



‘Improving Ireland’?



Wenzel Hollar map (courtesy of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto)

Economic and Social History Society of Ireland

Annual Conference

11-12 November 2011

Humanities Institute of Ireland, University College Dublin

Convenors

Catherine Cox, David Durnin, Lindsey Earner-Byrne, Anne Mac Lellan

Supported by the School of History and Archives, University College Dublin

‘Improving Ireland’?

11-12 November 2011

This two-day conference will focus on the following questions: What was improvement, and why did it matter? Whether a direct product of conquest and colonization, or a more benign force for change apparently for the good of the country, the impetus and desire to improve Ireland from an agricultural, societal, scientific, medical, educational, religious, cultural, linguistic or other perspective was evident both within and outside Ireland over the centuries. The motivations behind improvement differed depending on the time, place and circumstance, the people involved, and the outcomes desired. How did different endeavours affect or help to shape Ireland over time? Who were the agents of the drive to improve Ireland and why? How was the concept of improvement defined at any given time and to what degree was it contested? This conference will consider the various issues raised by the concept of ‘improving Ireland’ throughout history.

Venue

Humanities Institute of Ireland, UCD, Belfield, Dublin 4

Registration

Due to limited space, advance registration is essential. Please complete the attached registration form and return it to David Durnin, School of History & Archives, Newman Building, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4. Alternatively, you can complete the form and send it via e-mail to David.Durnin@ucd.ie. Registration fee is €30 (€20 unwaged) and this includes lunch on Saturday and refreshments on Friday and Saturday.

Catering

There will be a dinner for attendees on 11 November (€30 excluding alcohol). Booking is essential and please indicate on the registration form if you wish to attend. Refreshments will be provided on the days of the conference. Advised dietary requirements will be taken into account.

Hotels

There are a number of hotels located within a short distance of University College Dublin. Accommodation costs are entirely at your own expense but for your convenience, please find a list of the nearest hotels and their details below.

Burlington Hotel - <http://www.burlingtonhotel.ie/>

Ballsbridge Inn - <http://www.d4hotels.ie/ballsbridge-inn.html>

Ballsbridge Towers - <http://www.d4hotels.ie/ballsbridge-towers.html>

D4 Berkely - <http://www.d4berkeley.ie/>

Stillorgan Park - <http://www.stillorganpark.com/>

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Provisional Programme

Economic and Social History Society of Ireland Annual Conference 'Improving Ireland'?

Friday, 11 November 2011

3.30pm: Registration and opening remarks

4.00pm – 6.00pm: Postgraduate Session

Gordon Rees (Queen's University Belfast)

'Sir Richard Cox, 1702-66: patriotism and improvement in mid-eighteenth-century Ireland'

Susan Galavan (Trinity College Dublin)

'Dublin's development during the Victorian age'

Anne Mac Lellan (University College Dublin)

'Goodbye Mr Germ': volunteering to improve Ireland's tuberculosis death rate, 1900-1950'

6.00pm – 8.00pm: Keynote Speaker

Toby Barnard (University of Oxford)

TBA

Saturday, 12 November 2011

9.30am: Registration

10.00am - 11.20am: Improving Ireland: Intellectual Contributions

Professor David Hayton (Queen's University Belfast)
'Thomas Prior and Sir John Rawdon'

Dr Eoin Magennis (InterTadeIreland)
'The interpreter of improvement: Arthur Young and Ireland'

Break

11.40am - 1.00pm: Improving Ireland: Medicine and Science

Dr Andrew Sneddon (University of Ulster)
'Parliament, improvement, and medicine in eighteenth-century Ireland'

Dr Juliana Adelman (Trinity College Dublin)
'Improving nineteenth-century Dublin?: Separating human and animal spaces'

1.00pm – 2.00pm: Lunch

AGM Economic and Social History Society of Ireland

2.00pm - 3.20pm: Improving Ireland: Education and Agriculture

Dr Ciaran O'Neill (Trinity College Dublin)
'The Murder Machine Revisited: Why the Intermediate Education Act (1878) was an improving measure for Irish Catholics.'

Dr Leeann Lane (Mater Dei Institute of Education, Dublin City University)
'The Irish Homestead under George Russell (AE): an economic endeavour or an Anglo-Irish blueprint for moral renewal?'

Break

3.40pm – 5.00pm: Improving Ireland: Outside Views

Professor Mary Daly (University College Dublin)
'Outside advice: Ireland's response to external recommendations for improving the Irish economy'.

Dr Tomás Finn (NUI Galway)
'“A real disservice to Irish democracy”?: *Tuairim* and politics, 1954-1975.'

5.00pm – 5.15pm: Closing Remarks

Dr Juliana Adelman (Trinity College Dublin)

‘Separating human and animal spaces in nineteenth-century Dublin’

This paper will explore how animals intersected the two improving discourses of public health and political economy in nineteenth-century Dublin. The almost overwhelming presence of nonhuman animals in the city was seen by sanitarians as a major contributor to the city’s unhealthy state. Reformers sought to eliminate particular animals and animal-related activities from the urban environment. Backyard piggeries and private slaughterhouses were of primary concern and both were perceived as containing moral as well as physical hazards. While some animals were being pushed from sight and smell, others were being feted as harbingers of economic improvement. Livestock were touted by many as potential saviors of the Irish economy. Improvements in animal breeds, especially under the leadership of the Royal Dublin Society and its livestock shows, were advocated as a means of regeneration. It was the right kind of animals in the right places, improvers seemed to think, that would make Ireland and Dublin a better place. I will examine the similarities and differences between the rhetoric surrounding the sanitary campaign to banish backyard piggeries, attempts to eliminate private slaughterhouses and the introduction of a government stud system to improve Irish horses. I will also look at the success or failure of these efforts and their impact on the culture and identity of nineteenth-century Dublin.

Professor Mary E. Daly (University College Dublin)

'Outside advice: Ireland's response to external recommendations for improving the Irish economy'

This paper will examine various reports from the late 1940s until the late 1960s, for example, the reports around Marshall Aid (mainly relating to agriculture), the World Bank report on the Irish economy in 1957/8 and the Buchanan Report on regional planning. In examining these various reports this paper will explore how Ireland responded to these various external recommendations on how to improve the Irish economy.

Dr Tomás Finn (NUI Galway)

‘A real disservice to Irish democracy’?: *Tuairim* and politics, 1954-1975.

This paper examines *Tuairim* (1954-75; *Tuairim* means opinion in Irish), an intellectual movement active in Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s. *Tuairim*'s significance lay in the ideas put forward in the pamphlets it published, articles its members wrote as well as at the meetings it organised. These addressed several burning issues at the time. They include Northern Ireland, the economy, political and electoral reform, education, childcare and censorship. In relation to economic policy, *Tuairim* influenced the government's policy and facilitated the establishment of an economic development branch in the Department of Finance - this followed from T. K. Whitaker's Economic Development. But there remained a clear opposition to decentralisation of policy and political reform. Resistance to changes in how the government and the Oireachtas operated was very strong; there continued to be a reluctance among politicians to engage with those outside of their immediate circle throughout this period. Despite this, change happened and *Tuairim* did influence public debate in this area. This paper is concerned with the society's contributions to debates on both administrative and electoral reform and its attempts to convince the political establishment of the need for changes to how the Oireachtas operated. It considers the attitudes of senior politicians to *Tuairim*; the contrast between John A. Costello and Sean Lemass's view of the society is particularly striking. While Costello was critical, Lemass welcomed *Tuairim*'s contribution. Yet Lemass rejected changes to the political system. Though there was a suspicion and even hostility from parts of the religious and political establishments to the society's liberalising agenda and the independent thinking it promoted, this lessened as *Tuairim* became increasingly respectable. This is also a reflection of the complex nature of debates: when politicians did not perceive their immediate interests to be directly threatened, they could be and were open to being influenced by the ideas put forward by *Tuairim*.

Susan Galavan (Trinity College Dublin)

‘Meade & Son and the Expansion of the City: Dublin in the Victorian Age’

This paper will explore the theme of improvement in Ireland by focusing on Dublin’s development during the Victorian age. During the nineteenth-century the city’s population grew to more than double its size as it expanded to form new residential suburbs. Speculative developers acquired plots in empty fields beyond the canals, building new streetscapes of red brick houses. Today Dublin’s Victorian domestic architecture extends across a vast area from the city to the surrounding county areas. The level of architectural sophistication, the quality of materials and craftsmanship is testament to the skills and status of their creators. This paper will explore the role of one of these key players, the construction firm Michael Meade & Son, a prolific family of Dublin builders. Amongst their extensive list of works they executed schemes of grand semi-detached Victorian residences in some of the most imposing streets of the south Dublin suburbs. I will investigate the motivation behind their desires to forge new business opportunities in a rapidly changing city. Part of a rising middle class elite, how did their vision help to shape the advancement of nineteenth-century Dublin? This research combines new primary source material with formal architectural analysis, producing important new insights in to the development of the Victorian city.

Professor David Hayton (Queen's University Belfast)

‘Thomas Prior and Sir John Rawdon’

As an economic writer, and founder of the Dublin Society, Thomas Prior (1681-1751) made a highly important contribution to the popularisation of ideas of ‘improvement’ in 18th-century Ireland. But while a great deal has been written about him, little attention has been paid to the early stages of his career, when he acted as agent to the Irish estates of the Rawdons of Moira. This paper makes use of the Rawdon family correspondence in the Huntington Library to reconstruct the relationship between Prior and his primary employer, Sir John Rawdon, 3rd Bt (1690-1723), and to show how Prior’s own interests and ideas reflected the ‘improving’ traditions of the family, as well as his particular experiences as a land agent. Furthermore the nature of the personal relationship between the young Prior and his employer implied a strong reciprocal influence. In particular, it will show that the ideas we associate with Prior and his colleagues in the Dublin Society had a long pedigree, and that the various elements conflated by historians under the general notion of ‘improvement’ — intellectual curiosity, evangelical Protestantism, economic enterprise and conspicuous consumption — can all be traced in the interests and activities of successive generations of Rawdons.

Anne Mac Lellan (University College Dublin)

‘Goodbye Mr Germ’: volunteering to improve Ireland’s tuberculosis death rate, 1900-1950.

There were two major attempts, both orchestrated by women, to tackle tuberculosis in Ireland by means of voluntary organisation, in the first half of the twentieth century. The Irish tuberculosis epidemic peaked in the beginning of the twentieth century however tuberculosis remained a significant cause of mortality and morbidity until the end of the 1950s. National anti-tuberculosis leagues were formed in many countries, in the late 1800s, in an attempt to educate the public as to the newly proven bacterial aetiology of the disease and to pursue various palliative, preventative and curative regimes. In Ireland, the Women’s National Health Association (WNHA) was founded by Lady Aberdeen, vicereine of Ireland, on 13 March 1907. Tuberculosis became its main focus. A grand exhibition was mounted in Dublin, complete with eminent speakers and grisly anatomical and microbiological exhibits. However, the campaign was short-lived and there is some disagreement as to its effect.

More than three decades later, in 1942, the Protestant paediatrician Dr Dorothy Price attempted to found a national anti-tuberculosis league (NATL) that would include medical and lay people. The WNHA strove to ‘improve’ the individual’s personal habits while the planning group of the NATL placed greater emphasis on medical intervention including improved diagnosis, better bed provision, as well as the use of tuberculin testing, x-rays and BCG vaccination. This paper will explore the motivation, aims, methodology of the two leagues.

Price’s league was cut short by the Catholic Archbishop John Charles McQuaid and the voluntary drive to improve Ireland’s tuberculosis death rate was continued by the Irish Red Cross which, in 1943, subsumed the members of the proposed league. The Red Cross campaign, to some extent, replicated the methodology of the WNHA although it used a more ‘flippant, frivolous approach’ to engage the public. The ‘cabinet of horrors’ was replaced by engaging shows such as the puppets Shelah and Seán. Although the rhetoric was modern, the approach of the Irish Red Cross was predicated on what Greta Jones has termed ‘more traditional forms of social intervention’ than those advanced by its progenitor, the proposed national anti-tuberculosis league. This paper will explore the continuities, disjunctions and outcomes of the various attempts to improve Ireland’s tuberculosis death rate in the twentieth century.

Dr Eoin Magennis (InterTradeIreland)

‘The interpreter of improvement: Arthur Young and Ireland’.

An important paper presented by Cormac Ó Gráda and Robert Allen to a previous Irish Economic and Social History conference in the late 1980s made the important point that Arthur Young’s data on agricultural yields did not fit his general observations about Irish (or English and French) agriculture and improvement. The reasons for this are likely to have been that Young’s view of Ireland was an ideological one and any data that contradicted this was glossed over.

Despite this manipulation of his own data (or perhaps because of it) Young’s views on improvement, the role of state supports and that of the landed classes in Ireland were very influential, particularly in Britain and in Europe. This paper will revisit these views, the ideological impetus behind them and the way in which Young’s views were received in Ireland itself, sparking a debate about ‘Irish improvement’.

Dr Ciaran O'Neill (Trinity College Dublin)

‘The Murder Machine Revisited: Why the Intermediate Education Act (1878) was an improving measure for Irish Catholics.’

The Intermediate Education Act of 1878 ushered in a system of ‘payment-by-results’ which lasted until 1924. The main effect of this legislation was to solidify the denominational divisions in Irish education and to expose generations of Irish children to a narrow curriculum that promoted ‘cramming’ ahead of holistic education. Later nationalist commentators such as Michael O’Riordan and Padraic Pearse attacked the legislation as a further proof of the damage done to Irish society by ill-considered English legislation.

Indeed, the 1878 act has never quite shaken off Pearse’s catchy moniker ‘The Murder Machine.’ Historians of Irish education, from Atkinson to O’Buachalla, have concluded that the impetus for the Act came about through political agitation in Westminster and that it was essentially a top-down imposition which was bitterly resented by Irish educationalists.

This paper will argue against this orthodoxy. Instead it will show that the Intermediate Act was the result of intense lobbying from a coalition of Catholic interests from the early 1870s and that their main goal was to expand and improve Catholic social mobility at a lower middle-class level. The legislation itself was based on a payment-by-results scheme trialled in Trinidad by an Irish civil servant, Patrick Keenan, and was rewritten for an Irish context with the help of three Catholic educationalists, Pere Leman and Fr Reffe of Blackrock College and Fr William Delany, the Jesuit Rector of Tullabeg College – then the leading elite boarding school in Ireland. Furthermore, the main effect of the legislation was to double Catholic access to intermediate education from 10, 145 in 1881 to 23, 897 in 1901 while the number of those attending Anglican schools actually declined in the same period. This paper will argue that far from being seen as a negative measure the Act can be read as an example of successful agitation from influential Catholics for the improvement of upward social mobility for their less wealthy co-religionists.

Gordon Rees (Queen's University Belfast)

‘Sir Richard Cox, 1702-66: patriotism and improvement in mid-eighteenth-century Ireland’

Eighteenth-century Irish patriotism has, until relatively recently, been defined by historians in political terms. Political writers such as William Molyneux, Jonathan Swift, and Henry Grattan, for whom patriotism entailed defending the constitutional freedoms of Ireland and its parliament, have tended to dominate the historiography. This paper uses the case of the notable improver Sir Richard Cox, MP for the borough of Clonakilty in County Cork and a prolific pamphleteer on political and economic subjects, to argue that in the mid-eighteenth-century there emerged an alternative to the brand of patriotism espoused by Swift or Molyneux. Cox's patriotism was of a more pragmatic and economic type; he accepted that, in practice, Ireland's status as a kingdom dependent on Great Britain was unlikely to change, and so focused instead on improving the country's economy within the existing constitutional arrangements. Cox's career indicates that patriotism and economic improvement became intertwined in this period. Serving one's country could be achieved not by restating the claim that restrictions imposed on Irish trade by the London parliament should be removed, but by encouraging practical improvement schemes which would ensure long-term economic development. In addition to producing a series of pamphlets on economic subjects, Cox often promoted improvement-related legislation in parliament and took a keen interest in the development of linen manufacturing on his Dunmanway estate. This paper will, therefore, look beyond Cox's pamphlet rhetoric and ask how far his activities as an MP and landlord confirm the existence of a viable tradition of practical patriotism and demonstrate its links to economic improvement. The study of mid-eighteenth-century Irish patriotism is complicated by the fact that it could be ambiguous and was at times adopted in an opportunist fashion. Cox's career, and in particular his involvement in political controversies such as the 1737 coinage debate, the Lucas affair of 1749 and the dispute over the 1753 Money Bill, also serves to illustrate some of these difficulties.

Dr Andrew Sneddon (University of Ulster)

'Parliament, improvement, and medicine in eighteenth-century Ireland.'

Using parliamentary sources, institutional and private records, this paper will consider legislative endeavours involving the regulation of drugs and medicines, voluntary hospitals, county infirmaries, the Royal Colleges of Surgeons and Physicians, and various medical boards, guilds and societies. It will explore the extent to which improvement ideals and rhetoric motivated Ireland's provincial and metropolitan political elites to use parliamentary initiatives to establish, augment, and regulate Ireland medical practitioners and institutions. The paper will also consider how far this legislation can be seen to be improving, or merely a consequence of the economic forces of an increasingly competitive medical market place, the growth of parliament as an institution, and the Anglican elites' rhetorical love affair with the most protean of all terms, 'improvement'. In doing so, a further dimension will be added to the eighteenth-century culture of improvement, usually defined in terms of economic and agricultural development, improving societies, estates and demesne cultivation, and attitudinal and behavioural shifts.