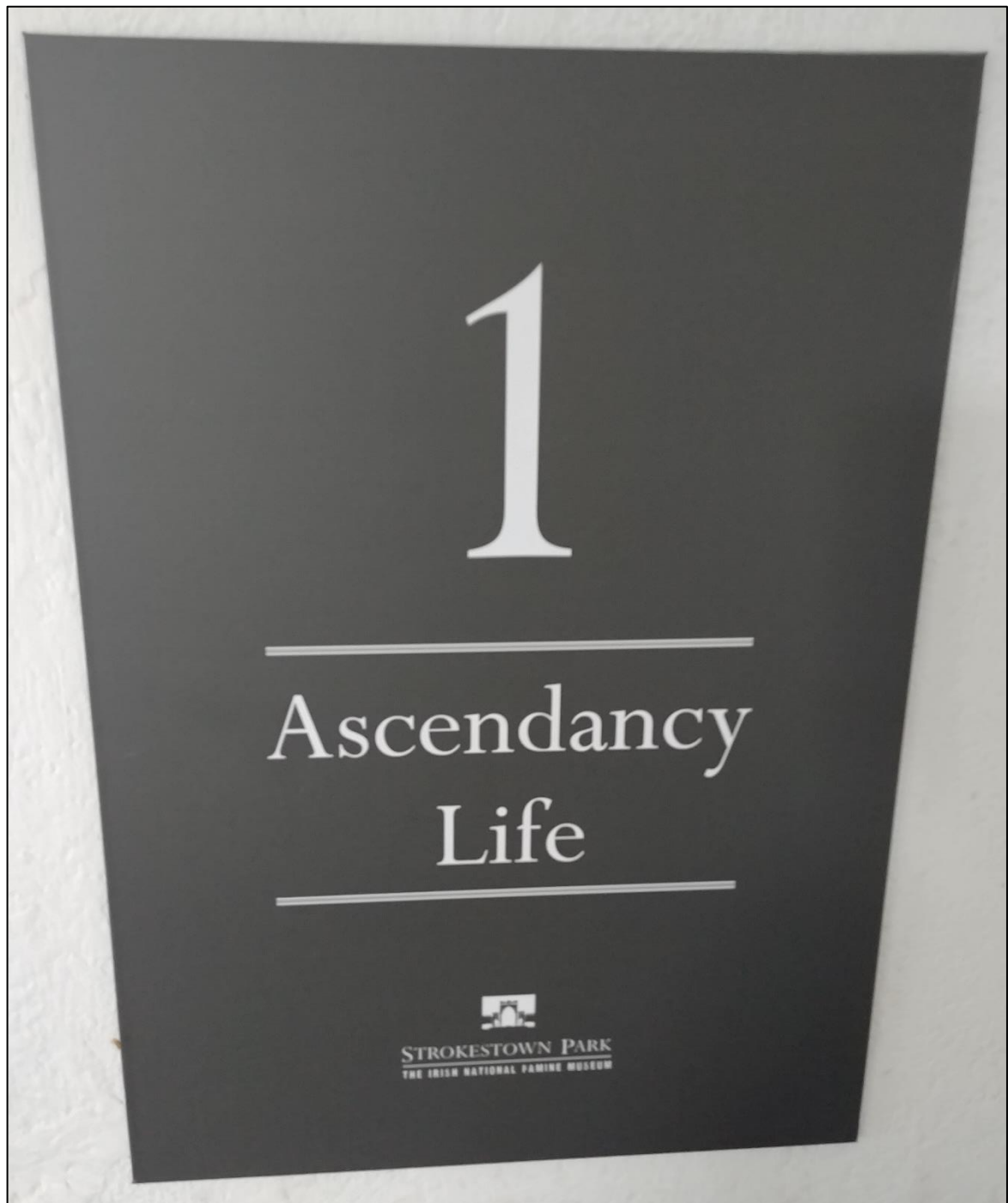


Figure 59: Section 1 sign Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 60: Section 2 sign Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 61: Section 3 sign Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 62: Section 4 sign Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 63: Section 5 sign Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 64: Section 7 sign Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018

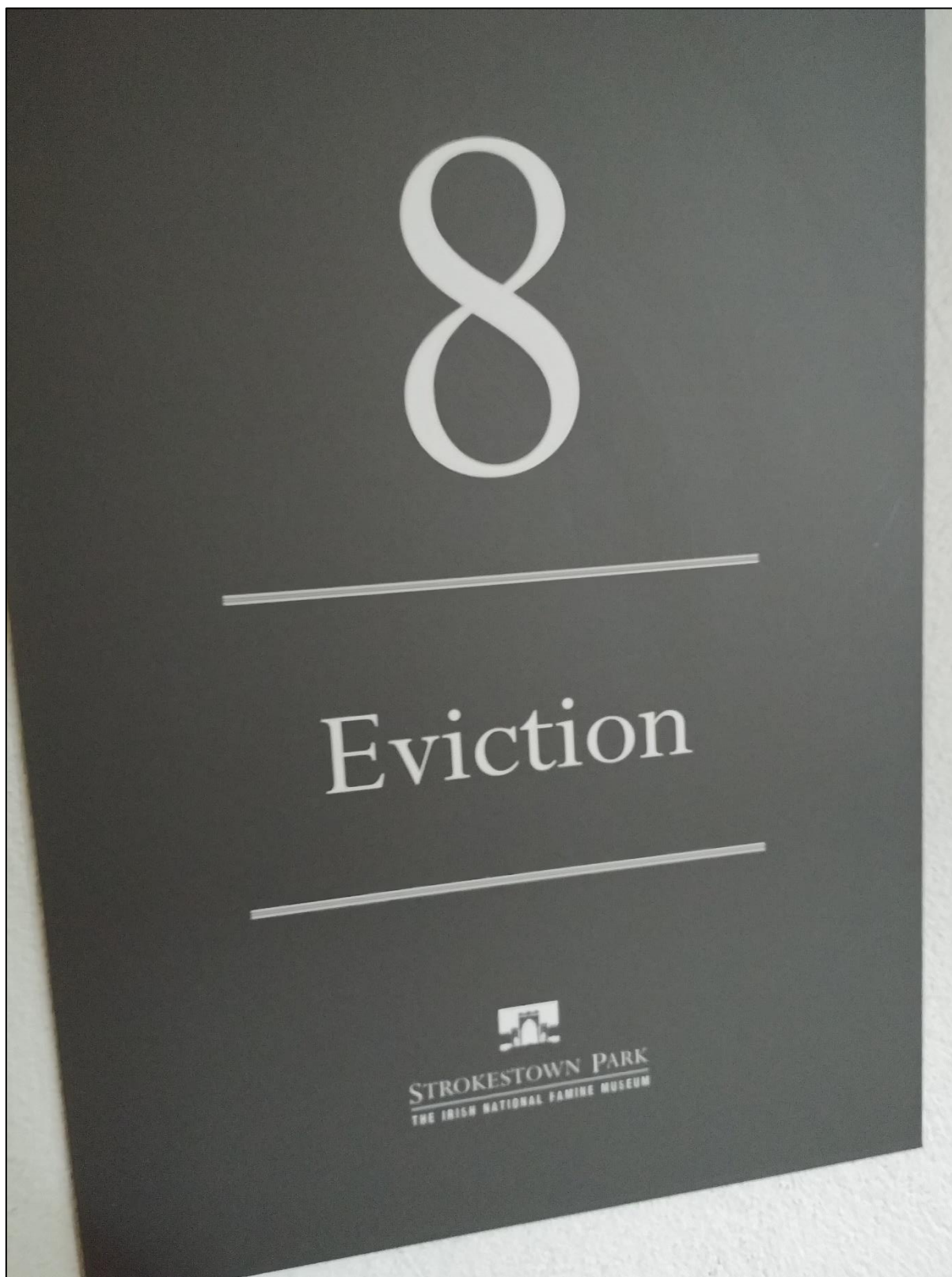


Figure 65: Section 8 sign Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018

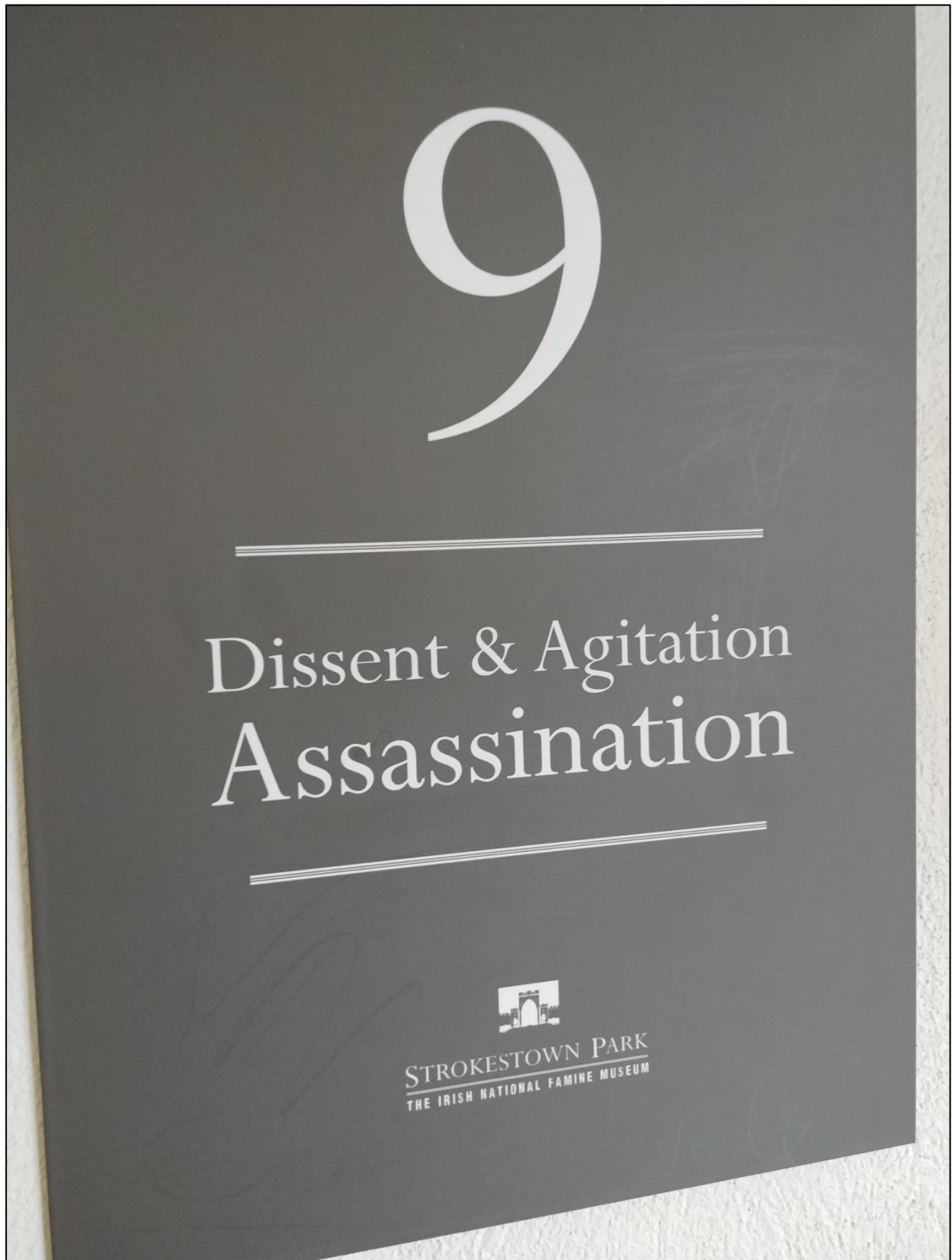


Figure 66: Section 9 sign Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018

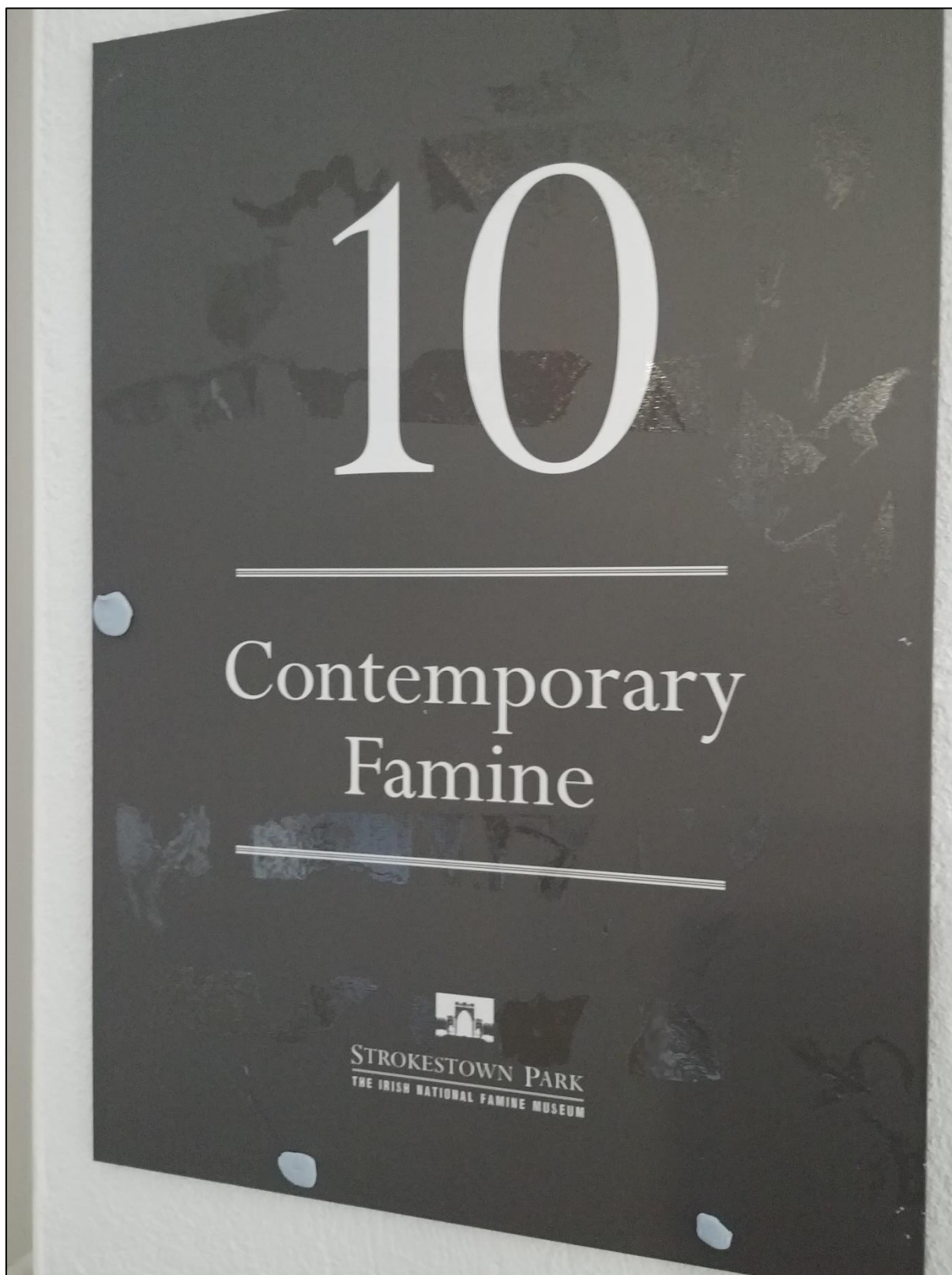


Figure 67: Section 10 sign Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 68: Reconstruction of peasant bed, Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018

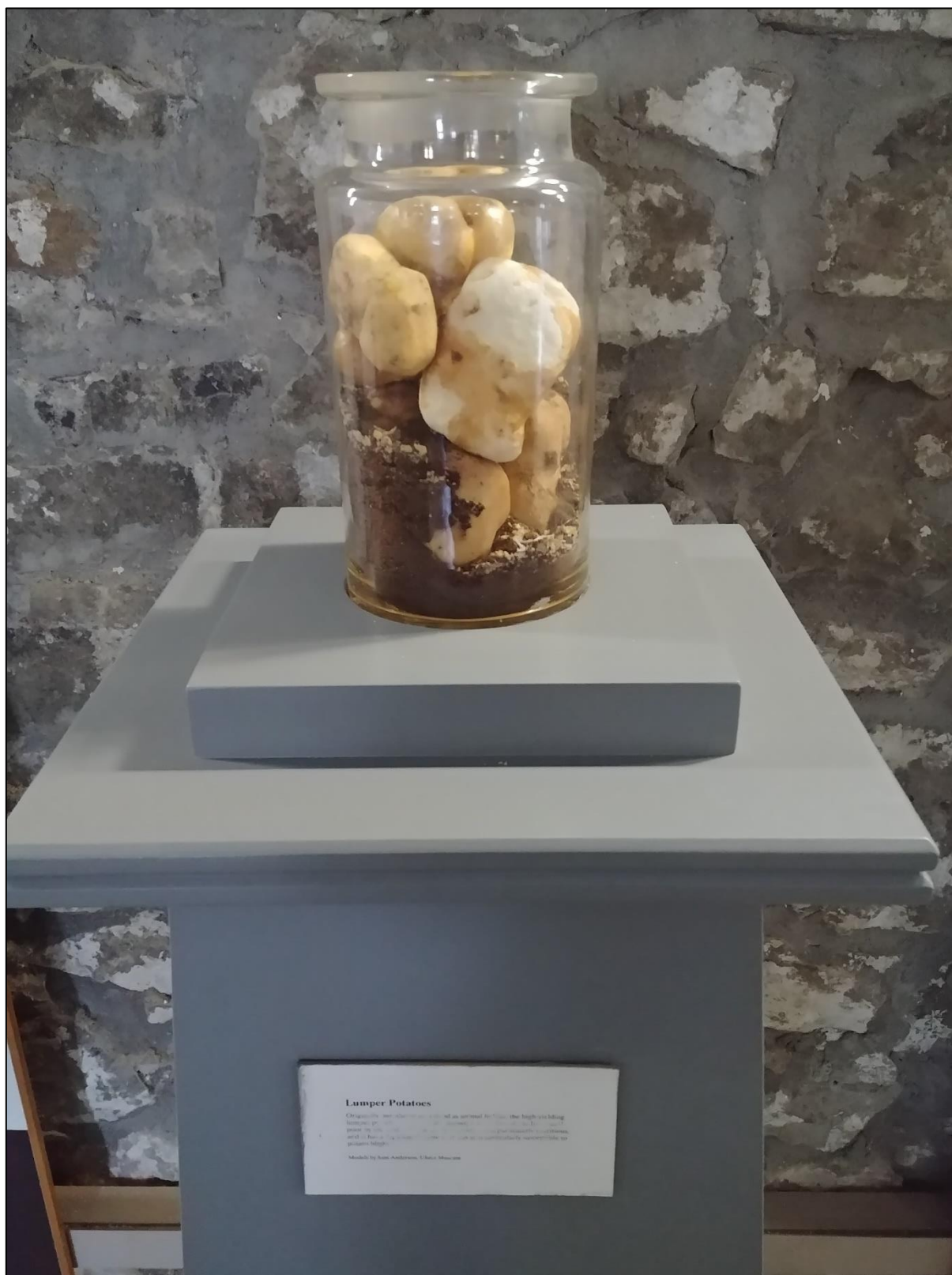


Figure 69: Lumper potatoes on display in Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018

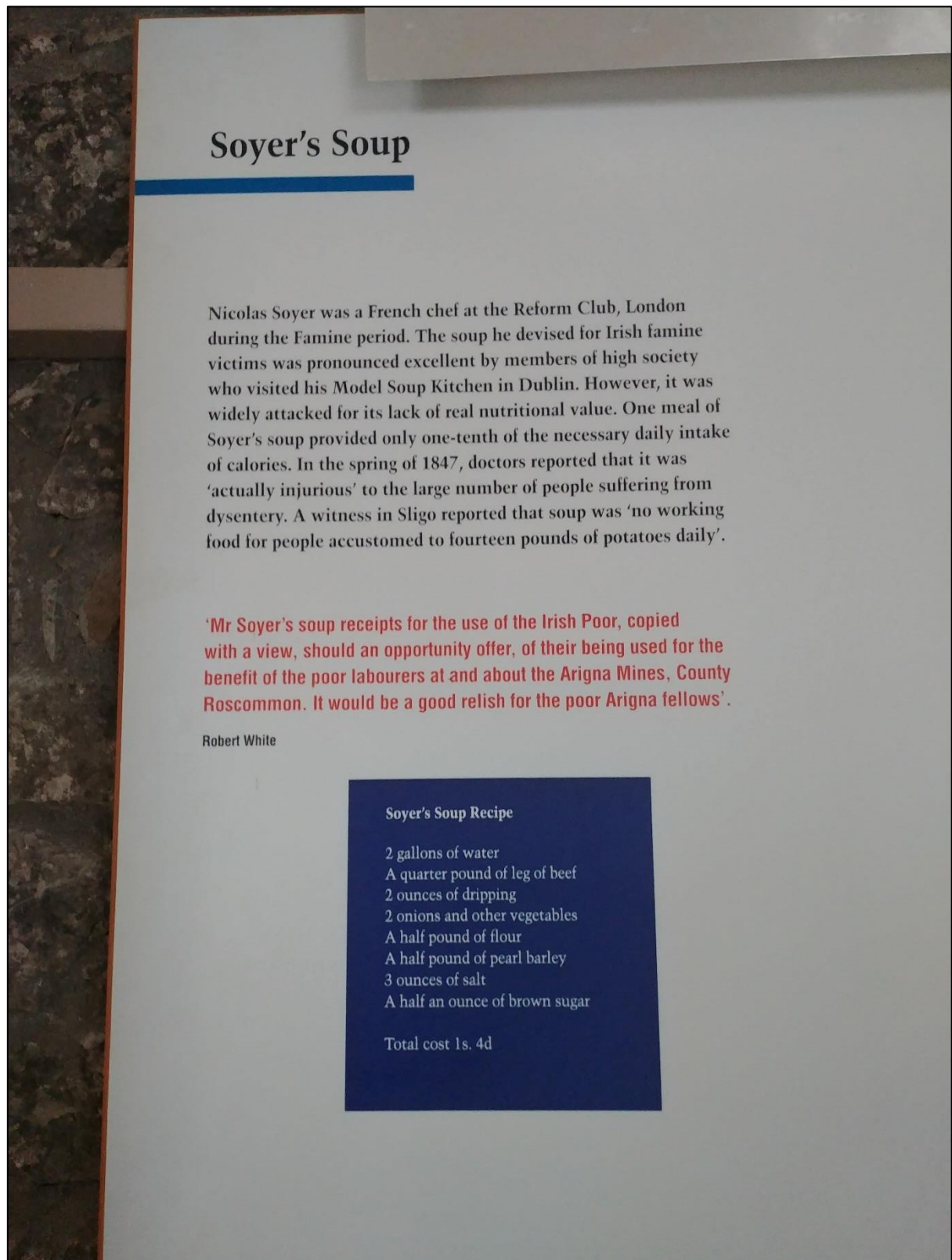


Figure 70: Soyer's Soup information panel, Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 71: Reconstruction of a Famine ship, Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 72: Reconstruction of a 'coffin ship' bunk, Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 73: Interior of National Famine Museum, Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 74: Reconstruction of pauper's clothing allowance for emigration, Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018

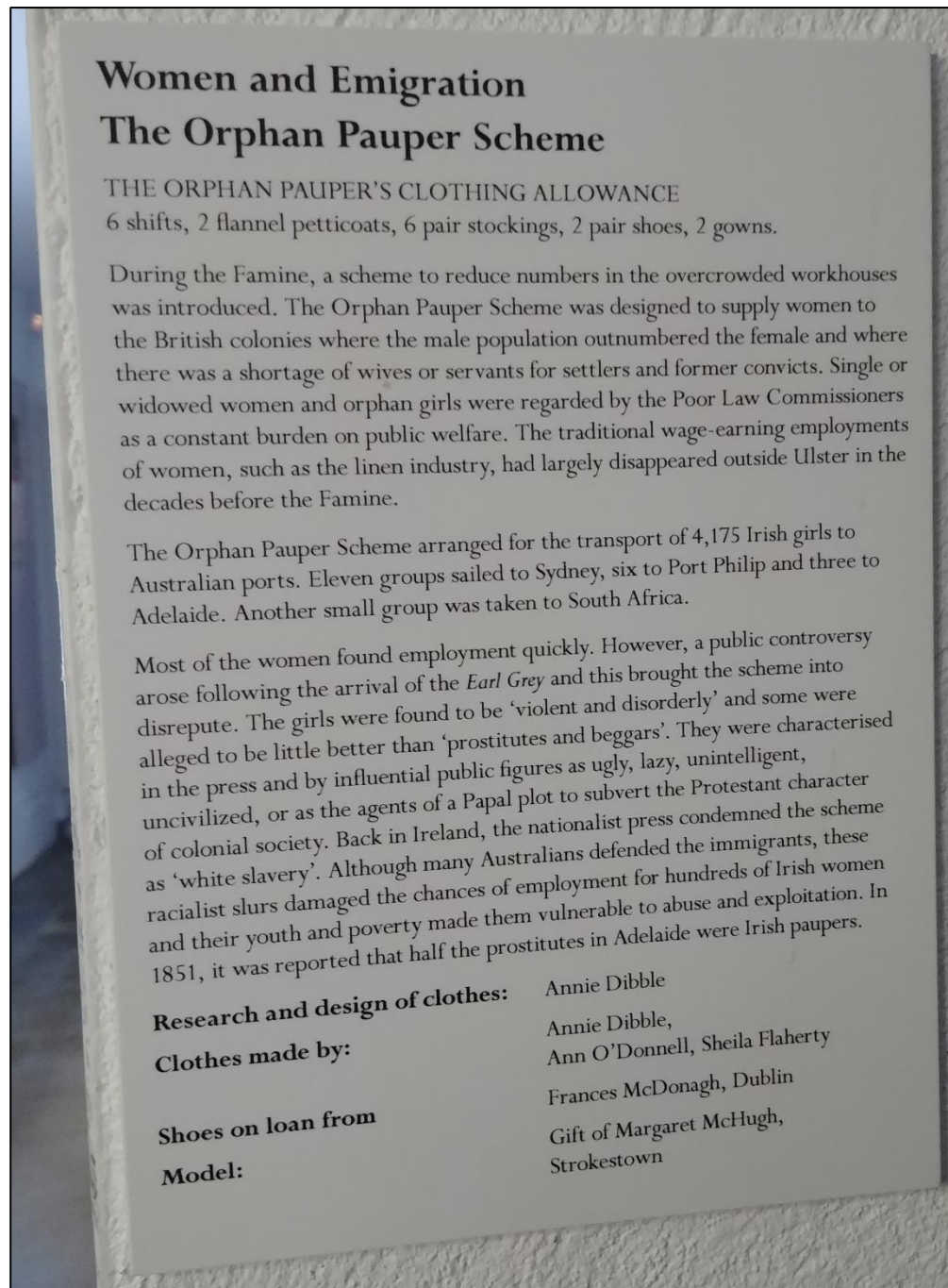


Figure 75: Pauper's clothing information panel, Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 76: Gun used to kill Major Denis Mahon, Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 77: Interior shot of National Famine Museum, Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018

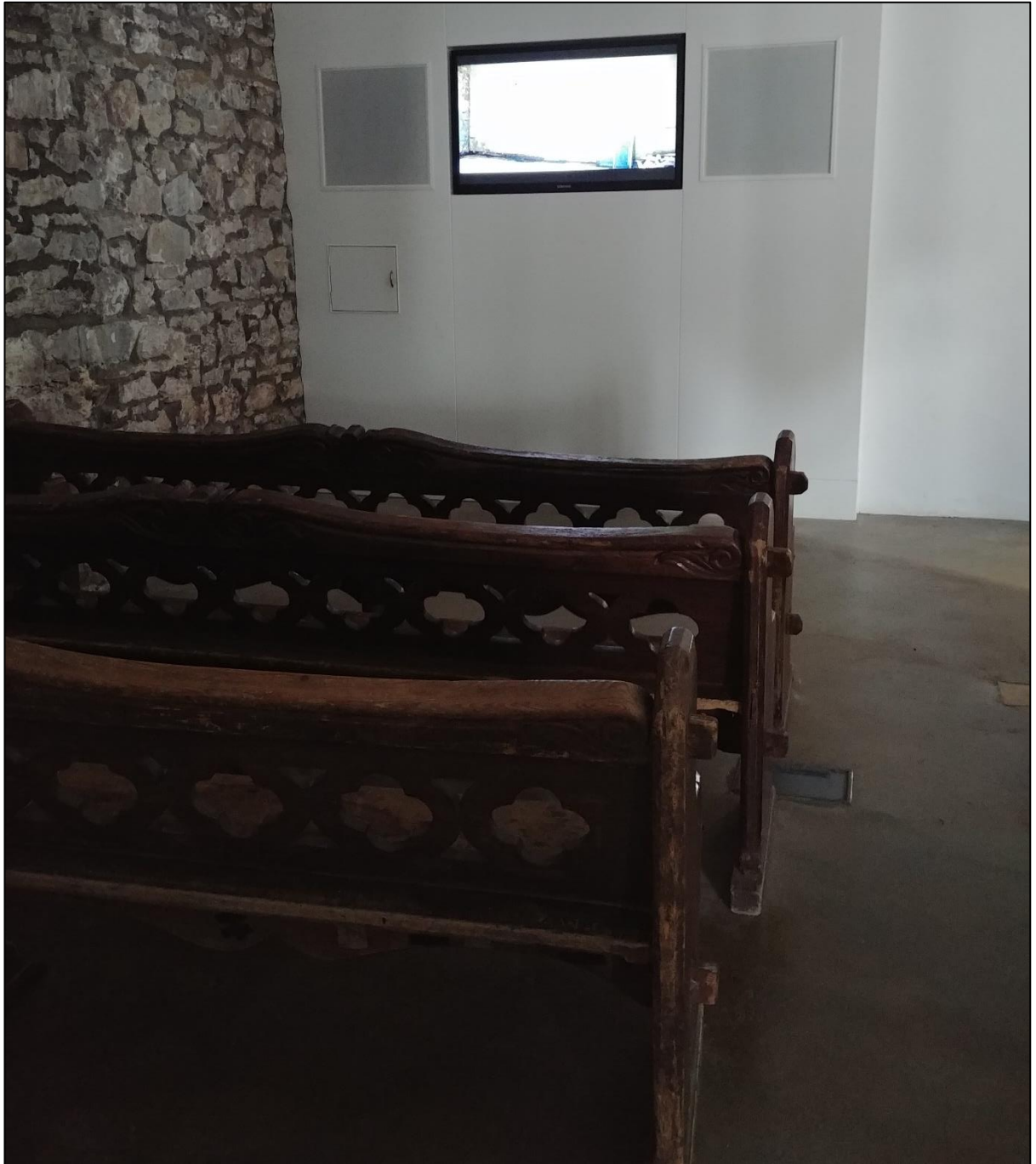
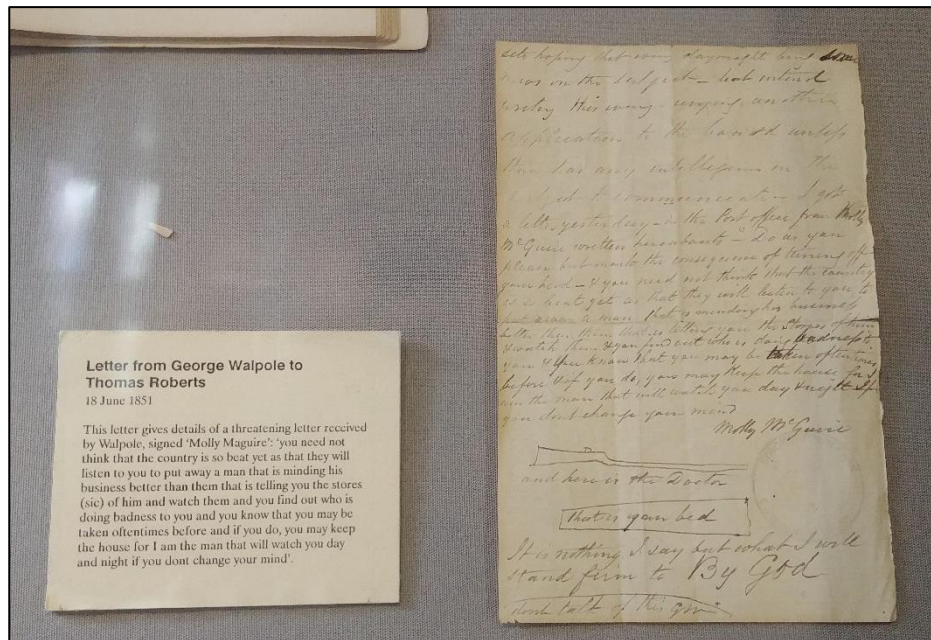
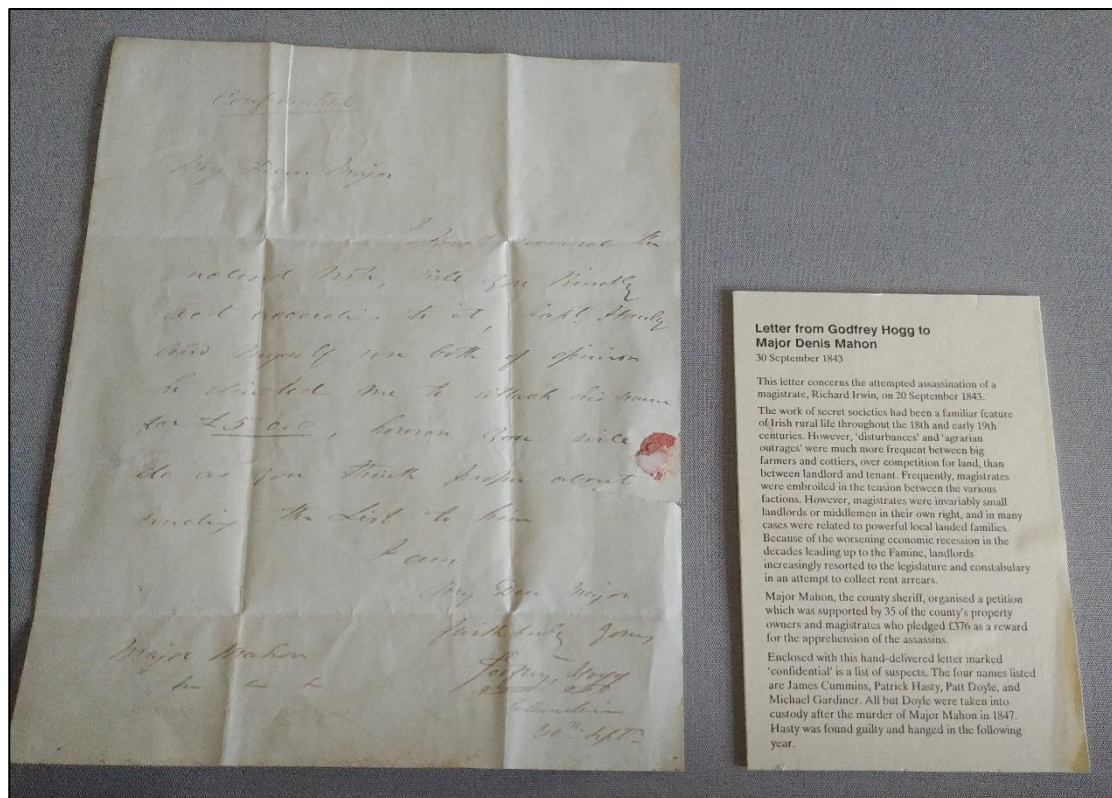


Figure 78: Video room, Stroketown, taken on 31st July 2018

Figure 79: Letter from George Walpole to Thomas Robert, Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018Figure 80: Letter from Godfrey Hogg to Major Denis Mahon, Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018

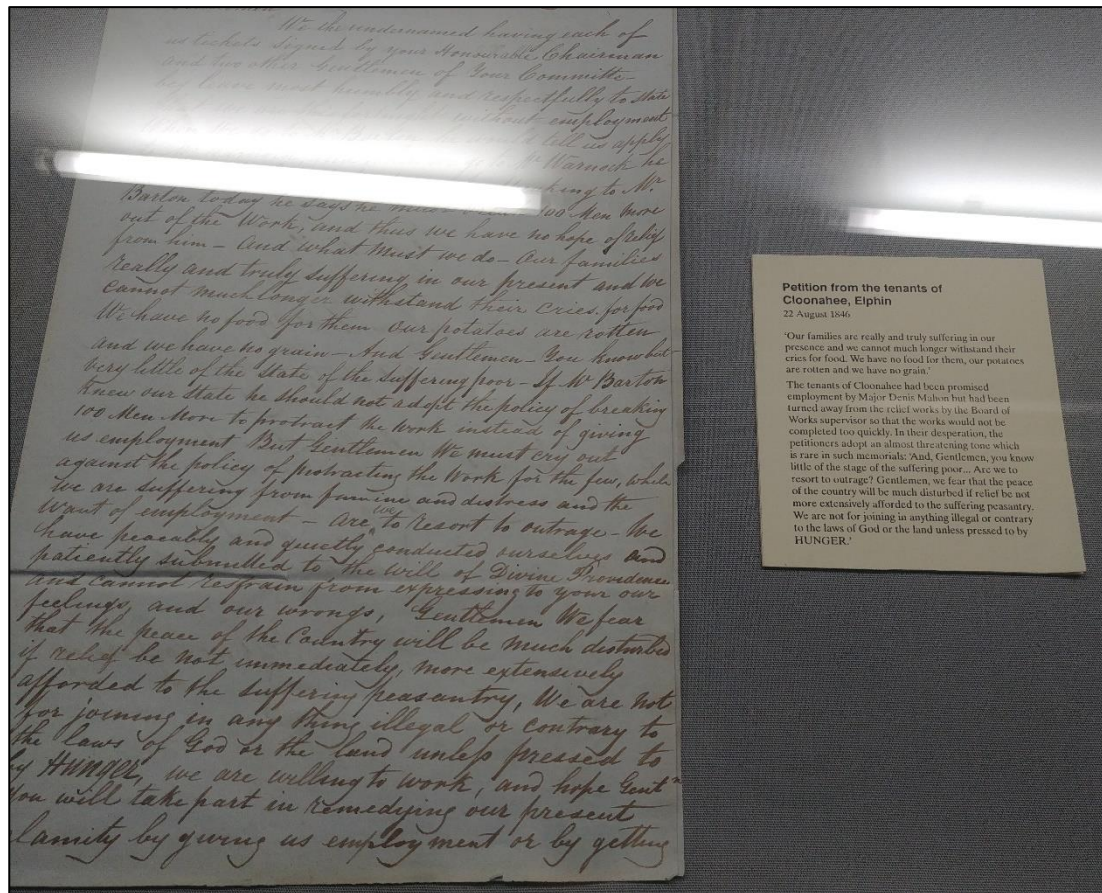


Figure 81: Petition from the tenants of Cloonahee, Elphin in Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 82: Interactive touchscreen, Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 83: Interior shot, Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018

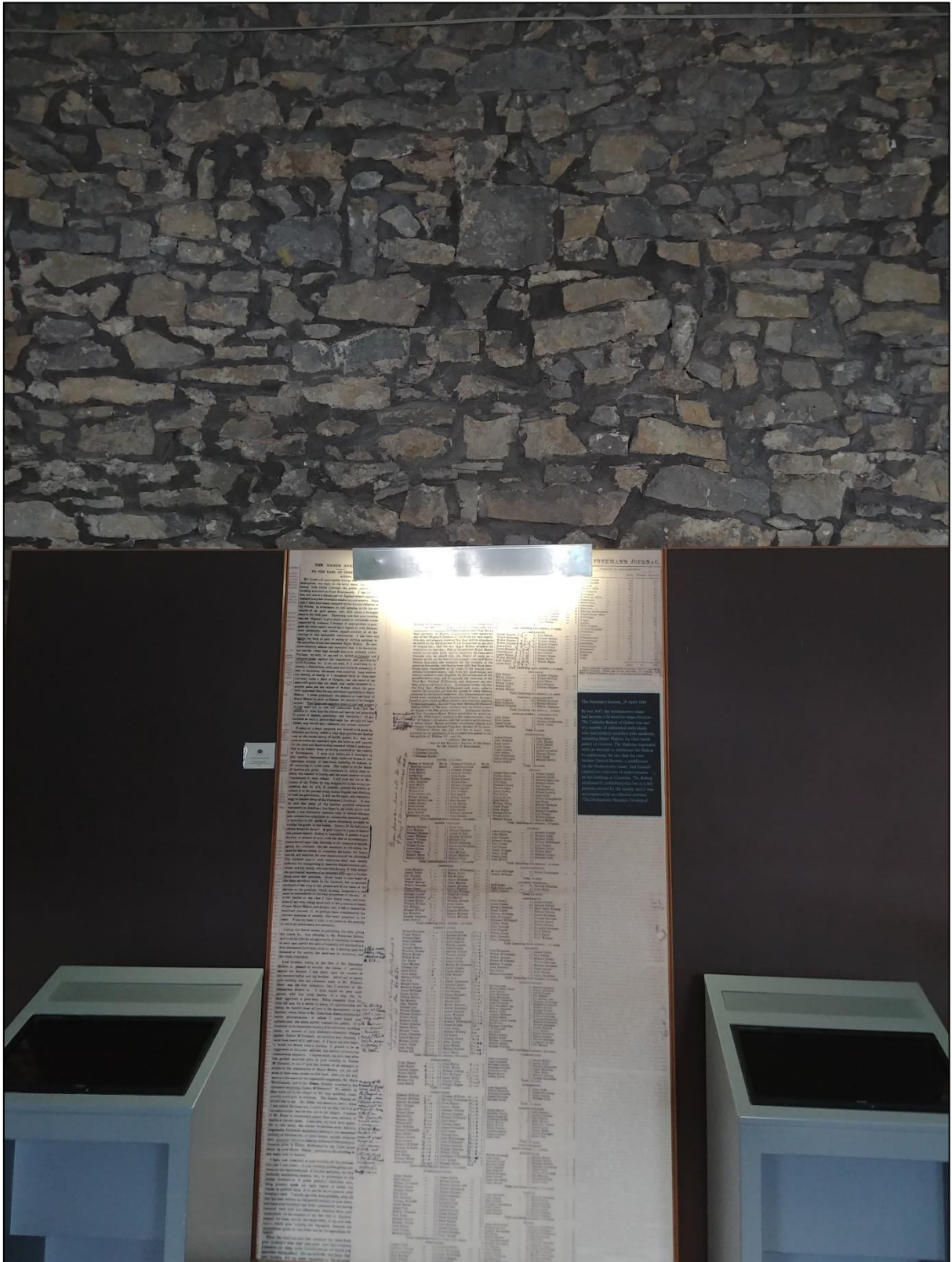


Figure 84: Interior shot Stroketown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 85: Exterior of the National Famine Museum, Strokestown, taken on 31st July 2018



Figure 86: The Emigrant Flame at the Dunbrody, with burns constantly in memory of emigrants everywhere, taken on 13th February 2018



Figure 87: The Irish Emigrant Wall of Honour, Dunbrody, sent by Kelly Coppola on 15th August 2018



Figure 88: 'Launched in Quebec' Dunbrody information panel, sent by Kelly Coppola on 11th June 2018

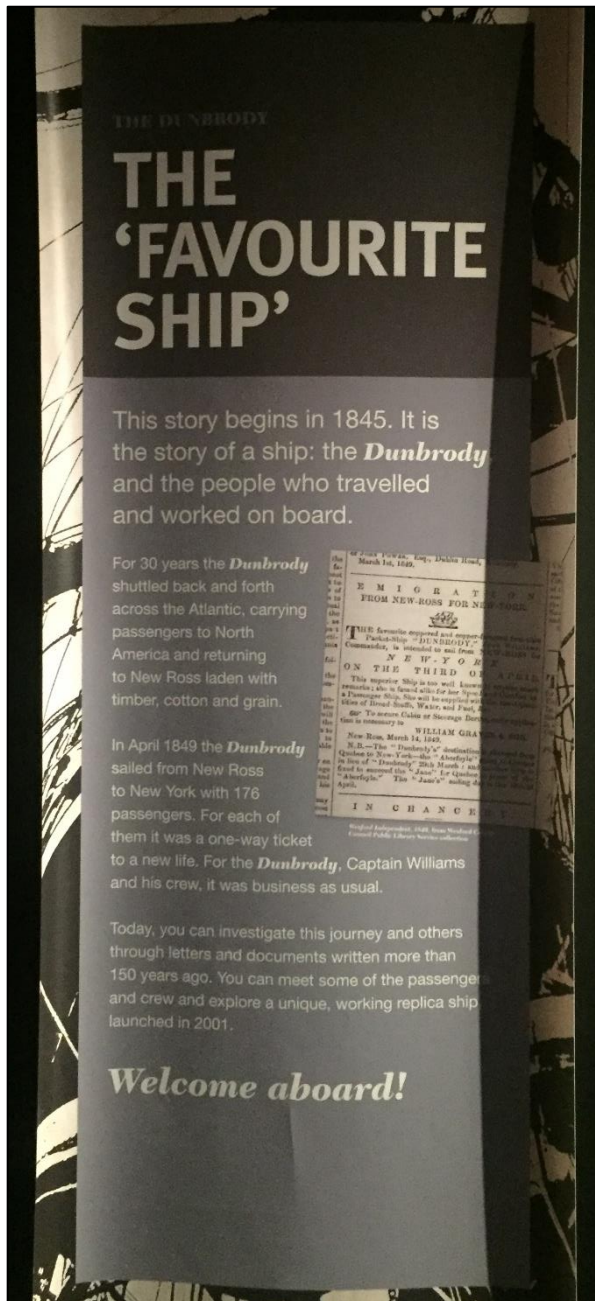


Figure 89: 'The Favourite Ship' information panel Dunbrody, sent by Kelly Coppola on 11th June 2018

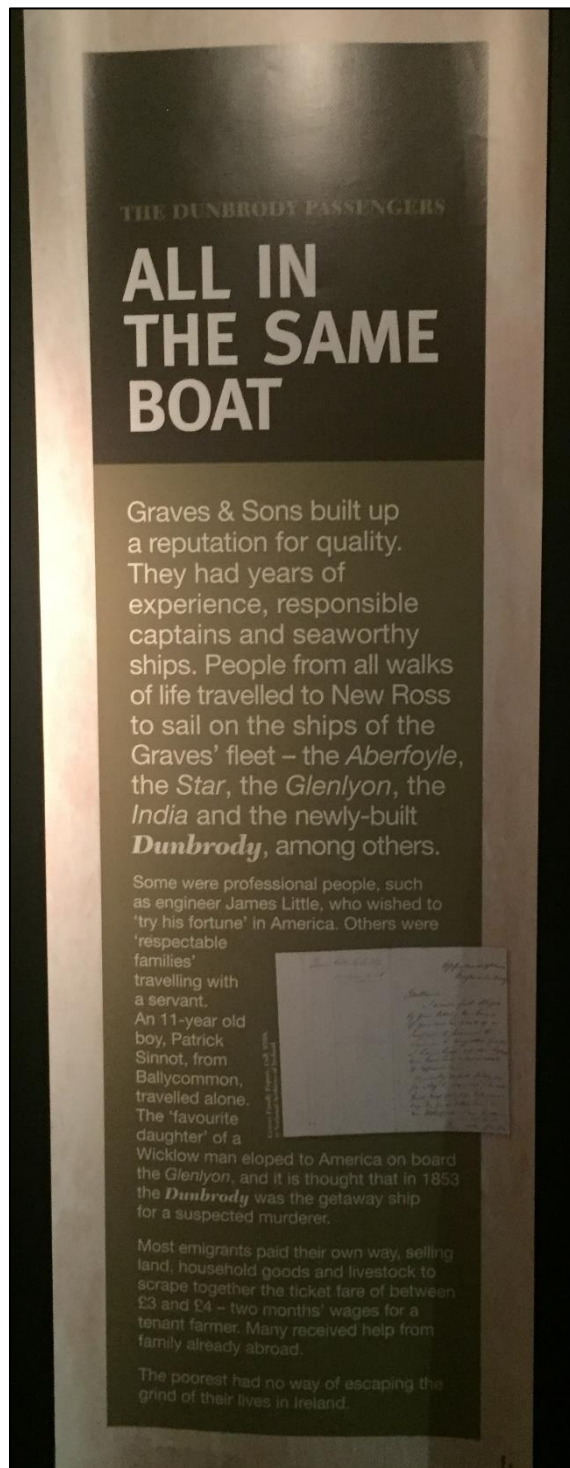


Figure 90: 'All In The Same Boat' information panel Dunbrody, sent by Kelly Coppola on 11th June 2018

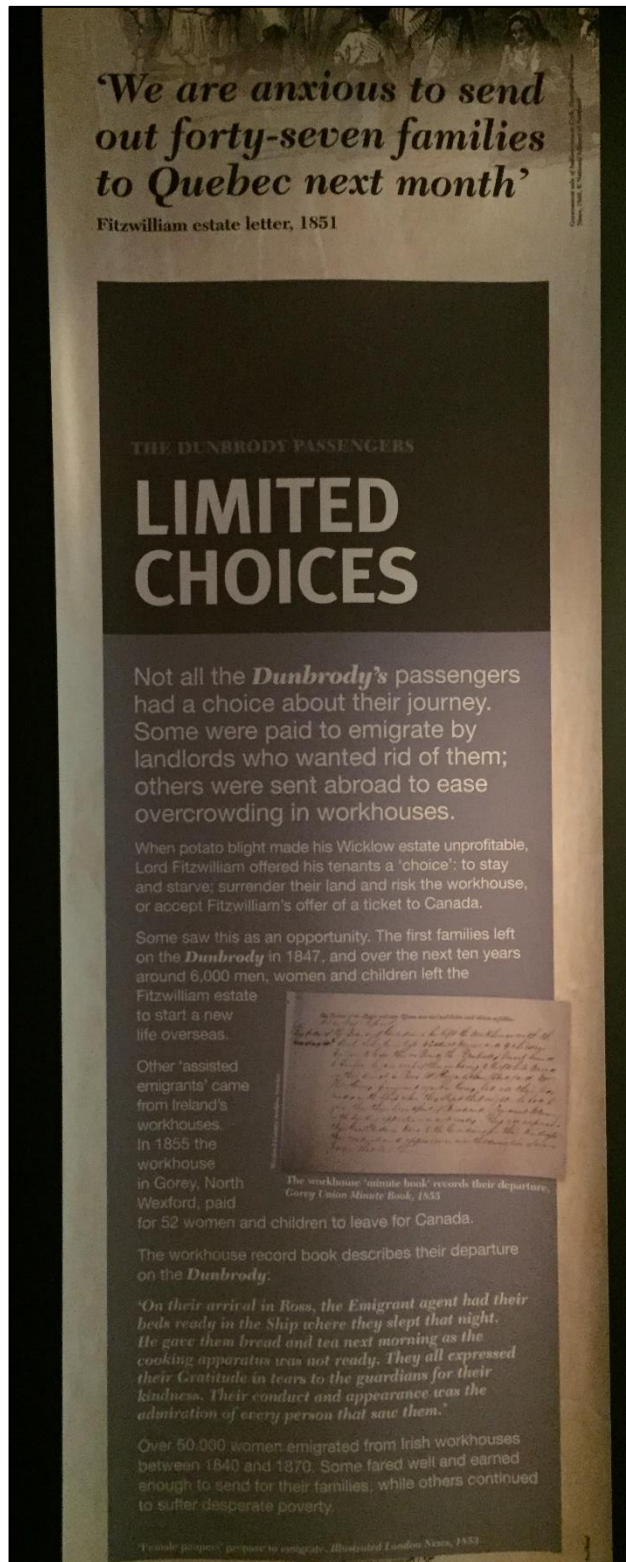


Figure 91: 'Limited Choices' Dunbrody information panel, sent by Kelly Coppola on 11th June 2018

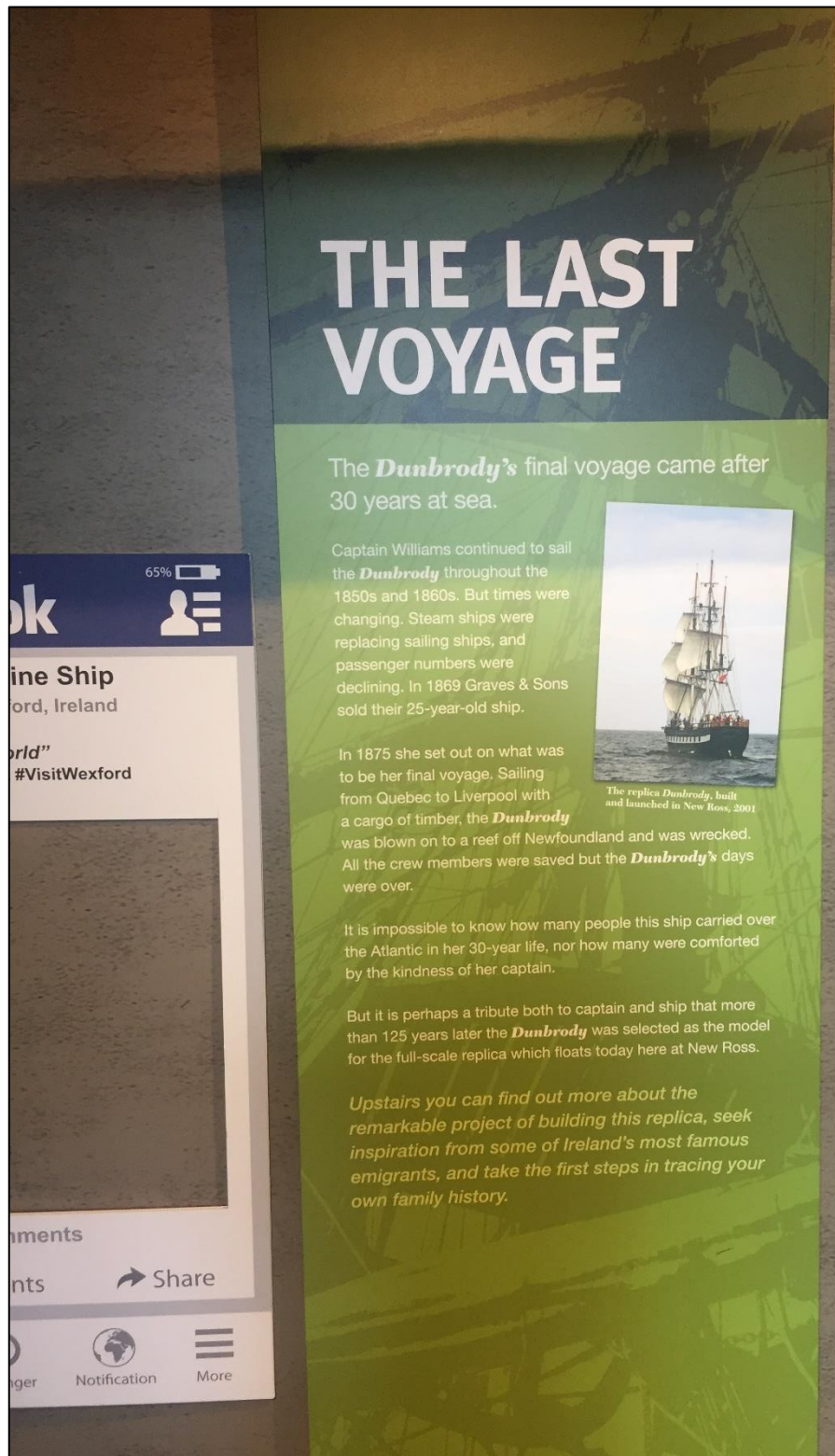


Figure 92: 'The Last Voyage' Dunbrody information panel, sent by Kelly Coppola on 11th June 2018



Figure 93: Coming Home exhibition in Skibbereen taken on 2nd August 2018



Figure 94: The Irish America Hall of Fame, Dunbrody, sent by Kelly Coppola on 15th August



Figure 95: Irish America Hall of Famine interior, Dunbrody, sent by Kelly Coppola on 15th August 2018



Figure 96: Soup pots on display in Strokestown 31st July 2018



Figure 97: Travelling trunk on display in Strokestown 31st July 2018

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