



# tattie howkers

Irish Potato Workers in Ayrshire

Heather Holmes

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Heather Holmes currently works in the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department. She undertook her doctorate on 'Potato harvesting in the Lothians 1870 to 1995' at the University of Edinburgh (awarded 1996). The thesis won the Michaelis Jena Ratcliffe Prize in 1996 and was subsequently published as *As good as a holiday: Potato harvesting in the Lothians 1870 to the present*, (Tuckwell Press, 2000). She has published widely on Irish migratory potato workers in Scotland and has contributed as an editor to the Scottish Life and Society Series of the European Ethnological Research Centre.



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Further intensive work was conducted in a research fellowship, 'The social history of the Irish migratory potato workers in Scotland' undertaken at the Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University of Belfast, in 1997-98. I continued that interest and enthusiasm into the workers in my spare time when I engaged in other research work at the European Ethnological Research Centre, Edinburgh, and at School of Communication Arts, Napier University, and during my current career as a civil servant in the Scottish Executive.

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## 1: Introduction

John Strawhorn and William Boyd suggest that in Ayrshire 'intensive early potato cultivation began in 1857'.<sup>1</sup> However, in that year the *North British Agriculturist and Edinburgh Evening News* notes that the cultivation of early potatoes was already 'extensively practiced along the coast on the light and early soils'. In the neighbourhood of Ayr around 1,000 acres of potatoes were cultivated.<sup>2</sup> From the first development of early potato growing which is reported to have started in 1847, crops of early potatoes, or earlies, became synonymous with the county of Ayrshire, as were the terms 'Ayrshires' and 'Ayrshire potatoes'. As early potato growing extended to other areas of south-west Scotland by the 1950s, these terms came to apply not only to early potatoes from that county but also to 'all earlies down to Wigtown Bay and the farmlands tucked into the shore elbow of the Mull of Galloway'.<sup>3</sup>



Illus. 1: Ayrshire potato season, Girvan 1907.

Early potato production has been intensively carried out in Ayrshire. In 1934, the *North British Agriculturist* notes that it 'easily retains pride of place as containing the largest area devoted to the growth of earlies with a ratio of three acres to every one found elsewhere'.<sup>4</sup> In 1938, 5,724 acres of this crop were grown



in the county; the corresponding area of maincrop, or later ripening crops, was 2,917 acres.<sup>5</sup> Almost a decade later, in 1946, early potatoes were grown on 483 farms in the county.<sup>6</sup> (The development of the acreage is noted in Appendix 1). In some districts, the early potato crop played an important role in the farm economy. In 1888, it was 'the chief product of the farm'.<sup>7</sup> In Girvan in 1901, it was considered to be 'a most important one [product] in the district'.<sup>8</sup> That significance was also recorded for the coastal district of Maybole parish in 1951, where the growing of early potatoes was regarded to be 'the main occupation'.<sup>9</sup> The crop was marketed over a wide geographical area of Scotland and England. Until the 1930s, early potatoes grown in the Girvan district had a virtual monopoly in the Scottish early potato market.<sup>10</sup> In the 1920s, for example, the largest purchasers of the crop came from western Scotland, especially Glasgow and other industrial centres such as Bellshill, Partick, Govan, Hamilton, Cambuslang, Johnstone, Airdrie, and Paisley. Other important purchasers were from Edinburgh and Forfar.<sup>11</sup> In 1958, they were sold in the major Scottish potato markets.<sup>12</sup> They were also sold in the large English potato markets; in 1958 these included Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham and London; this last centre was not a traditional retail centre for the crop.<sup>13</sup> The crop played an important role in the industrial diet, filling a gap between the end of the supply of old season potatoes and the availability of the new season maincrops.

Early potato production has been a specialised and intensive branch of Ayrshire farming. However, it was not traditionally undertaken as a separate type of farming, but within a mixed system. The large manure requirements were met from the keeping of fattening stock and other means such as sea-wrack.<sup>14</sup> The crop also allowed catch crops of rye-grass, rape, white and yellow turnips to be sown and eaten on the ground by sheep that were to be kept for fattening.<sup>15</sup> Such crops ensured that farmers received an additional income from their farms. This was especially important in years when the price of early potatoes was unremunerative to the grower. However, at times, early potato growing 'viewed in conjunction with all its accessories' could be remunerative: in 1866 it was 'probably the most remunerative husbandry in Ayrshire at the present time'.<sup>16</sup> The crop was incorporated into the rotation in a number of ways. On some farms, it was grown in a short rotation with only occasional white or grain crops to break the succession; second early or maincrops were grown in a long rotation.<sup>17</sup> On the Kirkoswald and Girvan shores, that crop also formed the only green crop grown in a rotation.<sup>18</sup> On other farms, it was grown in the same fields year after year, and as such, there was a nil rotation. Indeed, at Jameston in 1900, one field had been under early potatoes for 37 years in succession.<sup>19</sup> In 1913, a large field at Morriston had been under this crop for 38 years.<sup>20</sup> By 1958, it had been cultivated in one field on this farm for 70 consecutive years.<sup>21</sup>

These patterns of crop rotation indicate that the early potato crop had its own husbandry practices and traditions. One well-known tradition that has died out within recent years is the employment of Irish migratory potato harvesters, 'Irish harvesters', 'tattie howkers' or 'potato diggers', who travelled from western and north-western districts of Ireland each year to harvest the early potato crop in Ayrshire and Lowland Scotland between about mid June and early August. These workers started their migratory employment in Ayrshire and other early potato growing districts in south-west Scotland, and moved to later harvesting ones such as Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire, the Lothians, Fife, Perthshire and Angus, where they completed their harvesting work in late October or November. These workers formed a visible part of the summer visitors to Ayrshire. As one observer remarks in 1929:

Every visitor to Girvan and other resorts in Ayrshire has seen the potato diggers at work in the fields, driving to the post office on Saturday night to send their hard won earnings home to old folks in Achill. They rise to the echoes of early Sunday morning as they troop through the streets to Mass.<sup>22</sup>



Illus. 2: Tattie howkers at Balig, parish of Ballantrae.



They were employed in large numbers in the county. Ayrshire was their chief centre of employment, especially in the early weeks of the potato harvest.<sup>23</sup> In 1910, one observer suggests that around 1,000 workers were employed in the Girvan area.<sup>24</sup> These workers were one of three distinct migratory groups of Irish workers that undertook seasonal migratory agricultural employment in Britain. The potato workers specialised in work at the potato harvest. The second group was composed of males from Donegal who undertook general agricultural tasks in Lowland Scotland until shortly after the Second World War, and the third of males from Connaught who worked on similar tasks in England, again until after the Second World War. Some of the latter group dealt principally with the beet crop. The potato workers were the only group which included females.

There has been little research undertaken into the migratory work and culture of the Irish workers who participated in the 'green howk', or harvested the early potato crop in Ayrshire. They have been briefly referred to in social and economic surveys of the county. Surveys which refer to agricultural land use and farming practices, such as those by John H. G. Lebon in 1932-33, John Strawhorn and William Boyd in 1951, and James Edward Shaw in 1953, note their presence in the harvesting field.<sup>25</sup> They are also discussed in a number of studies of seasonal agricultural workers in Scotland and Britain. James E. Handley's well known, and classic, account of the social history of Irish migratory workers, *The Irish in Modern Scotland*, published in 1947, records their social organisation and employment conditions.<sup>26</sup> Other writers such as Jonathan Bell and Anne O'Dowd (in her well known book *Spalpeens and Tattie Hokers: History and Folklore of the Irish Migratory Agricultural Worker in Ireland and Britain*) examine their employment conditions, their migratory culture and the way that the workers perceived the migratory work.<sup>27</sup> Also, the work of the present author on the social and economic history of the potato harvest in the Lothians from 1870 to the present, documents aspects of their employment conditions including their work in the harvesting field, their living and housing conditions.<sup>28</sup> Her short surveys also focus on aspects of their social and institutional history.<sup>29</sup> All of these studies usually describe aspects of their migratory employment throughout their employment area in Lowland Scotland. The work of the present author largely focuses on the Lothians, though the short surveys refer to themes that apply throughout the full extent of their employment area. No single study specifically focuses on conditions in Ayrshire. Furthermore, many of these studies, especially by James Handley, Jonathan Bell and Anne O'Dowd, refer only briefly to the workers after the Second World War when their employment declined and finally came to an end. However, during this period, these workers were one of the main groups of casual and seasonal workers in Scottish agriculture, at a time when it was becoming highly mechanised.

This monograph seeks to fill a gap in the knowledge of an important aspect of the social and economic history of Ayrshire, and also Lowland Scotland. It examines a number of themes in the social and institutional history of the Irish migratory potato workers in Ayrshire during the twentieth century. It provides an outline of the traditions of the early potato crop that demanded that such a large, and specialised, labour force was required to harvest the crop. It examines how the customary practices of growing and harvesting the crop shaped their work practices and employment conditions. It outlines the recruitment methods of the workers in their distinct self-contained harvesting units, or squads, which were formed for the duration of a harvesting season, and also their character. The size of their workforce is assessed as are the reasons for its decline, especially during the second half of the twentieth century. The survey records how they travelled to Ayrshire. The harvesting is examined through the husbandry practices, tools and techniques used to deal with the early crop and the ways in which these affected the tasks on the harvesting field. It provides an account of the nature of the accommodation (the bothies) and the living conditions of the workers. As the state of the accommodation was a matter of great concern throughout the twentieth century, the survey also highlights the ways in which it became regulated by national legislation and local byelaws. The social and institutional culture of the workers, including their recreational activities and institutions which they drew on to ensure their physical and spiritual health and to improve their employment conditions, is also referred to.

Although Irish workers were employed to harvest the early potato crop in Ayrshire during the second half of the nineteenth century, there are few records of their employment until the turn of the twentieth century. After 1897 there was a growing interest in the workers and their employment and housing conditions in Ayrshire and throughout the districts of Lowland Scotland where they were employed. That interest generated a number of published and manuscript reports on these subjects which gave many insights into them. This period is also examined for another reason: it was an important period in their social history. Many changes were noted in the character of the workers, the extent of their employment and their employment and living conditions. It witnessed important changes to the experience of the migratory potato work: the harvesting work changed from being labour intensive, where crops were principally harvested by hand tools, to completely mechanised and no squads were employed to gather the scattered tubers from the ground. It was also a period which saw the regulation of their employment conditions, especially that of their accommodation.

This monograph draws on a wide range of sources of evidence, both written (published and manuscript) and oral, to discuss the social and institutional history of the Irish workers. The evidence of records in local archives in Ayrshire and national archives in Scotland and Ireland form the basis of evidence. In many



instances these provide the only record of aspects of the social and institutional history of the Irish workers. Much evidence is recorded in official administrative records, notably those of Ayr County Council and Scottish government departments that oversaw their work and facilitated the development of a range of statutes which shaped their migratory experience. These records include a number of special surveys on the employment and housing conditions of the workers, and reports which were written as part of their duties of activity. Many of the officials who wrote these records had close contacts with the workers and observed, at first hand, their employment and accommodation. Local authority sanitary inspectors had experience over a number of seasons and worked closely with the farmers in the early potato growing districts before the Irish workers arrived and during the time they were employed at the harvesting work. Some members of the local Roman Catholic clergy also had contact for many years.

These archival records are combined with a range of published accounts, many of which provide contemporary accounts of the migration. These include the provincial newspaper press in the west of Ireland and Ayrshire, as well as the Scottish agricultural press. The provincial press is especially invaluable between 1900 and the early 1930s when it published a large amount of detailed information on local events and happenings. In the west of Ireland, it especially recorded the dates when the workers left for the Scottish potato harvest and the date of their return; their employment conditions, particularly their accommodation, of which they were especially critical, are sometimes commented on. In Ayrshire, it records details of the cultivation, growth and customary practices of the early potato crop and its harvest, a noteworthy event in the agricultural year. It reports the arrival of the workers, their presence in the county and stories about them, such as their attendance at the Roman Catholic chapels. These sources are augmented by autobiographies and autobiographical works written by former migrants. Three works, written by Patrick MacGill and Peadar O'Donnell, focus on conditions in the county in the early decades of the twentieth century. Both MacGill's *Children of the Dead End* and *The Rat-pit* describe these in the 1905 season, as does O'Donnell's *Adrigoolie* in 1918. These present a good deal of first hand experience of the migratory work, especially the accommodation, living and working conditions, and the social organisation of the worker groups. A range of monographs and academic journals, including social and economic histories, also described the workers and their migration, and these are drawn on. They include social and economic surveys of Ayrshire, as also the west of Ireland from where the workers were recruited. They report the wider social and economic framework of aspects of their employment, such as the transport infrastructure that enabled them to travel, at low cost, to the Scottish potato harvest.

As this survey covers a period when Irish workers could still recollect their employment at the early potato harvest, oral recordings from sound archives in

Scotland and Ireland were consulted. Further interviews were undertaken with former workers, some of whom lived in County Mayo, one of the worker recruiting areas in Ireland. They supply a range of evidence on aspects of their migratory work and institutional history that is not recorded in the written evidence or which has been only briefly referred to.

## 2: Potato Culture and the Labour Force

### *Potato Growing Areas*

The harvesting labour force and their work were shaped by the distribution of the early potato crop in Ayrshire and the traditions associated with the crop. Between the mid nineteenth and late twentieth centuries, the county had three distinct potato growing areas. The first was located in the high-lying parishes to the north and east of the county and in the south-east and central parishes, such as Kilmarnock, Dunlop, Mauchline and Dalry. In this area, potatoes were cultivated to a limited extent for domestic or local consumption (Table 2 and Figure 1). Later ripening varieties were mainly grown; few first earlies were grown, except for seed production. A second district was situated in the inland parishes in the south-west of the county, such as Tarbolton, Kirkmichael and inland parts of Maybole and Kirkoswald. These had a higher proportion of their cropping area under the potato crop (Table 2 and Figure 1). According to John H. G. Lebon, writing on the agriculture of Ayrshire in 1932-3, this was 10 or 12% of the cropped land.<sup>30</sup> The crop was grown for commercial production. A third area was located along the coast, especially between Ayr and Ballantrae, and the lower Irvine and Garnock valleys (Table 2 and Figure 1). This was an area where the soil is 'light enough and the climate mild and dry enough for intensive arable farming to be practised'. Intensive potato cultivation was undertaken.<sup>31</sup> This was the focal area for the employment of the harvesting labour force.

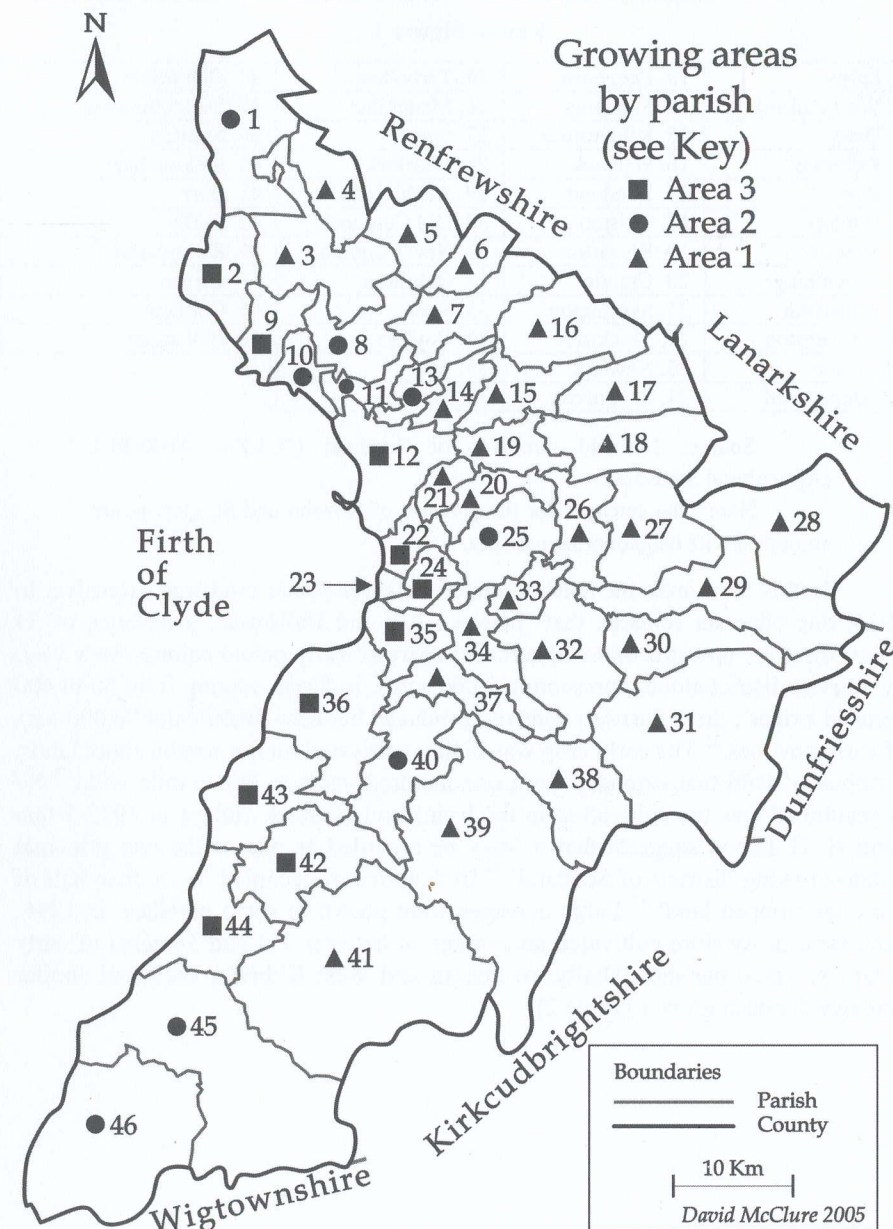


**Table 1: Potato Growing in Ayrshire in 1925: Areas of Production with Acreage of Potatoes Grown**

Area 1		Area 2		Area 3	
Parish	Acreage	Parish	Acreage	Parish	Acreage
Dalry	59.25	Largs	122.25	West Kilbride	970.25
Kilbirnie	32.25	Stevenston	83	Ardrossan	238.25
Beith	19.25	Kilwinning	208.75	Dundonald	447
Dunlop	16.25	Irvine	180.75	Monkton and Prestwick	359.75
Stewarton	27.5	Dreghorn	227.5	Ayr & St. Quivox	943
Fenwick	17.25	Tarbolton	237.75	Maybole	564
Kilmaurs	96.5	Kirkmichael	146.75	Kirkoswald	1034
Kilmarnock	82.25	Colmonell	136.25	Girvan	1042.75
Loudoun	68.25	Ballantrae	139.5	Dailly	324
Galston	102.5				
Riccarton	56.25				
Craigie	5.25				
Symington	34				
Mauchline	68.75				
Stair	21.75				
Sorn	37.25				
Muirkirk	17.5				
Auchinleck	24.25				
Coylton	30				
Dalrymple	26				
Ochiltree	24.25				
Old Cumnock	39.75				
New Cumnock	71.25				
Dalmellington	12.25				
Straiton	32.5				
Barr	34.75				

Source: National Archives of Scotland (N.A.S.), AF40/14/1 (Agricultural Statistics).

Note: Newton is not recorded as a separate parish from 1896. (AF39/3/2).



**Figure 1 : Potato Growing in Ayrshire in 1925: The Geography of Areas of Production**



## Key to Figure 1

1. Largs	13. Dreghorn	25. Tarbolton	37. Dalrymple
2. West Kilbride	14. Kilmaurs	26. Mauchline	38. Dalmellington
3. Dalry	15. Kilmarnock	27. Sorn	39. Straiton
4. Kilbirnie	16. Fenwick	28. Muirkirk	40. Kirkmichael
5. Beith	17. Loudoun	29. Auchinleck	41. Barr
6. Dunlop	18. Galston	30. Old Cumnock	42. Dailly
7. Stewarton	19. Riccarton	31. New Cumnock	43. Kirkoswald
8. Kilwinning	20. Craigie	32. Ochiltree	44. Girvan
9. Ardrossan	21. Symington	33. Stair	45. Colmonell
10. Stevenston	22. Monkton	34. Coylton	46. Ballantrae
11. Irvine	23. Newton	35. Ayr	
12. Dundonald	24. St. Quivox	36. Maybole	

Source: National Archives of Scotland (N.A.S.), AF40/14/1 (Agricultural Statistics).

Note: The acreages for the parishes of Newton and St. Quivox are combined with neighbouring parishes.

In this third area, the acreage under the early potato crop was extensive. In 1914, one observer remarks that 'between Ayr and Ballantrae, a distance of 34 miles, there are upwards of 5,000 acres set apart for early potato culture every year, the Girvan district alone representing 2,000 acres, in farms ranging from 50 to 400 acres in extent'; these parishes annually produced between 40,000 and 50,000 tons of early potatoes.<sup>32</sup> The early crop was highly cultivated on the coastal shore lands, a ribbon of land that extended from one hundred yards to half a mile wide.<sup>33</sup> So concentrated was the cultivation in the Irvine and Garnock valleys in 1932-3 that John H. G. Lebon suggests that it 'may be regarded as one of the two principal potato-growing districts of Scotland'.<sup>34</sup> In that area, it occupied 'more than half of the total cropped land'.<sup>35</sup> Large acreages were grown in some parishes. In 1946, each farm in Ayrshire cultivated an average of between 8.3 and 34 acres of early potatoes. Three parishes, Dailly, Ardrossan and West Kilbride, each had similar acreages for each grower (Table 2).

Table 2: Average Acreage of First Earlies Grown in 1946

Parish	Average acreage per farm
Monkton	14.9
Dailly	20.6
Girvan	34
Kirkoswald	26
Maybole	13.9
Ardrossan	20.5
West Kilbride	20.6
Ayr	8.6
Dundonald	8.3

Source: N.A.S., AF40/35/1 (Agricultural Statistics).

Note: Parishes are from area 3 in Table 1. By this time a number of parishes had increased their early potato production. For example each holding in Ballantrae grew 18.5 acres of first earlies.

Some farms had larger acreages of first earlies than these average figures indicate. In 1888 one agricultural newspaper observes that: 'farmers along the coast have great breadths of them, several as much as 100 acres'.<sup>36</sup> Before the mid 1930s, records of public sales of first early potato crops (see below) record the extent of the crop sold on the most important early potato growing farms. In 1894, for example, 65 acres were sold at Little Turnberry, 100 acres at Dowhill, 57 at Currah and 110 acres at Park.<sup>37</sup> For 1911, some 120 acres were exposed at Robstone and 35 acres at Cairnhill.<sup>38</sup> These farms grew large acreages over a number of decades. They were important centres for the employment of casual and seasonal labour to harvest the crop.

### *Shaping the Work of the Labour Force: Relationships Between Farmers and Potato Merchants*

Critical to the character of the harvesting labour force employed to harvest the early potato harvest in Ayrshire and their work practices, were the customary practices to grow, harvest and market the crop.<sup>39</sup> A number of contracts developed between farmers and potato merchants to undertake these activities. In the first contract, a potato merchant approached a farmer to hire land from him on which to grow a crop of potatoes. This contract does not appear to have been widespread in the county, but was noted in other parts of Scotland, especially in connection with maincrop potato crops.<sup>40</sup> In a second type of contract, a potato merchant and farmer worked together to grow, harvest and market a crop of potatoes. Each undertook a range of tasks in the planting, cultivation, harvesting and marketing of the crop.<sup>41</sup> In a third contract, sale by the acre, a farmer grew the crop and sold it when it was growing in the ground at a price per acre, usually to a potato merchant who



harvested and disposed of it.<sup>42</sup> As part of their sale agreement, the farmer undertook a range of tasks.<sup>43</sup> In a contract noted in 1913, which became universal in following years, he supplied the accommodation for the merchants' workers who harvested the crop.<sup>44</sup> This practice was an old one, already well established for the potato crop in the Lothians by 1841, and for disposing of a range of crops such as ryegrass.<sup>45</sup> It is recorded as a method of sale for the early potato crop in Ayrshire in 1857 when it was regarded to be 'the more general practice' for dealing with it.<sup>46</sup> By 1868, potato merchants 'bought freely by the acre'.<sup>47</sup> A considerable breadth of the crop was also sold in this way in 1883.<sup>48</sup>

Sale by the acre was conducted in two ways. The crop could be sold by private sale. This was the earliest of the methods of sale. The prices obtained from this sale were not disclosed and in 1913 they were reported to be 'kept dead secret as a rule'.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, some newspapers comment that they were satisfactory or were in advance of the previous year.<sup>50</sup> Crops were also sold at public auction. This custom was developed by Mr Dunlop, farmer at Morriston and one of the pioneers of the early potato industry in Ayrshire; the first sale was conducted at his farm in 1880.<sup>51</sup> At first, this type of auction was not popular: 'the results were disappointing, the merchants not taking kindly to the idea'.<sup>52</sup> However, they started to gain increasing support, and by 1887 'the annual sale of early potatoes at the farm of Morriston' was patronised by 'a large attendance of dealers from all parts of the country'.<sup>53</sup> In the following year, an auction of growing potatoes was recorded at Maybole.<sup>54</sup> By the early 1890s, a number of these sales took place across the early potato growing districts of Ayrshire.<sup>55</sup> Some farmers ran their own auction sales and obtained a special auctioneer's licence to conduct them.<sup>56</sup> Their use started to decline in the 1930s:

It is quite evident that more farmers at Girvan are reverting to selling early Ayrshire potatoes by private bargain. Sales by private roup have been confined in the past few years, to farms north of Girvan, with the exception of Shalloch Park farm and Girvan, and this year Burnside farm and Boghead farm have reverted to private selling.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, agricultural newspapers continue to report them until at least 1957.<sup>58</sup> By 1953 they were utilised by only a small number of growers.<sup>59</sup>

The public auctions had a distinct pattern of use. Each season, the first auctions were conducted in districts where the earliest ripening crops were found. In the 1890s, they were held at Girvan, followed by those in West Kilbride; in some seasons such as 1899 this pattern was reversed.<sup>60</sup> Three or four auctions were held throughout the county on successive days during a two or three week period of June. At each sale, the crops from two or more farms were usually sold together. There were also some larger auctions which sold the crop of a greater number of farms. The crop was sold in lots which ranged from one acre to ten acres in extent

(Table 3). These had an average size of between three and five acres. Larger plots are also recorded, though these were uncommon until the early 1930s.<sup>61</sup>

The public auctions and the private sales had a distinct relationship with each other. The private sales were the first sales to be undertaken in a season and usually took place in late May and early June; the public auctions started around the middle of June when some of the earliest lots were ready to harvest.<sup>62</sup> Some farmers favoured one of these methods of sale and used it over a long period of time.<sup>63</sup> Others also made use of both. For example, when lots intended for public auction were withdrawn from sale, a farmer had to harvest the crop himself or sell the crop through a private bargain. The acreage sold by private sale had an effect on the amount of crop available for public auction and vice versa. In the Girvan district in 1896, 'a good many lots in the district have been purchased privately, and the quantity for sale by public auction is correspondingly reduced'.<sup>64</sup>



Table 3: Size of Lots at Public Auction in 1897 and 1932

Name of farm	Number of lots	Size of smallest plot A.R.P.	Size of largest plot A.R.P.	Number of potato merchants purchasing the crop
1897				
Turnberry Lodge	9	3 2 8	7 2 11	5
Turnberry Warren	4	3 0 13	5 0 18	2
Jameston	16	2 2 28	5 3 10	9
Morrison	3	6 1 22	11 0 12	3
Drumbeg	8	2 2 23	11 2 34	n.a.
Turnberry Lodge	10	3 3 4	8 1 31	6
Dowhill	13	1 0 38	10 0 24	n.a.
1932				
Jameston	11	2 0 39	8 0 0	6
Morrison	15	3 0 2	10 1 0	10
Drumbeg	11	2 3 21	12 0 34	7
Dowhill	8	2 2 3	12 1 36	6
Shalloch Park	10	4 2 8	19 1 10	6
Burnside and Chapeldonan	9	5 0 4	15 1 17	6
Dunnymuck	2	5 3 26	18 0 8	1
Warren	4	5 1 24	6 2 10	3
Little Turnberry	4	1 3 0	9 3 16	6
Drumbeg	11	2 3 21	11 3 15	8
Cairnhill	3	3 3 28	8 2 20	3
Enoch	3	1 2 10	16 1 0	3
Robstone	5	3 1 0	15 0 19	4
McCrimdaleston	2	3 3 2	8 3 7	2
Hawkhill	3	6 2 32	13 1 8	2
Park	3	10 0 19	19 1 24	1
Boghead	4	5 2 34	10 3 22	2

Source: *Scottish Farmer*, 26 June 1897, 18 June 1932, 25 June 1932.  
n.a.: not available.

*The Sales and the Employment of the Workers*

The private sales and public auctions shaped the employment of the workers who harvested the early potato crop. Many of the buyers at these sales were their employers. In 1922, at least 20 such companies purchased the crop at public auction.<sup>65</sup> These businesses were located throughout central Lowland Scotland, especially western districts.<sup>66</sup> In 1898, and at the fourth public auction of potato

crops in 1915, agricultural newspapers record that ‘there was a large attendance of potato merchants from Glasgow and other centres’.<sup>67</sup> During these decades, merchants from Glasgow formed a large percentage of the buyers.<sup>68</sup> In 1922, they accounted for nine of the 20 merchants who purchased the crops at public auction.<sup>69</sup> A small number were also located in the industrial areas of western Scotland such as Govan, Hamilton, Cambuslang, Johnstone, Paisley, Airdrie, Partick and Bellshill.<sup>70</sup> In 1922, five merchants had their businesses in these towns.<sup>71</sup> A small group, which was not always represented at each auction, also had addresses in Ayrshire towns such as Girvan, Kilmarnock, Dalry, Ardrossan and West Kilbride.<sup>72</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s, merchants were also recorded at the public sales from eastern Scotland. G. & D. Maxwell of Forfar is first noted as a purchaser from 1922 onwards and the Edinburgh merchant Thomas McClung from 1931; by 1933 he purchased crops on a number of farms.<sup>73</sup> James Haggart of Crieff is recorded from 1930 onwards.<sup>74</sup>

Some of the merchants purchased crops of growing potatoes at the public sales for a number of decades. They embraced the oldest firms in the potato trade in Scotland, and the largest potato businesses and some of the largest employers of the workers. In 1934, they included the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society, Messrs Galbraith’s Stores Ltd., Messrs J. & A. McArthur, Messrs James Fulton Jnr., and Messrs Paul & Weir.<sup>75</sup> In 1938, the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society was reputed to be the largest buyer in Scotland.<sup>76</sup> Their names were well recognised among the harvesting labour force.<sup>77</sup>

The public auctions had an important impact on the work practices and customs of the harvesting labour force. The crop on each farm was sold in a number of plots that were usually purchased by number of merchants; in only a few instances were all of them sold to one merchant. A number of squads employed by different potato merchants undertook the work on a farm at the same time. In 1905, the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland notes that ‘on certain farms in the busy time from 100 to 200 labourers may be seen at work raising potatoes. On one farm at which inquiry was made 104 pairs, or pairs of workers, were engaged.’<sup>78</sup> The number of harvesters employed on a farm varied considerably. In 1920, three or four squads were employed at Girvan Mains and at Doughill this figure was five squads or around 100 people.<sup>79</sup> In 1909, some 200 men and women were employed on one farm for 6 or 7 weeks; that same figure was also recorded on farms in 1921.<sup>80</sup>

The plots were relatively small in size and the workers undertook their harvesting activities on a farm for a short period of time, from a few days to as long as a few weeks.<sup>81</sup> Some squads were employed on a number of farms in Ayrshire before they moved to another harvesting district to continue their work.

Not all of the workers were recruited from local sources and accommodation had to be provided for them. They were housed on or close to the



farms where they undertook their harvesting work. The task of finding sufficient accommodation for them was regarded to be problematic, even until 1957.<sup>82</sup> Where a number of squads were employed and accommodated on a farm at the same time they placed a great strain on the premises that were available.<sup>83</sup> Farms were not always equipped with sufficient accommodation and purchasers did not always find it easy to arrange alternative premises at another farm. As a result, in 1957, the Chief Sanitary Inspector for Ayrshire suggests that potato merchants should assess the availability of the accommodation before they purchased their crops.<sup>84</sup>

### 3: The Labour Force

The contracts to grow, harvest and market the early potato crop in Ayrshire allowed the purchasers of the crop, who were usually potato merchants, to systematically and quickly harvest it. These merchants were the largest employers of the harvesting labour force. They recruited a large labour force through the contracting system which could handle large acreages of crop in a very labour intensive task and deal with over a relatively short period of time, from about mid June until early August. Furthermore, it was capable of working with specialised harvesting tools and techniques and their associated techniques. That labour force was drawn from a number of sources.

#### *The Labour Force*

The potato merchants recruited their labour from three principal sources. The first was towns and villages in Ayrshire. In 1910, the County Chief Constable's Office in Ayr suggests that this source supplied only a small proportion of the total harvesting force.<sup>85</sup> The second source was the 'slums' of large urban areas such as Glasgow, Paisley and Greenock. Workers from these centres included a number of 'vagrants'.<sup>86</sup> In 1910, this source contributed a larger percentage of workers to the harvesting labour force than the first.<sup>87</sup> The third source was seasonal migratory workers recruited from western and north-western Ireland. They were employed from the latter part of the nineteenth century and until at least the 1980s. The extent of their employment increased and decreased according to the extent of the employment of the Scottish workers. In 1903, one observer could remark that 'formerly the merchants got hands from Glasgow and still get a few from there, but for many years, the bulk of the workers have gone from the west of Ireland'.<sup>88</sup> The Irish workers were the most important source of labour for harvesting the early potato crop in Ayrshire. In 1905, the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland asserts that 'the Irish labour is at present indispensable to the early potato industry'.<sup>89</sup> *Ayr Advertiser* could assert that 'without their assistance, there would be some trouble in finding sufficient hands'.<sup>90</sup> They were extensively employed across the county, and in 1907 they were accommodated on over 70 farms (Table 4).<sup>91</sup> Some potato merchants, including the principal buyers at the public auctions of growing crops, employed large numbers of Irish workers. In 1913, one potato merchant had four squads of 26 workers.<sup>92</sup> In 1934, J. & A. McArthur 'generally' employed about '200 workers in lifting early potatoes' and the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society (S.W.C.S.) about 300 workers; in that year the S.C.W.S. was the largest 'importer' of these workers for the Scottish potato harvest. In 1935, J. & A. McArthur employed 176 Irish workers.<sup>93</sup>

**Table 4: Number of Farms Housing Potato Workers in 1907**

County	Number of farms housing potato harvesters
Ayrshire	over 70
Dumbartonshire	about 50
Renfrewshire	85 farms (Lower District only)
West Lothian	26
Midlothian	over 30
East Lothian	about 50
Stirlingshire	about 30
Fife	3
Perthshire	about 40

Source: N.A.S., AF59/62 (Housing Conditions of Migratory Workers), III, 'Housing of Potato Diggers'.

The Irish workers were highly regarded as good workers. Traditionally, they were the sons and daughters of smallholders who were accustomed to agricultural work and were skilled in it. They were commended for their work skills. In 1907, the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland confirms that:

The merchants and employers of these agricultural labourers, some of whom engage large numbers, give in most cases a favourable report as to the work and conduct of the employees. One association, employing about 160 hands, states that they are the best labourers they can procure for potato digging. Another large employer states that he has engaged these labourers for 30 years, and that they have decidedly improved as a class.<sup>94</sup>

In that same year the *Ayr Advertiser* notes that 'as a rule, they are capital workers and well behaved'.<sup>95</sup> In 1934, the Glasgow potato merchant J. & A. McArthur praised highly the workers for their industry and skill; Mr Clark, Manager of the Potato Department of the S.C.W.S. also 'emphasised the special usefulness of Irish workers'.<sup>96</sup> A number of testimonies bear witness that the Irish were more agreeable workers than the Scottish. Thus, in 1903, merchants and farmers 'agree that the Irish have been found the steadier and more satisfactory workers'.<sup>97</sup> Mr Harper, potato merchant, further highlights their skills in 1933. For harvesting crops in Wigtownshire and Ayrshire, he explains that 'Irish labour was invariably utilised on account of their skill at digging by hand'. For him, 'local labour ... was not as satisfactory either in skill or output as Irishmen'.<sup>98</sup> In later years, one merchant suggests that 'the merchants generally were well pleased with the hard working Irish picker who in many cases worked for two or three generations on the same farms for the same merchant'.<sup>99</sup>



## 4: Hiring the Irish Workers

### *The Gaffers*

The squads of Irish potato workers were recruited by Irish gaffers or gangers who were generally drawn from the west and north-west of Ireland, especially the counties of Mayo and Donegal. As employees of Scottish potato merchants, they were considered to be their local agents in Ireland.<sup>100</sup> They had a number of functions. They recruited and brought together the members of their harvesting group, or squad, and arranged their transport to Scotland.<sup>101</sup> They kept their squad members together and supervised them throughout the duration of the harvesting season from approximately mid June to late October or November; for those who undertook grading or dressing work, they kept together members of their squads for much of the year until the end of the old potato season in the spring. They supervised their work and ensured that it continued at a satisfactory rate so that all of the merchants' orders were filled and the crop was properly harvested so that the tubers were not damaged.<sup>102</sup> They played a pivotal role between the potato merchant and the farmer on whose farm the crops were to be harvested. They paid the workers their wages which they received from the merchant and saw that their squad members also received their perquisites supplied by either the potato merchant or the farmer; when housing byelaws came into force in Ayrshire in 1921, they make certain that their squad maintained the accommodation according to their standard. They dealt with any problems with their employment and accommodation. Some tried to get the 'best places' for their workers to live in.<sup>103</sup> They looked after the welfare of their squad members, and were viewed as father-like figures. They assisted them when they found themselves in difficult circumstances, for example, when they got into financial difficulties or if they heard bad news from home.<sup>104</sup> In the early 1960s, some also acted as banker for their squad.<sup>105</sup>

The gaffers had a distinct character. All were males who had participated in the potato work over a number of seasons and were experienced in its practices.<sup>106</sup> For Michael King, who recollects his experiences during the late 1930s, 'It took a lot of initiative to become a gaffer. They were usually middle aged men who were married.'<sup>107</sup> In some districts the position of gaffer was a hereditary job which passed from father to son.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, some families of gaffers were associated with particular potato merchants.

Gaffers had their homes in Ireland, though after the Second World War some settled in Scotland. They spent much of their working lives in Scotland, returning to Ireland either at the end of the harvest or at the end of the old potato



(maincrop) season to recruit their squads for the new season.<sup>109</sup> Although they were separated from their families for much of the year, some were accompanied by their family members, especially those who were old enough to participate in the work.<sup>110</sup> Some gaffers employed their wife as the housekeeper or cook for the squad. Like their workers, they had a tight community group and were known to each other. That community was also a small one, which comprised an estimated 91 members in 1918.<sup>111</sup>

The workers expressed a range of attitudes towards their gaffers. As they had a special niche in the harvesting labour force and enjoyed special pay and sometimes housing, workers sometimes criticised them for that status. Some considered that they were not honest and cheated their squad of their pay. One of O'Dowd's informants, Michael MacGreal, 'had heard of some, and had experience of other gaffers who were not too good to their workers and acknowledged that it was indeed the gaffers who accepted the rough conditions'.<sup>112</sup> As they ensured that their squads were disciplined in their behaviour both within and outwith the harvesting field, they were regarded as 'hard men'.<sup>113</sup> However, not all workers or potato merchants shared these views. David Scobie, a fieldsman for a potato merchant, acknowledges that 'the bulk of the foremen were decent honest men. ... Like all walks of life you get the rogue among them.'<sup>114</sup> John Galloway, a potato merchant, considers that the workers respected their gaffers.<sup>115</sup>

### Recruiting the Workers

With their expenses paid by their potato merchants, the gaffers returned to Ireland at the end of the old potato season in May or early June to recruit their squads for the start of the forthcoming harvesting season in approximately mid to late June.<sup>116</sup> They recruited their squads from a small geographical area of the west of Ireland. In 1905, this was reported to be the counties of Mayo and Donegal where the majority of Irish seasonal agricultural workers who were employed in Britain were also recruited (Figure 2). By 1937, some workers were also recruited from Galway.<sup>117</sup> Each of these counties supplied varying numbers of workers. In 1937, 70% were recruited from Mayo, and a further 25% were from Donegal; the remaining few were drawn from Galway.<sup>118</sup> Each county had specific recruiting districts. In 1937, the Department of Agriculture in Ireland records that the main recruiting district in Donegal was Glenties where 452 workers were engaged; a further 10 were from Dunfanaghy. In Galway, 65 workers were from the Oughterard rural district and 10 from Galway district.<sup>119</sup> In Mayo, all the workers were recruited in the Belmullet and Westport rural districts in the west of the county; the former supplied 857 workers and the latter 413. So important was the Belmullet area, and especially Achill Island, as a recruiting district, that the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland referred to the potato workers as 'Achill Workers'.<sup>120</sup>



Figure 2: The West and North-West of Ireland

This statistical evidence is also reinforced by oral and written evidence from the 1920s and 1930s. The prominence of Belmullet as a recruiting area is emphasised by the *Mayo News* which reports that in June 1928 not less than ten gangers (gaffers) were out recruiting at the same time in that town.<sup>121</sup> For the 1938 harvest, the tradition of seeking employment at the Scottish potato harvest was regarded to be 'strong' in the Bangor Erris district. Michael King recollects that 'on the Belmullet Peninsula nearly every family sent a member to Scotland. Other areas were also around Blacksod Bay – Doohooma and Doolough'.<sup>122</sup> However, in his home district of Glenamoy, Mayo, there was no tradition of employment at the Scottish potato harvest. His family heard about that work from his father who spent 'a lot of time' in Scotland.<sup>123</sup> These were areas where small-holding agriculture was widely practiced.



Squads were usually drawn from within a county area. Even until the mid 1960s, gaffers recruited workers from their own parishes or nearby ones.<sup>124</sup> That practice is clearly demonstrated by Patrick MacGill who notes that the squad recruited by Micky's Jim in 1905 largely comprised people from Glenmornan in Donegal.<sup>125</sup> Gaffers had definite reasons for not recruiting their squad members from more than one county. There was an intense rivalry between workers from the different recruiting areas. This was clearly seen in the behaviour of the male workers after they had been drinking. As the *Mayo News* asserts: 'feuds born in the remote recesses of Donegal or Achill Island were recalled to stage a minor Donnybrook in an Ayrshire street'.<sup>126</sup> Workers in each area also had different characters. Those from Donegal were regarded to be more articulate and physically stronger.<sup>127</sup> In the early twentieth century they also travelled to the Scottish potato harvest by different land and sea routes.

### *Recruitment Methods*

Squads comprised former workers who had crossed to Scotland for a number of seasons and new members travelling for the first time. These experienced workers formed the core members of a squad. New squad members were recruited in a number of ways. Gaffers asked their former squad members whether they knew of any prospective workers; they then approached them. As they were widely known in the recruiting communities, workers approached them or members of their families.<sup>128</sup> Jonathan Bell, writing of north Donegal, notes that prospective workers 'put their names down' with a gaffer.<sup>129</sup>

Gaffers also recruited their squad members through formal methods. They recruited in towns or villages where they knew there was an available pool of harvesting labour. They stood at a particular place and waited for prospective workers to approach them. Fair days such as those of 11 June at Bangor, or the 15 June at Belmullet, were also important days for recruitment.<sup>130</sup> Gaffers, who were sometimes accompanied by their wives, also travelled around their home districts prospecting for workers.<sup>131</sup> In the early 1970s, some placed recruitment advertisements in the local newspaper press.<sup>132</sup>

During the first decades of the twentieth century not all gaffers had recruited a sufficient number of workers on their squads by the time they left Ireland, or arrived in Scotland (some recruited from other squads during the sea crossing).<sup>133</sup> Their squads were supplemented by a small number of Scottish workers when they disembarked. For example, MacGill describes that when Micky's Jim arrived at the quayside at the Broomielaw, Glasgow, in June 1905, his squad was augmented by four Scottish workers who had been gathered together from Glasgow and the surrounding towns.<sup>134</sup>

When gaffers were recruiting their squad members, they stated the employment conditions that they would experience. The *Mayo News* suggests that

they presented a positive image of conditions, of 'rosy promises of a successful season across the water'.<sup>135</sup> However, not all these were fulfilled. Sean Ó Ciaráin acknowledges that 'most people knew that that was only talk'.<sup>136</sup> The employment conditions that were noted were various. When he was recruited for the 1947 harvest season, Ciaráin recollects that the gaffer refers to modern comforts such as iron beds, flush toilets and hot and cold water.<sup>137</sup> In 1905 Micky's Jim sent a letter to Dermot Flynn which records the names of the members of the squad, the rate of wages, and the place and date of departure for Scotland.<sup>138</sup> Although his letter does not record any other employment conditions, they would have been known to prospective migrants in the recruiting districts who had discussed them in their home communities or heard about them in letters which workers had sent home. They also discussed them as they travelled to Scotland. The more experienced squad members told tall tales of the conditions to frighten the young, inexperienced members.<sup>139</sup>

### *Character of the Squads*

The squads of Irish workers had a distinct character. As they were recruited from a small geographical area, many comprised relatives and neighbours. In 1907 the Medical Officer of Health for the Counties of Stirling and Dumbarton notes that they were:

Often members of one family; they are brothers and sisters, or brothers, sisters and cousins, accompanied, it may be, by a representative of an older generation, who is the parent of some and the relative of most. The family monopoly is said to be carefully guarded.<sup>140</sup>

These family ties are also confirmed in a number of accounts of the workers in Ayrshire and surrounding districts. For the 1905 harvesting season, Patrick MacGill remarks that Micky's Jim's squad included two sisters, Dora and Bridget Doherty, who were also blood relations to Murtagh Gallagher and a father and son, Oiney Dinchy and Connel Dinchy. Thady Scanlon was a first cousin of the gaffer, Micky's Jim. Norah Ryan and Dermot Flynn knew one another from their school days.<sup>141</sup> However, he does not note the relationships of five members of the squad: Maire a Glan, Biddy Wor, Owen Kelly, Judy Farel and Willie the Duck.<sup>142</sup> In 1910, Dr Elizabeth McVail, in her M.D. thesis, observes that in Ayrshire, the Irish workers 'often consist of near relatives'.<sup>143</sup> The County Medical Officer of Ayrshire, Dr Coll Reginald Macdonald, notes in the same year that 'a gang may be composed to a large extent of relatives and personal friends'.<sup>144</sup> This character is also confirmed in membership lists of squads in 1920. These record only two or three surnames.<sup>145</sup> However, squads very seldom included married couples.<sup>146</sup>

The relationship between the Scottish workers who were employed on the Irish squads is rarely noted. Only a few of the Scottish workers were related to



each other. In 1910, married people were sometimes noted among members of the 'tramp class'.<sup>147</sup> In 1924, one squad included a woman, her grandson and three sisters.<sup>148</sup> Unlike the Irish squads, the personnel on the Scottish squads did not remain constant throughout a harvesting season and their membership could frequently change. In 1924, a witness who gave evidence at the fatal accident inquiry into the deaths of nine Scottish workers employed at Kilnford Farm in the parish of Dundonald, Ayrshire, asserts that 'there were so many changes among the workers'.<sup>149</sup> The Chief Constable's Office in Ayr in 1911 notes the reasons for these:

It happens that a man is found working at one of the farms living with a woman as his wife, and in a few weeks is found under similar conditions at another farm with a different woman, and, doubtless, among this class there are cases of couples pairing for the potato season, and they disagree, separate, and pair with others before the end of the season. This, of course, only takes place in a fallen class of women who would be guilty of immoral practices irrespective of housing conditions.<sup>150</sup>

### *Size of the Squads*

The squads of Irish workers were recruited as self-contained harvesting units capable of harvesting the early potato crop (and later ripening crops) as quickly, efficiently and effectively as possible. Although they generally comprised between 20 and 30 workers, they could also be smaller or larger. The specialised nature of the early potato harvest in Ayrshire caused them to vary greatly in size.<sup>151</sup> In 1907, one report suggests that 'the size of the gangs varied very much from 6 to 60 or 70 men and from 12 to 140 or 150 women in some of the large farms'; these may have comprised a number of squads employed by one or a number of merchants.<sup>152</sup> In 1920, 'a very large squad' of 40 workers was employed at one farm while others had between 15 and 40 workers in each.<sup>153</sup> In no other county where Irish workers were employed, were squads as large.

The members of the Irish squads had a distinct age pattern. They were largely teenagers or young adults.<sup>154</sup> In 1938, one observer remarks that 'the most noticeable feature about the travellers was their youth'.<sup>155</sup> In the previous year, some 19.2% of the males who engaged in the potato work were under 16 years of age; the corresponding figure for females was 20.2%.<sup>156</sup> By 1964, an estimated 60% to 70% of the potato workers employed in Ayrshire were under 20 years of age.<sup>157</sup> The age when they first went to the Scottish potato harvest varied during the twentieth century. In the early 1900s they went to that work at an earlier age than in former years. At that time, families on Achill Island were compelled to send children as young as 11 years of age to the work.<sup>158</sup> During the inter-war years, this

was at 14 or 16, when they were considered to be strong enough to undertake the work.<sup>159</sup>

Females tended to participate in the work until they married.<sup>160</sup> Males had a further definite age pattern. In 1905, they were recorded to be lads of 16 to 21 years of age or old men.<sup>161</sup> That age structure was reflected in the role which the potato harvest had in their lives. When they were teenagers, this work provided them with their first experience of migratory work.<sup>162</sup> Although older and stronger males undertook other types of migratory work (which also paid a higher wage rate), they returned to the potato work to introduce their young family members to it; this practice continued into the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>163</sup> They also engaged in the work when they could not undertake other types of agricultural work.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, a small number of males, especially from Achill Island, continued at it over a number of years so that they could obtain sufficient experience to become gaffers.<sup>165</sup>

### *Gender of the Workers*

The squads of Irish workers had a distinct ratio of male to female members. As the work at the potato harvest was considered to be easier to undertake than other types of seasonal migratory agricultural work in Britain, a higher percentage of females than males participated in it. In 1905, 265 of the 425 workers employed by five potato merchants were females.<sup>166</sup> In 1906 and 1907, that figure ranged between 60% and 70% of the Irish workers.<sup>167</sup> In this latter year in Ayrshire, there 'were invariably more women, usually twice as many as men'.<sup>168</sup> Nevertheless, the ratio of female to male workers varied from year to year and over decades. By 1909, there had been a decline in the number of males.<sup>169</sup> In 1937, squads comprised 'a few male adults, the remainder being women, boys and girls'.<sup>170</sup>

### *Character of the Irish Workers in the Early Twentieth Century*

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, a number of observers in Ireland and Scotland comment on the character of the Irish workers. Many of their reports describe them in favourable terms. In 1905, the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland suggests that 'general testimony is given as to the satisfactory character of the labourers'.<sup>171</sup> The Scottish Council for Women's Trades considers that they were 'a very respectable class of workers'.<sup>172</sup> They were noted for their economical and thrifty ways.<sup>173</sup> They were 'quiet in their living' and seldom gave trouble to the authorities.<sup>174</sup> In 1918, the Very Reverend Canon Lord Archibald Douglas of Girvan observes that in that past ten years he was only aware of one police case which involved the Irish potato workers in the Girvan Court.<sup>175</sup> The workers had a very high standard of morality which was regarded to be 'irreproachable' and 'the wonder and marvel of the Scotch'.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, between



1910 and 1920, only one illegitimate birth was recorded among the workers; they responded to it by 'hounding out' the girl.<sup>177</sup> They had a deep reverence and respect for their parents.<sup>178</sup> They were faithful to their religious duties.<sup>179</sup> As the Parish Priest at Girvan, Father O'Donnell, points out in 1937, they 'never failed, no matter how hard they had to work, to attend to their religious duties'; similar comments were also made in the early 1960s.<sup>180</sup>

Especially during the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Irish workers kept themselves together in their squads. When a number of squads were housed on a farm, they would not always associate or mix with one another or go into the same apartment as another squad.<sup>181</sup> They did not always mix with Scottish workers. The Irish and Scottish girls had little association with each other during their leisure hours and would not willingly share the same accommodation.<sup>182</sup> They were suspicious of people outwith their squads. In 1920, one civil servant points out that they would 'hardly speak to a stranger or even to the potato merchant himself. They are almost primitive in their instincts and seem almost to crowd together for protection when an outsider approaches'.<sup>183</sup> Worker autobiographies record the relations between the Irish squads and the wider community in terms of strangeness. Patrick MacGill refers to the 'strange man' with the playing cards who visited his squad.<sup>184</sup> He would only accept him as a visitor to it after he heard that he knew Micky's Jim, and was told the extent of his relationship with him.<sup>185</sup>

In the first decades of the twentieth century the Irish workers were regarded to be a distinct group that was different to the Scottish workers and the Scottish communities which they came into contact with. That difference was seen in their language. Some workers spoke Irish. By the late 1930s, they spoke a mixture of Irish and English, though workers from Donegal had native Irish speakers who always spoke Irish among themselves.<sup>186</sup> For one worker from Donegal, Joe Rue Gallacher, 'he spoke only Irish himself until he came over to Ayrshire. Then he has to learn English in a hurry'.<sup>187</sup>

The workers had their own style of clothing. On Saturday evenings in Girvan in 1900 they were viewed as 'a sight, and present a striking contrast in their harvesting garb to the fashionably dressed summer visitors'.<sup>188</sup> Although their clothing is described as being 'picturesque' in following years, it no longer posed such a striking contrast by 1929.<sup>189</sup> In that year, Michael J. Johnston notes that:

Those who haven't seen the Irish potato workers for some years would be agreeably surprised to mark the change which has come over their kind inside a decade. From a class which used to be regarded as half-primitive, illiterate, poverty-ridden, they have improved almost out of kin. Picturesque, they used to be called in the old days. Easily distinguished from the townspeople and visitors, impervious to the march of progress, the decrees of fashion, always the women and girls wearing coarse shawls; the

men and boys clad in rough suits of corduroy material. Nowadays, when the Irish workers come to the town there is little to distinguish them from the other people they are rubbing shoulders with in the pavements or in the shops. Audibly, their brogue is one sufficient means of identifying them. In appearance, however, they have assimilated the garb and styles of today. On a night off, rough, old clothes, and aprons of sacking cloth, do very well for the work of gathering the potatoes in the fields, but they no longer distinguish the Irish harvester in his night or her night off. Especially the fair sex.<sup>190</sup>

If the Irish workers were described in favourable terms during the 1900s and 1910s, the Scottish workers were noted in unfavourable ones. Workers from the cities were always recorded as being of a 'degraded type' and as 'undesirables'.<sup>191</sup> A range of observers reiterate these judgements. For the Chief Constable's Office in Ayr, they were 'of a low type, many of them of the very lowest, debauched and filthy in their habits, coarse and foul in their language and quarrelsome. Scenes of disorder do occur among them which occasion the attention of the police'.<sup>192</sup> The County Medical Officer of Ayrshire, Dr Coll Reginald Macdonald, concludes that 'there is no doubt that these ... require to be very carefully supervised and kept under control'.<sup>193</sup> Farmers and the workers did not view the workers in favourable terms.<sup>194</sup> Patrick MacGill records the attitude of Micky's Jim's squad towards two Scottish women workers, Gourock Ellen and Annie, who were recruited in Glasgow. For him: 'nearly everyone in the squad looked upon the two women with contempt and disgust, and I must confess that I shared in the general feeling. In my sight they were loathsome and unclean. They were repulsive in appearance, loose in language, and seemingly devoid of any moral restraint or female decency'.<sup>195</sup> A report from 1920 suggests that the Scottish workers had a negative effect on the Irish ones, who 'got into trouble' with them after they had been drinking.<sup>196</sup>

### *Changes in the Character of the Irish Squads*

The character of the Irish workers changed after the Second World War. This started to become evident in the late 1940s, but was especially noted in the 1950s and 1960s. The traditional recruiting patterns altered. By the early 1960s, workers were drawn from four distinct social and occupational groups: first, they continued to be relatives of small holders from the traditional recruiting districts; second, they were drawn from housing estates in towns in Mayo and Donegal; third, they were workers from the tinker class; and fourth, they were hired from hostels and recruitment agencies in the towns and cities outwith the west of Ireland.<sup>197</sup> A decade later, they were recruited from a broader range of occupational backgrounds. The *Observer* suggests in 1971 that:



These days the potato squads recruited in Ireland are far more likely to be those at the very bottom of the social heap, or people running from some problems. There are gypsies, dropouts, children escaping from home and not much missed, men with alcoholic difficulties, or women with marital problems.<sup>198</sup>

The relationship between squad members altered. In 1964, Father Tuffy of Ballina, Mayo, surveyed the character of the squads employed on 33 farms in Ayrshire (Table 5). He observes that on many farms, family groups continued to be present. At one farm, Barneil, eight family groups were accompanied by one or both parents. At all other farms, smaller numbers of these groups were in attendance.

**Table 5: Composition of Irish Squads in Ayrshire in 1964**

Farm and location	Number of families with one or both parents	Number of families without either parent	Total number of workers
Dyke Mains, Saltcoats	-	-	20
Low Boydston, West Kilbride	*5	-	24
Chapelton Farm, West Kilbride	*5	*2	28
South Kilrusken, West Kilbride	*5	*2	20
Begleys Farm, West Kilbride	-	-	26
Chapelton, West Kilbride	*3	4	28
Yonderfield, West Kilbride	3	VM	20
Meadow Head, West Kilbride	-	-	20
Genoch Farm, by Ayr	2	2	8
Laigh Kyleston, by Ayr	3	3	25
Balchriston, Maybole	4	*2	17
Jameston Farm, Maybole	*2	-	30
Castlehill Farm, Maybole	2	-	5
Turnberry Lodge, Maybole	3	VM	28
Shanter Farm, The Maidens	1	VM	30
Drumbeg, Turnberry	2	3	20
Dowhill Farm, Girvan	4	VM	29
Curragh Farm, Girvan	2	4	22
Girvan Mains, Girvan	5	VM	58
Chapeldonan, Girvan	*2	1	23
Barneil, Girvan	8	4	26
Hawkhill, Girvan	*3	-	22
Shalloch Park, Girvan	3	4	28
Dunnymuck, Girvan	2	5	22
Houston Farm, Girvan	2	3	33
High Craighead, Girvan	-	-	28
Cairnhill, by Girvan	-	1	15
Robston Farm, by Girvan	-	4	29
Camregan, by Girvan	*3	VM	24
Craigie Mains, Ballantrae	cf Begleys Farm		
Balig Farm, Ballantrae	4	1	26
Laggan Farm, Ballantrae	1	0	48
Enoch Farm, Ballantrae	2	VM	32

Source: N.A.S., DD13/2684, 'Report on Accommodation for Irish Workers Engaged in Potato Harvesting in Scotland'.

Note: figures are approximate and in some cases the division between males and females is not recorded

\*: approximate figure; VM: vast majority



Approximately five family groups were each recorded on three squads, and five families were noted at another farm. Four family groups were present on a further three squads. Approximately three families were recorded on three squads and that number was confirmed at a further five. Approximately two families were present on three squads and two families were also noted for another seven squads. One family group was only noted in two squads; no parents were recorded on seven squads.

Although Father Tuffy notes the strong presence of family groups in squads, he also emphasises that squad members were not always accompanied by either of their parents (i.e. they comprised brothers and sisters or other family relations). He observes that the vast majority of workers employed on seven squads were of this character, as were four family groups on five farms. One family group on three farms and two groups on one farm also had this pattern. The number of workers who did not have any family ties and who were unknown to other workers on a squad before the start of the harvesting season increased by 1971.<sup>199</sup>

The age of the workers changed. During the 1950s and early 1960s there was an increase in the number of children present on the squads. In Ayrshire in 1952, they were described as 'young children, much too juvenile to be workers' and as the 'holiday-making friends and relatives of the diggers'.<sup>200</sup> During the 1955 season, 13 children were at Chapelton and five at Ardneil, and in 1961, 18 adults were accompanied by seventeen children at Corsecleys; 13 of these 'belonged' to one woman.<sup>201</sup> So great was their impact on the character of the squads that in 1962 the Carrick District Sanitary Inspector comments that 'it has been said that the "tattie howkers" sitting on the trailers on their way to the fields looked more like a Sunday School picnic than a working squad'.<sup>202</sup> They made some farms appear like holiday centres. At several farms in the Kilwinning District in 1953, 'you did not know if they were seasonal workers' premises or children's holiday camps'.<sup>203</sup>

The ratio of males to females shifted. In 1964, Father Tuffy observes that there was a marked increase in the numbers of males employed in Ayrshire.<sup>204</sup> (Table 6) In his survey of 33 farms, he records a larger number of males than females at 21 farms and at a further five he notes an equal number of them; he did not state the ratios at five farms. At five farms, only a few more males than females were present. The largest differences in the number of males and females on a squad were recorded at Girvan Mains, Robston, Laggan, Chapelton, Houston, Camelton, Drumbeg, Yonderfield, Genoch and Enoch: at Girvan Mains 34 males were present compared to 24 females. Conversely, at these farms, females also formed a minority of the workers. At Enoch, eight women were employed, compared to 24 males. Only two farms, Balig and Chapeldonan, had a larger number of females than males.

Table 6: Character of Irish Squads in Ayrshire in 1964

Farm	Males	Females	Total number of workers
Dyke Mains, Saltcoats	n.a.	n.a.	20
Low Boydston, West Kilbride	12	12	24
Chapelton Farm, West Kilbride	21	7	28
South Kilrusken, West Kilbride	10	10	20
Begleys Farm, West Kilbride	n.a.	n.a.	26
Camelton, West Kilbride	20	8	28
Yonderfield, West Kilbride	13	7	20
Meadow Head, West Kilbride	n.a.	n.a.	20
Genoch Farm, by Ayr	20	8	28
Laigh Kylston, by Ayr	13	12	25
Balchriston, Maybole	10	7	17
Jameston Farm, Maybole	15	15	30
Castlehill Farm, Maybole	13	8	21
Turnberry Lodge, Maybole	16	12	28
Shanter Farm, The Maidens	15	15	30
Drumbeg, Turnberry	13	7	20
Doohill Farm, Girvan	15	14	29
Currie Farm, Girvan	14	8	22
Girvan Mains, Girvan	34	24	58
Chapeldonan, Girvan	11	12	23
Barneil, Girvan	18	8	26
Hawkhill, Girvan	13	9	22
Shalloch Park, Girvan	15	13	28
Dunnymuck, Girvan	11	11	22
Houston Farm, Girvan	22	11	33
High Craighead, Girvan	n.a.	n.a.	28
Cairnhill, by Girvan	10	5	15
Robston Farm, by Girvan	20	9	29
Camregan, by Girvan	15	9	24
Craigie Mains, Ballantrae	Cf Begleys Farm		
Balig Farm, Ballantrae	10	16	26
Laggan Farm, Ballantrae	33	25	48
Enoch Farm, Ballantrae	24	8	32

Source: N.A.S., DD13/2684, 'Report on Accommodation for Irish Workers Engaged in Potato Harvesting in Scotland'.

Note: figures are approximate and in some cases the division between males and females was not recorded.

n.a. : not available



Relations between squad members were transformed. The social and moral safeguards which had been provided by the strong family and neighbourhood ties were weakened. So important were these to the character and well-being of the squads that Peadar O'Donnell, who had a long-standing interest in the workers, considers that if they were to break down, then a 'lot of harm' would be caused to the squads.<sup>205</sup> Among some squads, a number of moral and social problems emerged. In Ayrshire, Wigtownshire, East Lothian and West Lothian, sanitary inspectors consider that the presence of young children and infants was 'undesirable and continues to give rise to concern'.<sup>206</sup> Their additional numbers caused the workers' accommodation to become overcrowded, and, as a result, its standard became poorer. As some of the children were too young to be employed, they had to be supervised during work hours. However, their parents argued that they had brought them to the potato harvest so that they could look after them.<sup>207</sup> The increased presence of married couples created moral problems for the young members of the squads. As it was often difficult to supply separate sleeping accommodation for them, some slept within the apartment designated to a single sex of worker. Double sized mattresses, brought by these workers, could not be easily accommodated within the sleeping apartments and some were placed in front of emergency exits.<sup>208</sup> As they disrupted the sleeping arrangements, some workers occupied premises that were not regarded to be sanitary or fit to be used to accommodate them. They also contravened the provision of the byelaws which regulated their accommodation. The increase in anti-social behaviour was attributed to the greater numbers of tinkers that were present on the squads.<sup>209</sup> As they kept themselves apart from other squad members, they caused divisions within a squad.<sup>210</sup> They were also associated with the destruction of domestic facilities, especially water closets. As Peadar O'Donnell comments in 1962: 'the tinkers are blamed for the pretty terrible way even good facilities are messed up'.<sup>211</sup>

As a result of the changes to the character of the squads, relations between workers and their gaffers could become strained. Some gaffers found it difficult to hold their squads together. A number of workers left the work after a very short period, sometimes only a few weeks. Some families of gaffers responded to this problem by moving workers between their squads. Especially by the early 1970s, the popular newspaper press reports allegations of increased brutality and exploitation among squads. Through their investigations they found workers who were vulnerable and open to exploitation and would accept poor employment conditions, low wages and ill-treatment. They noted that they were poorly educated, had little ability to read and write, and knew little of life outside their home communities in Ireland and were unable to approach officials to ask for help to deal with any personal or employment problems.<sup>212</sup>



## 5: Number of Irish Workers Employed

### *Sources of Evidence*

It is very difficult to state exactly how many Irish (and also Scottish) workers were employed to harvest the early potato crop in Ayrshire either during one harvesting season or throughout the period of this survey. Statistics tend to be fragmentary and are found in a number of sources of evidence that each have their own method of compilation and geographical or historical extent. The 1841 census attempts to ascertain the number of people in Ireland who became "temporary emigrants" in order to supplement their earnings at home by wages obtained for assisting in work of various kinds in England and Scotland'.<sup>213</sup> After that survey was conducted, no further statistics of the extent of the employment of Irish seasonal migratory workers were compiled until 1880. In that year, and annually until 1915, the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland collected statistics of the numbers of migratory agricultural labourers 'who seek employment at a distance from their own homes, especially in England and Scotland'.<sup>214</sup> These were compiled from a number of sources: a survey undertaken by the enumerators of the agricultural statistics at the homes of migrant workers in Ireland; information supplied courtesy of the Registrar-General for Ireland; a yearly tally of the number of temporary migrants who left the principal Irish ports, excluding Dublin; and details of the numbers of special harvestmen's tickets sold by the Midland Great Western Railway (M.G.W.R.) and the Great Southern and Western Railway (G.S.W.R.) to migratory labourers who travelled to Dublin and via Dublin to England and Scotland until 1912. Additionally, from 1906 onwards, special inquiries were conducted to ascertain from their employers, the employment conditions of the Irish migratory labourers in England and Scotland.<sup>215</sup>

The department recognised that it was difficult to collect statistics of the number of Irish migratory seasonal agricultural workers who travelled to Britain. In 1905 and 1906 it affirms that 'there are considerable difficulties in connection with an enumeration of migratory labour'.<sup>216</sup> It was, not, however, until 1911 that it could confirm that 'it is not practicable to obtain absolutely accurate returns of the numbers of Irish agricultural labourers who migrate each year to Great Britain'.<sup>217</sup> Its statistics are problematic. They include evidence of a number of workers who did not engage in migratory work. For example, the statistics gathered by the railway companies include data on people who travelled to Dublin and remained in the counties near that city as well as statistics of agricultural labourers who went to England twice during a calendar year.<sup>218</sup> Furthermore, the railway company



statistics are higher than those collected by the agricultural enumerators which are believed to include both movements within Ireland and also those to Scotland and England. Anne O'Dowd considers that the agricultural statistics do not include all the workers who would have undertaken the migratory work. She believes that 'June was very early for many to have decided whether or not they would go away to work.'<sup>219</sup> However, the department indicates that the largest number of seasonal migrants travelled from Irish ports to Scotland and England in that month. It was also a time when the agricultural population in Ireland was in a state of considerable flux and when the potato workers traditionally travelled to Scotland.<sup>220</sup> O'Dowd also suggests that as the Constabulary (who acted as the agricultural enumerators) was not generally liked, workers would not give them honest answers to their questions.<sup>221</sup> Furthermore, although female workers undertook migratory agricultural work, very few of them are included in the statistics. Indeed, the department's report for 1901 notes that its earlier reports only comprised statistics for males.<sup>222</sup> However, women and girls are included in the railway and port returns but are excluded from the agricultural statistics.<sup>223</sup> As a result of this anomaly, in 1901 enumerators were instructed to collect data on the number of women and girls who annually travelled to Great Britain for seasonal agricultural work.<sup>224</sup> After a discussion of the problems of its statistical evidence in 1915, the department suggests that the statistics account for only 60% of the migrants who travelled to Britain. This figure has been accepted by James E. Handley, Cormac Ó Gráda and Anne O'Dowd, though Gerard Moran considers that it is too low.<sup>225</sup>

It is also very difficult to assess the number of workers who travelled to the Scottish potato harvest.<sup>226</sup> The early reports of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland do not present statistics for each of the three migratory groups of workers that travelled to Great Britain to undertake agricultural work: the Connaught workers (males who travelled to England for general seasonal work), Donegal workers (males who travelled to Scotland to undertake general seasonal work) or Achill workers who were employed at the Scottish potato harvest. They simply note the numbers who travelled to each country.<sup>227</sup> Nevertheless, after 1905, the department's annual reports on migratory labourers provide estimates of the number of workers who travelled to and were employed to harvest the Scottish potato crop. In 1909-10, for example, an estimate suggests that between 1,500 and 2,000 workers were employed at that work.<sup>228</sup> In 1911, that figure ranged between 1,300 and 1,800 workers.<sup>229</sup> Similar figures are also confirmed by local newspapers in Ayrshire for the early potato harvest in that county during that same period. In the Girvan district during the 1899 harvest, a large number of Irish workers were employed and in 1900 'large forces were at work'.<sup>230</sup> In 1909, an estimated 1,000 to 1,200 workers were employed in South Ayrshire and in the following year, about 1,000 were recorded in the Girvan

district.<sup>231</sup> In 1913, *Ayr Advertiser* estimates a far higher figure, and suggests that 'there will now be fully 2,000 workers in the potato fields scattered in different parts of South Ayrshire'.<sup>232</sup>

Although their numbers remained comparatively stationary in the first decade of the twentieth century, they increased during the First World War, a time of intense crop production. In 1918, an estimated 2,542 Irish workers were employed at the Scottish potato harvest.<sup>233</sup> It is not surprising that their employment fell between 1918 and 1937, a period which covered general economic distress and a reduction in the area under the Scottish potato crop. During that period, their employment fell by 17.5% to an estimated 1,787 workers.<sup>234</sup> A year later, some 1,200 of the workers were reported to be recruited from Achill and Erris.<sup>235</sup>

### *Extent of Employment after the Second World War*

After the Second World War, the statistics of the number of seasonal Irish workers employed to harvest the early potato crop in Ayrshire (as throughout Lowland Scotland), continue to be fragmentary. In the early potato growing districts of Ayrshire in 1950 harvesting continued to require a 'considerable influx of labour'; numerous workers were employed two years later.<sup>236</sup> Another survey from 1961 suggests that 1,500 such workers were employed at the Scottish potato harvest.<sup>237</sup> However, a further account, from the Glasgow and West of Scotland Potato Trade Association, two years later in Spring 1963, suggests a slightly lower figure of between 1200 or 1500 workers.<sup>238</sup> Throughout Scotland, the extent of their employment declined rapidly in the late 1960s. By 1971, only 600 or 800 workers continued to be employed.<sup>239</sup> Although their numbers further declined, they were still employed in the 1980s. Indeed, Jonathan Bell suggests that squads travelled from the Arranmore area of Donegal in 1988.<sup>240</sup> Although they no longer undertook harvesting work in the early 1990s, some continued to be employed to dress or sort the potato crop and engage in vegetable work, especially harvesting activities.<sup>241</sup>

After the Second World War, the employment of Irish workers also declined in Ayrshire. In 1949 George P. Greenlaw, Chief Sanitary Inspector, observed that 'the work entailed has been lessened greatly in recent years by the growing tendency to "dig from the lorry", as the saying goes, implying that local labour is brought to the field in lorries and that no one sleeps at the farm buildings'.<sup>242</sup> By 1962, fewer squads were employed in the county and each squad had a smaller number of members.<sup>243</sup> These smaller squads were clearly seen at Balig and Corseclays. These farms had employed four squads of 100 workers, but by 1962 only three squads, which had a total of 23 workers, were employed at them.<sup>244</sup> In Ayrshire and the Lothians in 1971, between 360 and 540 workers were employed.<sup>245</sup>



### *Decline of the Migration to the Scottish and Ayrshire Potato Harvest*

After the Second World War, the number of Irish workers employed to harvest the early potato crop in Ayrshire, as throughout Scotland, declined as a result of a number of factors. Historically, migration to agricultural employment in Scotland and throughout Britain allowed the workers and their families to continue their subsistence way of life in their home communities. It provided them with a cash income to buy goods that they could not obtain from their small holdings. Importantly, it allowed them to pay their rent. Remittances from the Scottish potato harvest and from other seasonal employment and emigration provided a significant contribution to the local west of Ireland and national Irish economies.<sup>246</sup> That work was one of only a small number of sources of employment in the recruiting communities. Its importance was highlighted by the high level of participation in that work in some communities.

However, after the Second World War the subsistence way of life lived by the seasonal migratory agricultural workers in the west of Ireland became less attractive. Workers chose to engage in other occupations that gave them a higher standard of life. For male workers, this included employment in other forms of migratory work such as industrial work on public works schemes.<sup>247</sup> By the early 1950s, permanent emigration to Britain had become more prevalent as also emigration to the United States in the 1960s.<sup>248</sup> The emergence of economic development schemes and other government incentives in Ireland provided further employment opportunities. These provided an alternative to the seasonal potato work. As a result of their introduction, it became less essential to engage in the seasonal potato work (such schemes were also attributed to cause the decline in the number of Irish workers who travelled to the Scottish potato harvest in the 1920s).<sup>249</sup> The beginning of unemployment benefit in Ireland also made it less vital for them to undertake potato work.<sup>250</sup>

In the recruiting districts, the work at the Scottish potato harvest no longer became viewed in a favourable light. In 1962, Peadar O'Donnell notes that 'the idea is abroad in Donegal and Mayo - and here is where screechy newspaper notice has done harm - that this kind of work is degrading'.<sup>251</sup> He concludes that the reporting was biased and described a select range of aspects of the migratory work and its employment conditions which made that work appear less favourable than it actually was.<sup>252</sup> When he travelled among squads in Ayrshire during that harvesting season, he 'found the squads considerably stirred up over newspaper publicity, which they detest. They consider themselves held up to ridicule by it'.<sup>253</sup> One observer suggests that the coverage caused prospective workers to become less inclined to engage in the potato work.<sup>254</sup>

Changes in husbandry practices for the growing, harvesting and marketing of the early potato crop also had an impact on the extent of the employment of the

Irish workers. The use of the mechanical harvester or complete harvester reduced labour demands, especially for gathering potatoes, the most labour-intensive activity in the harvesting process. As Irish workers became more difficult to recruit, farmers and merchants purchased harvesters to remedy their labour problems. In turn, smaller numbers of workers required to be employed.<sup>255</sup> Local authority byelaws, which regulated the nature and standard of the accommodation for the workers, became more stringent. Farmers considered that it was easier and more cost effective to employ local labour from towns and villages than employ Irish workers who required to be accommodated. The introduction of revised local authority byelaws under section 171 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1966 demanded a higher standard of accommodation than had been required by earlier ones. Not all farmers or merchants who supplied accommodation were willing to incur heavy expenditure to bring their premises up to the new standard and no longer made them available.<sup>256</sup> In the years immediately following the announcement that these revised byelaws were to come into operation, the employment of local workers increased at the expense of Irish ones.<sup>257</sup>



## 6: Travelling to Ayrshire

‘Scotland’, sung to the air of ‘The Maid of the Sweet Brown Knowe’.

Come all you brave Irishmen,  
Attend to me a while,  
Till I relate the hardship great  
We have in Achill girls  
Concerning our brave Achill girls  
Who are compelled to go  
For to earn an honest living  
Far away from sweet Mayo.

On the 15th day of June, my boys,  
Most plainly to be seen,  
Our gallant ocean liner  
She came with flags of green.  
She gathered all, both big and small,  
From North and West and South,  
Who marched in a grand procession  
Towards the harbour at Bull’s Mouth.

From Innishbiggle and the Vally,  
Dugord and Old Slievemore.  
From Dooagh and Dooega,  
Curraun and brave Clochmore.  
And all round the borders  
Through Mullaranny took their route,  
And made no delay but came that day  
To meet us at the Bulls Mouth.

If you had seen our Achill girls  
Parading on the quay,  
The sight would make your heart grow glad  
For many a long day.  
They raised a cheer without a fear  
That banished every doubt,  
And sang a song of Paddy’s land  
As they rallied through Bull’s Mouth.



Farewell to Achill Island  
 Was the toast that went around  
 Among our brave Achill girls,  
 As our ship sailed through the Sound,  
 You may search the Irish nation  
 From Croagh Nephin to Glenlow,  
 But you will never find the equals  
 Of our girls from dear Mayo.

Hurrah my boys! our sails are up  
 And the wind is blowing fair.  
 We are off to bonnie Scotland,  
 In a few days we'll be there.  
 It is hard to part with those we love  
 And sad that we must go,  
 And bid farewell to Achill Isle  
 And the County of Mayo.

Composed by Anthony O'Calligan, Slievemore.  
 Source: *Mayo News*, 4 January 1930.

The exodus of Irish workers to the Scottish potato harvest was an important event in the annual calendar in their recruiting communities in the west and north-west of Ireland. As the song 'Scotland' indicates, it was a time of sadness and hope. It was a period of change: the population of these communities declined; family groups were split as members left the nuclear group; others closed up their homes to engage in the migratory work. For the migratory workers, that journey was also a rite of passage and one that often marked their first experience of migratory work outside Ireland. Sean Ó Ciaráin suggests that the crossing changed the course of his life: 'the ice was broken. I had started the process which was to sever me away from Ireland, and tie me to Scotland, where one day I would make my home.'<sup>258</sup> Even on his first day of employment at the potato harvest at Rothesay, that experience changed Patrick MacGill's perspective of life.<sup>259</sup> So great was the impact of the exodus of the migrants on their recruiting communities that it was annually recorded in the local newspaper press. Accounts report the date(s) when the migrants travelled, their numbers and the nature of the migratory work which they went to undertake. But they also provided an opportunity for journalists to comment on and criticise the role of migration within their home communities and the policies of the British and later, Irish, governments towards migration.<sup>260</sup>

### *Travelling to the Scottish Potato Harvest: Routes*

Reminiscences of former workers recall that they met other members of their squad at a meeting point such as a county town, a railway station or port in Ireland and travelled with them to the Ayrshire or the Scottish potato harvest.<sup>261</sup> Their journey could be a long one. It was undertaken in a number of stages: they travelled to a sea port; undertook a sea crossing, and, from a port of arrival in the west of Scotland, a land crossing to a farm in Ayrshire or another early growing district where they commenced their harvesting work. These stages were undertaken by a number of modes of transport and a number of routes.

In Ireland, workers travelled to a number of sea ports by a range of modes of transport. Especially during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they walked to the nearest railway station or port which could be at a considerable distance from their homes.<sup>262</sup> They also travelled by railway.<sup>263</sup> Remote districts, such as Achill, were not, however, served by the national railway network until the 1890s, thereafter it was widely utilised by the workers. Special trains were arranged for seasonal workers who travelled to Britain.<sup>264</sup> Gerard Moran suggests that railway companies quickly recognised the importance of seasonal migration and the need to transport large numbers of seasonal workers from recruiting districts in Ireland to Britain. Each year, when their movement was at its highest level, they provided a special fourth-class passage. The Great Southern Railways (G.S.W.R.) made special concession fares available from 1879 onwards.<sup>265</sup> Although Anne O'Dowd suggests that special harvestmen's tickets were issued until 1912, special fares for seasonal workers were noted until at least the 1920s.<sup>266</sup> In the mid 1920s, advertisements in the local west of Ireland newspapers note the issue of these fares by the G.S.W.R. to stations in Great Britain or England. In 1927, the only concessions appear to have been made to 'harvesters' travelling to Scotland.<sup>267</sup> Calls for the introduction of such special fares were made in later years, especially the early 1930s.<sup>268</sup>

By the 1930s, workers also travelled to their port of departure by motor transport. At first, this was used to transport them over relatively short distances. In 1938, some workers were taken by car to Letterkenny Station.<sup>269</sup> In that year, buses and motorcars were available to convey workers from Achill and Erris to Ballina and Westport; they continued their journey by rail to their port of departure.<sup>270</sup> They also travelled by bus to reach their port of departure. Special bus services were arranged, as in 1928, when the Magnet Company had to augment its regular service in Erris during a peak period of worker movements.<sup>271</sup> In Mayo in 1942, a number of G.S.R. buses were specially chartered to transport workers from Achill to Sligo; they continued their journey on buses to Derry.<sup>272</sup> Gaffers also chartered buses to transport their squads across Ireland.<sup>273</sup>



## Sea Routes

The workers crossed from Ireland to Scotland on a number of sea routes. They embarked from a range of ports of departure in Ireland but had fewer ports of entry in Scotland.<sup>274</sup> Some workers started their sea journey by travelling to one of the larger ports by steamer, and then transferred to another. Until the early 1930s, workers travelled on the *S.S. Tartar* which sailed between Sligo and Belmullet.<sup>275</sup> These routes changed during the course of the twentieth century. By the 1890s, workers journeyed from ports in the west and northwest of Ireland. From Donegal between 1880 to 1900, squads travelled from Arranmore and Downings. One worker recalls that 'when the railways came here in 1900 they went by train from here to Derry and got the Derry boat'.<sup>276</sup> They also crossed from Derry to Glasgow (or Greenock).<sup>277</sup> From Mayo, in the first decades of the twentieth century, they embarked at Westport, Ballina and Sligo which had regular steamer services with Glasgow.<sup>278</sup> They were also conveyed by special steamers from ports in Mayo and Sligo to Glasgow. In 1914, the majority of the workers took a special boat from Westport, Ballina or Sligo to Glasgow; special boats were also referred to in 1924 and 1925.<sup>279</sup> Normal steamer services were also altered to allow the majority of the workers to travel together. For example, the sailing of the Ballina to Glasgow via Sligo Laird Line service of Tuesday 21 June 1910 was rescheduled to sail on 17 June; its route was altered to permit it to sail from Ballina to Glasgow via Achill where a large number of the potato workers were recruited. Additionally, no livestock could be transported on that sailing.<sup>280</sup>

Workers also sailed from Dublin to Glasgow. Dublin was an important port for those who went to Scotland or England. In 1905, seasonal migratory workers made 17,288 bookings through it.<sup>281</sup> It became increasingly important for those who travelled to the Scottish potato harvest, and in 1938, some such 1,300 workers departed from it.<sup>282</sup>

Although Glasgow was the most frequently used port of arrival by the workers, other Scottish ports were also made use of.<sup>283</sup> During periods of political unrest in Ireland, as in the early 1920s, they came ashore in Ayrshire. For example, in 1920, specially chartered steamers from Achill Sound transported 570 workers to Ayr; the remainder travelled from Dublin to Glasgow.<sup>284</sup> In 1923, a special boat took workers from Dublin to Ayr.<sup>285</sup> In 1934, workers also landed at Ayr.<sup>286</sup> In later years they arrived at Stranraer.

A number of autobiographical works and oral reminiscences of former workers recall the experience of the sea crossing to Scotland. The accounts of Patrick MacGill, who travelled from Derry to Glasgow in 1905, and Peadar O'Donnell who also travelled on that same route in 1918, note that the sea crossing was arduous. In *The Rat-pit*, MacGill sums up its nature through the chapter title 'A wild night'.<sup>287</sup> Both MacGill and O'Donnell travelled steerage class, as did other workers in later years.<sup>288</sup> Accommodation was crowded and uncomfortable.

MacGill remarks that workers were intermingled with cattle in the hold of the ship. Although O'Donnell does not report their presence, he also suggests that the hold was overcrowded: it was 'packed with people, boys and girls mostly, with a sprinkling of elderly and middle-aged men'.<sup>289</sup> One account from 1926 recalls that the writer was 'shocked at the lack of accommodation'.<sup>290</sup> Both MacGill and O'Donnell describe the confusion of people and luggage as well as the general disorder in the hold. MacGill records this through the behaviour of the workers, especially the males: 'most of the men were drunk; a few lying stretched on the deck were already asleep, and the rest were singing and quarrelling'.<sup>291</sup> Fighting became general: 'all along the deck and down in the steerage cabin a terrible uproar broke forth; men fastened on to one another's throats, kicking, tearing, and cursing loudly'.<sup>292</sup> O'Donnell also reports that fighting took place.<sup>293</sup> Some workers also slept during their evening crossing.<sup>294</sup> They arranged themselves into groups of friends, neighbours and squads.<sup>295</sup> Gaffers also recruited workers who had not tied themselves to a squad or enticed them away from other gaffers.<sup>296</sup>

Many of these aspects of the crossing were not noted in later accounts. When Michael King travelled third class on the 'Burnscastle' on the Dublin to Glasgow crossing in 1938, he did not witness any fighting among the potato workers. He refers to them as a 'very timid lot'.<sup>297</sup> For the 1947 season, Sean Ó Ciaráin recalls that workers were in good spirits and sang and played music. They did not drink as they were 'too tired and worn out'.<sup>298</sup>

## Patterns of Travel

The workers travelled to Scotland in a number of large groups during a short period of June. The first of these were referred to as the early or advance parties, and were employed to harvest the earliest ripening potatoes. In 1938, one of these comprised 153 workers.<sup>299</sup> These parties were followed by the bulk of the workers whose arrival in Scotland is recorded in newspapers in the west of Ireland and Ayrshire especially until the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1919, 'upwards of 1,000 men and women' arrived during one week of June.<sup>300</sup> Some 400 of them travelled in one consignment on the *S.S. Hound* from Dublin.<sup>301</sup> In 1921, 1,000 workers arrived in Girvan on two days during the same week to augment those that had already arrived; this pattern of movement is also noted in 1928.<sup>302</sup> On 13 June 1938, 300 workers travelled from Derry to Glasgow, and on the following day some 280 sailed from Dublin to Glasgow; further workers were expected to travel on later sailings.<sup>303</sup> Once the majority of the workers arrived, newspapers report that digging or harvesting work was in full swing.<sup>304</sup>



### *Transport from the Port of Arrival*

Workers were conveyed from their port of arrival in Scotland by a number of modes of transport which were also used to take them from farm to farm during the course of their employment. In the first two decades of the twentieth century special trains from Glasgow to stations in Ayrshire were arranged for them.<sup>305</sup> Workers who arrived at Ayr at the start of the 1923 harvest were taken by train to Girvan from where they dispersed throughout that district.<sup>306</sup>

Workers also travelled to the farms in Ayrshire on carts or other vehicles such as motor lorries.<sup>307</sup> Carts were particularly used where they had to be transported over short distances.<sup>308</sup> By 1947, they were conveyed from Glasgow to the harvesting districts by open topped lorries owned by potato merchants.<sup>309</sup> They were also transferred onto carts and lorries when they arrived at stations in Ayrshire.

The transportation of workers on open lorry was criticised. Workers did not always like to travel on that type of vehicle. Writing in 1926, B. Bernardo concludes that 'the way they have to travel on open, unguarded lorries also is dangerous'.<sup>310</sup> This mode of transport was only suitable if the weather was favourable: 'shifting in rainy weather on open top lorries considerably adds to their [the workers'] discomfort'.<sup>311</sup> In 1961, an observer confirms that 'in wet weather the conditions in removal are really bad'.<sup>312</sup> By the early 1960s, gaffers and Irish priests in the recruiting districts attempted to persuade potato merchants to transport workers in covered transport on long journeys instead of on the open topped lorries.<sup>313</sup>

## **7: Harvesting Work**

### *The Nature of the Harvesting Process*

The Irish workers worked with a range of specialised tools and techniques to harvest the early potato crop. These were shaped by the nature of the potato plant and its tubers at the time of harvesting: the haulm or shaw was still vigorous and the crop was still 'green'; the skins of the tubers were immature and could be easily damaged; the tubers were considered to be a perishable product. The crop was harvested by a number of harvesting systems that could easily deal with large quantities of green shaw, gently handle the tubers and quickly transport the crop to market after harvesting.

### *Harvesting Processes*

The harvesting of the early potato crop had a number of distinct stages and tasks: the digging of the crop (which could be undertaken by hand tool or mechanical means); the gathering of the potatoes from the ground into one or a number of collecting containers; the grading of the potatoes (as they were gathered from the ground or after that task had been undertaken); the preparation of the gathered potatoes for market; the transportation of the potatoes to market.

### *Work Roles*

The Irish workers – and also Scottish farm servants – had a number of tasks to undertake in harvesting the early potato crop. These were determined by the contracts used between farmers and potato merchants to grow, harvest and market the crop. Some Scottish farm servants drove the digger or harvesting implement; others transported the potatoes from the harvest field. The Irish workers essentially formed the harvesting labour force. They undertook a number of tasks, most of which were undertaken by a specific sex of worker; some of them, such as the digging with the graip (see later in chapter) or gathering potatoes from the ground, could also be carried out by both sexes. The physical strength required to undertake them determined who would undertake them. Women were generally given the less physically demanding ones such as gathering the potatoes from the ground into baskets. Males had ones that demanded the greatest strength: timming or emptying baskets of potatoes gathered by the gatherers, loading potatoes onto carts or lorries that were to be taken to market.<sup>314</sup> Males also usually worked with the graip, though some women, especially the stronger and more experienced girls also undertook this task and could be very skilled at the work.<sup>315</sup> These physically demanding tasks also had the highest status. Some squad members could be



promoted to one of them, though others would not receive this promotion.<sup>316</sup> As harvesting tools and techniques altered throughout the twentieth century and during the course of a season (mechanical implements might be employed to undertake some of the later harvesting work), workers could switch roles and their status in the harvesting field.<sup>317</sup>



**Illus. 3: Girvan potato harvesters.**

The harvesting squad had a set number of workers to undertake this range of tasks. In 1934, when the crop was to be harvested by hand tool, a 'typical' Irish squad of 30 workers comprised 12 graips (a pair of workers, one to dig the crop, the other to gather the tubers that had been uncovered from the drill), two timmers, two persons to cover barrels and load carts, one to supervise the seconds or small potatoes, one to load at the station, and the gaffer.<sup>318</sup> Where crops were harvested by mechanical implement, the largest percentage of workers on a squad gathered potatoes from the ground.

### *Harvesting Tools and Techniques*

A number of harvesting tools and implements were utilised either by the Irish workers or the Scottish farm servants to dig or uncover the early potato crop from the drill in which it grew. Even until well into the twentieth century, hand tools continued to play an important role in harvesting the early potato crop in

Ayrshire. The potato graip or fork was a short-shafted graip with three or four prongs which were flattened to prevent the tubers from being damaged.<sup>319</sup> Although widespread throughout Scotland in the mid nineteenth century, its use became more confined and its operation became largely confined to dealing with early crops. By 1924, James A. S. Watson and James A. More could point out that 'owing to the great cost it only pays to hand dig first early crops that command a high price'.<sup>320</sup> Even after that date, it continued to be extensively used in Ayrshire. As late as 1951, an account of the parish of West Kilbride remarks that 'digging is mostly by hand'.<sup>321</sup> Evidence also suggests that it continued to be employed until at least the late 1950s.<sup>322</sup> This tool was closely associated with the Irish workers who also largely worked with it. It was a labour-intensive method of harvesting the crop.<sup>323</sup> In 1891, Henry Stephens comments that it was 'rather severe work' to use it efficiently.<sup>324</sup> His views are shared by other observers, including the potato workers themselves.<sup>325</sup>

A number of implements were used to harvest the early potato crop. The potato plough was the earliest one and had been advocated for 'raising potatoes in quantities' in 1776.<sup>326</sup> Although it was little employed to deal with the maincrop crops by the mid twentieth century, it continued to be utilised to harvest early potatoes in Ayrshire and other parts of Britain in 1968.<sup>327</sup> The spinner, the first mechanical implement which had moving parts, was quickly adopted throughout potato growing districts in Scotland from the 1890s onwards. By 1918, it was being adopted in Ayrshire in increasing numbers, thereby reducing the need to employ experienced potato workers.<sup>328</sup> By 1944, it had become the most widely utilised implement for harvesting the potato crop in Scotland.<sup>329</sup> However, its use declined during the second half of the twentieth century when another implement, the elevator digger, became more widely adopted. Although this latter digger was used in relatively small numbers in 1944, it became the most widely utilised implement in Scotland until it was superseded by the complete potato harvester or mechanical harvester.

The Potato Marketing Board surveyed the use of these implements throughout Britain during the early potato harvest in 1968. In Scotland, this investigation surveyed harvesting techniques on 57 farms in Ayrshire and Wigtownshire and 16 farms in the Lothians. It finds that the plough was the least used implement in both these areas of Scotland and was not employed in the Lothians (Table 7). Other implements were used to varying extents. In Ayrshire, the spinner was the most widely utilised one, and harvested 51% of the crop acreage; nationally this figure was only 19% of the total crop. The elevator digger was also widespread, and harvested 43% of the crop. This figure was also higher than the national statistic of 37% for all areas that were surveyed. A total of 97% of the farms surveyed in Ayrshire and Wigtownshire harvested their early crops with an implement or mechanical harvester; the rest utilised the potato plough.<sup>330</sup>



**Table 7: Types of Harvesting Machinery Used in South-West Scotland, the Lothians and Britain**

District	Number of farms surveyed	Percentage of district acreage lifted by:			
		Mechanical harvester	Elevator digger	Spinner	Plough
South-west Scotland	57	3	43	51	3
Lothians	16	69	28	8	0
All districts	374	42	37	19	2

Source: Potato Marketing Board, *Survey of Early Potatoes 1968* (Cowley, 1970), p. 10.

*Arranging the Workers on the Harvesting Field*

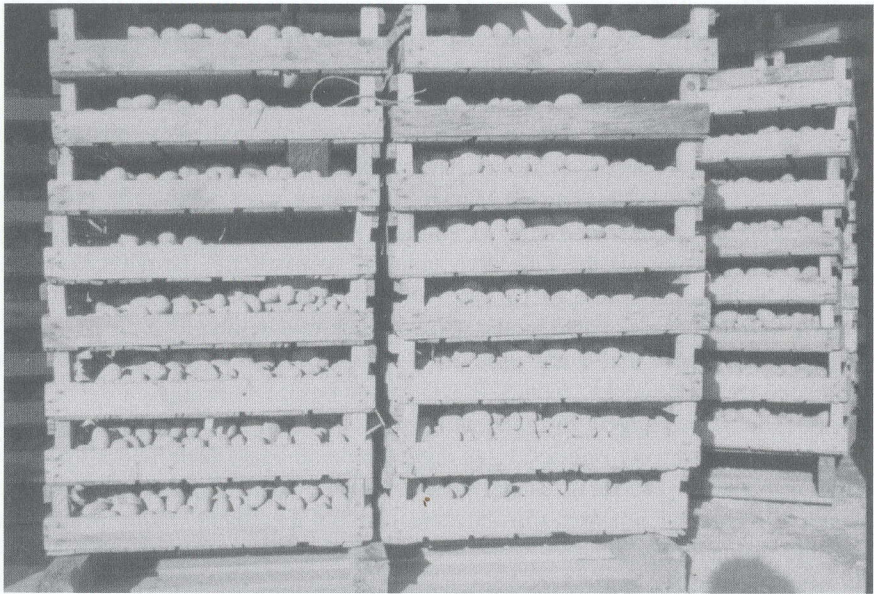
The use of tools and implements affected the way the early potato crop was dug and the way the Irish workers were organised on the harvesting field. When the crop was harvested by the graip, workers started their digging and gathering activities at one end of the field and moved up the length of the drill to the other end. In order that their work could take place systematically and at a steady speed, they were regulated by the use of a foregraip or first digger who could be either a male or a female worker.<sup>331</sup> Workers were arranged in ‘graips’ or pairs. A gatherer faced a digger and moved backwards, on their knees, towards them as they uncovered the potatoes from the drill.<sup>332</sup>

This method of arranging the gatherers was not used when crops were harvested with a mechanical implement. The drills of potatoes were marked into sections of equal length, indicated by sticks or branches, which identified where each gatherer’s work started and finished. These were called stents. Their length varied according to the length of the drill, the number of gatherers employed and allocated to each one (usually this was one or two). Shorter stents were preferred as workers gathered for a short period of time and had frequent rests. Workers adopted a number of positions to gather the potatoes. Sean Ó Ciaráin observes that they were ‘often on their knees when their back could stand it no longer’.<sup>333</sup>

*Collecting Containers*

The Irish workers gathered the potatoes into a range of containers which had a number of functions. They were primarily used to hold potatoes that were gathered from the ground. The basket was the most common container that was used for this purpose. Throughout Britain in 1968, the Potato Marketing Board observes that 84% of the early potato crop was gathered into it; a further 13% was placed into a bucket.<sup>334</sup> For the 1905 harvest at Rothesay, Patrick MacGill notes the use of ‘basin-shaped wicker baskets without handles’.<sup>335</sup> At this time and until after

the Second World War, they were commonly made of thin strips or spails of wood such as willow, hazel and oak, woven together with a thick rim around the top.<sup>336</sup> They were replaced by ones made of wire mesh, and then by the 1970s, others made of plastic. Their shape and construction materials affected the work of the gatherers. Wicker and spail baskets became heavy when soil adhered to them. Patrick MacGill describes that the workers had to drag them across the ground when they moved them.<sup>337</sup> He remarks that ‘the baskets which they hauled after them were cased in clay soil to the depth of several inches, and sometimes when emptied of potatoes a basket weighed over two stone.’<sup>338</sup> These also made the task of the barreller more difficult to undertake.



**Illus. 4: Seed potatoes at Morriston, Kirkoswald parish.**  
[Photo October 1987.]

Gatherers could gather the potatoes into a number of baskets. For the 1905 harvest at Rothesay, they gathered into two baskets.<sup>339</sup> This allowed them to grade or sort the potatoes as they collected them: the sound or ware potatoes were placed into one basket and the waste, brock (damaged or very small potatoes) or seconds into another.<sup>340</sup> Potatoes were also separated if seed was being taken from a crop: ware potatoes were collected into one basket and seed into another.<sup>341</sup>



Workers did not, however, always grade the potatoes as they gathered. They could be graded after they were gathered from the ground. In this case, the gatherers worked with one basket.<sup>342</sup> Ware potatoes that were to be taken to market could be gathered into one basket and the brock and small potatoes were left on the field to be collected after it was cleared.<sup>343</sup> Grading could also be undertaken by mechanical graders. Henry Stephens records the use of portable graders or riddlers for harvesting first early potatoes for the London market in 1871 and 1891.<sup>344</sup> The introduction of electric sorting or grading machines in Ayrshire in 1961 made the need to manually separate potatoes redundant.<sup>345</sup>

Potatoes that had been gathered into baskets could then be placed in barrels that held 1.5 cwt (hundredweights or 168 lbs) of potatoes. These had one of two functions. They acted as a measuring device: the potatoes were placed in the barrel and were measured or weighed, and then transferred from it into another container to be taken to market.<sup>346</sup> They could also be used to take the potatoes to market. This provided an excellent way of preventing the tubers from rubbing and damaging their skins during transit.<sup>347</sup> Barrels are referred to in numerous accounts of the early potato harvest. Although Henry Stephens does not note them until 1890, they are recorded by Patrick MacGill for taking ware potatoes to market in 1905.<sup>348</sup> John S. Stevenson, Balig, Ballantrae, recalls that prior to 1939 they were used to convey all the new crop potatoes to market.<sup>349</sup> Oral recollections suggest that they continued to be used until at least 1950.<sup>350</sup> Consignments of potatoes were sometimes noted by the number of barrels in them.<sup>351</sup>

As containers that were used to take the crop to market, barrels were superseded by potato sacks. John S. Stevenson of Balig recalls that by 1953 all early potatoes were bagged for transport to market.<sup>352</sup> The first sacks were made of hessian or jute and were referred to as lugged hessian bags; each held a hundred-weight of potatoes (112 lbs).<sup>353</sup> They were replaced by paper bags which held half a hundred-weight of potatoes (56 lbs) and had the merchants' name printed on them and displayed the identity 'Ayrshire potatoes'.<sup>354</sup> These appear to have been first used in Ayrshire in 1961.<sup>355</sup> They had the advantage of keeping the potatoes fresher than the hessian sacks did.<sup>356</sup> When they were first introduced, shopkeepers would not readily accept them as they had to pay for their additional cost; lorry men preferred the older hessian bags as they were easier to handle.<sup>357</sup> Nevertheless, another report suggests that their introduction was met with approval.<sup>358</sup> By 1968, they were widely utilised throughout Britain for holding first early potatoes that were sent to market. As the Potato Marketing Board concludes in that year: 'hand-lifted crops were usually picked into baskets and transferred to bags which were loaded into a trailer or lorry'.<sup>359</sup>

### *Preparing the Gathered Potatoes for Market*

After the potatoes were gathered, they were made ready for dispatch to market. As earlier mentioned, they were graded or sorted and were weighed.<sup>360</sup> Some further preparations were made. When the crop was transported to market by barrel, shaws or haulm was placed on the top of them which signified that their contents had been freshly harvested; they also kept the sunlight off the potatoes at the top of the barrel and ensured that they did not turn green or dehydrate.



Illus. 5: Girls gathering potatoes.

### *Experiences of Gathering the Crop*

A number of autobiographical works and oral reminiscences recall the experiences of the workers in harvesting the early potato crop in Ayrshire. The work experience was affected by the weather. As the haulm or shaws of the Epicure – the most widely cultivated first early potato variety – were strong and bushy, they became heavy with rainwater and soaked the workers who came into contact with them.<sup>361</sup> Peadar O'Donnell records that the tall shaws dripping with rain 'swished round the legs about the thighs' of the diggers.<sup>362</sup> Digging with the graip during or after inclement weather or heavy dew could be uncomfortable. One worker notes that this task could become 'very awkward'.<sup>363</sup> As the soil became heavy with moisture, the digging work required more effort to undertake. Gatherers also had to keep the potatoes clean from excess soil that adhered to them (dirty samples were



not regarded to be attractive). As soil accumulated on their baskets, they became heavier and more difficult to manoeuvre.<sup>364</sup>



**Illus. 6: Tattie howking at Springbank, Tarbolton parish.**

For the 1905 harvesting season, Patrick MacGill suggests the harshness of the gathering work, especially for the women gatherers. One of the workers on Micky's Jim's squad describes the gathering as 'the devil's job'.<sup>365</sup> That work is seen in terms of physical hardship: 'the job, bad enough for men, was killing for women'.<sup>366</sup> For him, 'the strain on the women's arms must have been terrible'.<sup>367</sup> Peadar O'Donnell also records the physical nature of the work and the strain that it had on the workers:

Red Charlie's brother was in the front group; his niece was gathering for him. They led the field. Next to them was a neighbour boy, who would burst his heart rather than give in to say that any man ever passed him out in a day's digging of potatoes. After him came Ellen Sally, her teeth bare and buried in her upper lip and a twisted smile on her face. Brigid Gallagher was as full of spirit as the next and she tore off after the field – little Annie Nellie Nancy on her knees wrestling with the shaws, shaking them and gathering the bigger-sized potatoes into her basket. Soon there was not a word in the field; there was an occasional grunt; now and then a gasp. Some digger said something to a gatherer and a sob was heard. After it came a general titter. The merchant and the gaffer stood back while helter skelter up the field tore the grunting workers. At nine the whistle went. Brigid Gallagher sank on her

knees in the mouth of her drill. Annie Nellie Nancy stretched out flat on her face beside her basket. Brigid had to help her to her feet.<sup>368</sup>

Younger members of the squad especially felt the strain of the work: 'some of them was maybe a year or two ahead of me and they were well used to it, you know. But I was only just what they called the 'Grecian', the learner'.<sup>369</sup> The gathering work was also monotonous. One worker notes that 'the machines came in, the diggers, and all you had to do was gather after the digger and that was day after day, that was your work. There was nothing else'.<sup>370</sup>

### *Transporting the Crop to Market*

A number of arrangements were made to transport the potato crop to market. In the 1930s and 1940s, sacks (or barrels) were loaded onto a trailer and then taken to a loading area at the side of the field where they were then transferred onto a lorry.<sup>371</sup>

Contracts between potato merchants and farmers for harvesting the potato crop stipulate that the farmer was responsible for carting the potatoes to a railway station.<sup>372</sup> On farms that were located at a distance from a railway station and grew large acreages of crop, this work was a large undertaking. Until the Turnberry Railway was opened, Mr Dunlop of Morriston had to undertake this work over a distance of about five miles to Maybole.<sup>373</sup> Some growers hired 40 or 50 carts from neighbouring farmers to fulfill their part of the contract.<sup>374</sup> Motor lorries were extensively used to convey potatoes to the railway station in 1921. In the following year in Girvan, these were 'a feature of our streets' during the harvest.<sup>375</sup> At Girvan Station potatoes were dispatched by special trains.<sup>376</sup>

From the mid 1940s onwards, road transport increased at the expense of rail transport. By 1948, at least 50% of the potato crop was transported by road.<sup>377</sup> Two years later, much of the crop was hauled by road and in 1951 the great bulk of it was conveyed in this way.<sup>378</sup> At this time, road transport had a number of advantages over rail: the potatoes did not have to be loaded onto railway wagons and unloaded at their destination to be conveyed by road; the crop was handled fewer times; road transport was a faster means of transportation and had more favourable haulage rates.<sup>379</sup>

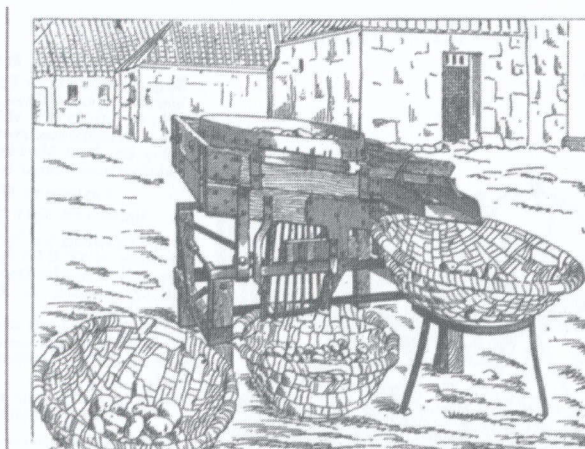
### *Mechanisation of the Early Potato Harvest*

Although the early potato crop in Ayrshire was harvested by a large labour force throughout much of the period of this survey, the mechanical or complete harvester made that need redundant.<sup>380</sup> By the early 1960s, a number of machines were at work in the county. In 1963, Chapelhill Farm, which customarily employed Irish workers, experimented with a complete harvester. However, it was only used for two years.<sup>381</sup> The *Farming News and North British Agriculturist* reported that



the advent of machine lifting in the county took place in 1966, when six or eight machines were reported to be at work in the Girvan area.<sup>382</sup> Two years later, when the Potato Marketing Board undertook its survey of harvesting techniques for the early potato crop, that harvester was 'hardly-used' in south-west Scotland (Ayrshire and Wigtownshire) and only dealt with 3% of the crop, compared to some 40% of the acreage throughout Britain. The corresponding figure for south-west England was 57%; for the Lothians it was 69%.<sup>383</sup> This pattern highlights that farmers and potato merchants in Ayrshire still preferred to harvest the crop with more traditional implements.<sup>384</sup> A number of factors contributed to the low rate of adoption in this area. Mechanical harvesting had a lower output than harvesting with a squad. While the harvester could deal with around two acres per day, a squad of Irish workers could dig three.<sup>385</sup> As there was an extensive acreage of crop to be dealt with, harvesters could not quickly and easily deal with these. Furthermore, Irish and local workers continued to be available in sufficient numbers to provide a pool of harvest labour.

Although detailed statistics of the use of the complete harvester are not available for Ayrshire in following years, others collected by the Potato Marketing Board in 1980, show that the complete harvester was employed on farms that had over 10 acres of early crop in Britain. However, that implement harvested only a relatively small proportion of the crop, some 420 acres of the 6,664 acres surveyed in Scotland, or some 6.3% of the total crop.<sup>386</sup> In 1980, the X-ray harvester, which separated potatoes from stones, soil, shaws and other trash using X-ray techniques, was the most frequently used type of harvester noted in the survey. Some 283 acres of crop were harvested by it; the corresponding figure for the two row self propelled harvester was 137 acres. Each of these harvesters had a distinct pattern of use. The X-ray harvester was most frequently used to harvest crops that had between 10 and 25 acres of crop; 262 acres were harvested with this machine in this size of unit. On farms that had between 25 and 50 hectares of crop, only 21 hectares were harvested with this machine. This machine was not used in any other size group. The self-propelled harvester had a wider spread of use on farms. It was also most frequently used on holdings that had between 10 and 25 hectares. In this category, it was employed to harvest 113 hectares. It was also utilised on the largest farms that had over 50 hectares of crop; this type of machine harvested some 24 hectares.<sup>387</sup>



A NEW POTATO DRESSER.

## A NEW POTATO DRESSER.

PATENTED BY JOHN H. WALLACE, THE BRAKE, STRAVITHE, E.S.O., TYPE.

THIS potato dressing machine is designed to separate and dress the seed and small at the time of dressing the potatoes for the market, while equal or better facility is given to pick out diseased and bad potatoes, as is the usual practice. A clear advantage in this is, that the whole dressing is completed at one process, and if dressing has to be stopped by bad weather the potatoes are all dressed and cleaned in four sorts—viz., ware, seed, chate, and greenends—all being free of earth. One machine is wanted for each worked with ordinary riddle, and therefore the same number of workers will be required as formerly. The worker uses the ordinary hand riddle, which, however, may be rested on the top of the machine and shaken with the machine, while it may also be shaken in the usual way. The bad potatoes are picked out and thrown aside as usual, and green ends fit for seed can be thrown into a scull or be let on one side; and the market potatoes are thrown into a cart or put into a bag as usual. The seed riddle is partly exposed, and by removing the hand riddle can be fully exposed and any bad potatoes picked out of seed. Only earth and soil is removed from the small, but these will be ready for driving to shed for cattle food, and can be put directly into a cart if desired. One boy or woman will easily carry away the seed, small and green ends potatoes from two machines.

It is expected from preliminary trials that workers will take kindly to the machine, because it will avoid the heavy lifting of hand-barrows, and the subsequent dressing of seed from the small, which is often a dirty and disagreeable job.

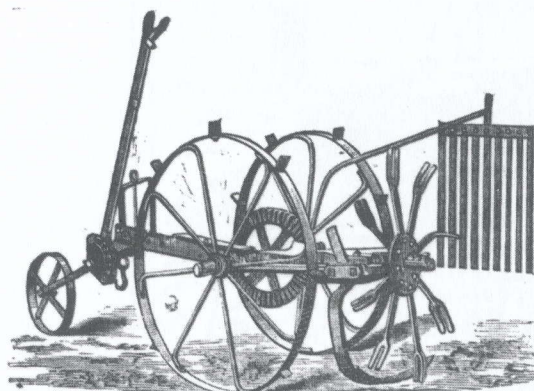
The dressing machines are made right and left handed, and when used in pairs there should be one right and the other left handed. The right handed machine has its highest corner on the workman's right hand, with shoots to left, and the left handed machine has its highest corner to workman's left hand, with shoots to right. The two machines forming a pair will stand on side of pit, and when two pairs are in use the second pair can stand on opposite side of pit, provided carts can get access for loading, and if not, the second pair will be at the other end of pit, or at another opening in pit. It is advantageous to have about six yards between pits, so that carts can get access to pits on both sides, and so two pairs of machines can be worked at one end. It greatly eases shovelling to remove the potatoes from the pits in the same order as they were pitted. The highest

men are employed, two pairs horses are standing side half a day for every 50 tons of market potatoes dressed, that is, 10 half days for crop of 200 tons, or 5 full days of two pairs horses, which may be taken at 10s per pair per day, which will represent 100s, or £5. This, added to £5 6s 8d, gives, on average a crop of 200 tons, a saving of £10 6s 8d, while 5 days have been made available for other work.

Illus. 7: New potato dresser. [*Scottish Farmer*, July 1900.]



## NEW POTATO-DIGGING MACHINE.



A. POLLOCK, MAUCHLINE,  
Begg to intimate to Farmers, Potato  
Merchants, and Others, that he is now  
able to Supply this MACHINE, and  
can with confidence recommend it for  
being the Best Machine for Raising  
Potatoes ever offered to the Public.

PERFECT IN WORK,  
LIGHT AND EASY TO DRAW.

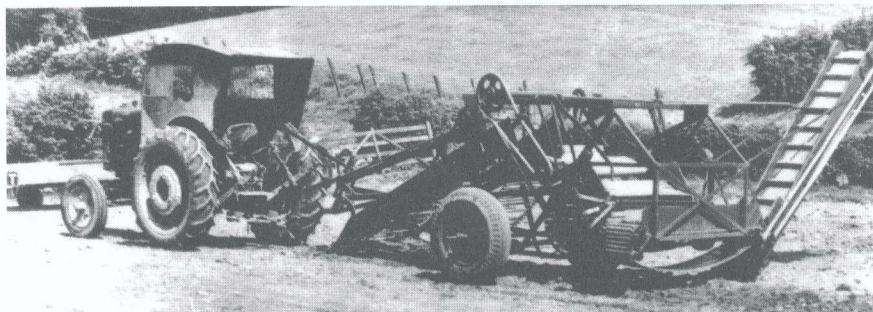
A. POLLOCK has Invented a Much  
LIGHTER MACHINE, with Broad-  
Rimmed Wrought Iron Wheels, ad-  
mirably adapted for Moss Land or  
Light Soil.

The Road Wheels are all made of  
Wrought Iron this season. Carriage  
paid to all Railway Stations in Scot-  
land.

Price Lists and Testimonials Post Free  
on application.

Mauchline, 5th September 1877.

Illus. 8: New potato digging machine.  
[*North British Agriculturist*, 19th September 1877.]



Illus. 9: Potato harvester.  
[Photo reproduced by permission of the Museum of Scotland.]

## 8: Employment Conditions

*Hours of Employment: Number of Hours*

During the twentieth century, the working day for the Irish potato workers became shorter, as it did for other agricultural workers. In 1905, it lasted 10 hours, and the working week was a six day one, from Monday to Saturday. By 1935, the working day from Monday to Friday, lasted 9 hours; on a Saturday it was 5 hours.<sup>388</sup> However, the workers did not always have steady work hours (see Appendix 2). They had to work until they filled all the orders for the crop which the potato merchant had received from his customers. Patrick MacGill records that as potatoes were urgently required for market when Micky's Jim's squad arrived at Rothesay, in a June afternoon in 1905, it had to immediately start harvesting work.<sup>389</sup> When there was a heavy demand of potatoes, as in Girvan in 1938, workers were employed on overtime hours.<sup>390</sup> If there was a high demand for potatoes as in the early part of the season, they were also required to harvest during inclement weather; in the latter part of the harvesting season they did not work in such conditions.<sup>391</sup> A writer in the *Irish Independent* considers that it was a 'pitiable sight' to see them working in the fields on wet days.<sup>392</sup> Intermittent periods of rain caused broken time, as did poor potato markets. Workers could be laid off their work when the potato trade was slack. In late June 1921, when the potato market was overloaded with supplies, many squads were put onto half time.<sup>393</sup> In 1925, when the potato crop was a low-yielding one and the trade was in a precarious state, the *Ayr Advertiser* considers that 'there will be broken time among the "tattie diggers"', and in consequence a good deal of satisfaction'.<sup>394</sup> When the potato market was glutted on 1 August 1947, the *Farming News and North British Agriculturist* observes that many squads had been 'idle in recent days'.<sup>395</sup> By 20 June of the 1952 harvest, when large quantities of foreign potatoes and potatoes from Cornwall and Pembrokeshire had come onto the market, most squads had spent only four or five hours each day undertaking harvest work.<sup>396</sup> During the 1956 season when the Ayrshire market had to compete with potatoes from Cyprus, merchants cut their price by £12 per ton and suspended their digging for one day. As a result, 1,500 workers were reported to be 'sitting idle'.<sup>397</sup>

Poor or low yielding crops required fewer man-hours and workers to harvest. In 1921, merchants feared that the low yielding crop would not provide sufficient work for their squads and they would have to lay them off.<sup>398</sup> Merchants were reluctant to continue harvesting operations if the crop did not bulk out satisfactorily, or if the cost of the tubers made that work uneconomical.<sup>399</sup> Work hours were also affected by harvesting output. If the working pace was pushed too



hard, the potato market could become oversupplied and prices were consequently reduced. An oversupply of harvesting labour also affected the amount of work that was available. As Peadar O'Donnell clearly points out: 'the over-crowding of the potato-fields meant half-time'.<sup>400</sup>

Just as their working hours were shaped by the state of the potato market and the harvesting season, so too was the structure of the working day. Throughout much of the twentieth century, the workers started their employment at 4 o'clock in the morning. This allowed the potatoes to be transported to market in time for it opening.<sup>401</sup> However, in early growing districts located away from major transport links, the work day started at an earlier hour. On Arran in the 1930s, workers rose at 2 o'clock in the morning so that the potatoes could be delivered to the ferry at 11 o'clock for onward transport to the Glasgow market.<sup>402</sup> In 1918, one report also suggests that when a special consignment was sent to market, workers rose at 2 o'clock and 3 o'clock in the morning.<sup>403</sup>

### *Wages and Wage Rates*

The rate of remuneration paid to the Irish potato workers was lower than for other Irish migratory seasonal workers who undertook general agricultural work or sugar beet harvesting.<sup>404</sup> Some observers were critical of their wage rate and consider that 'the average wage is not high'.<sup>405</sup> This level was caused by a number of factors: the work at the potato harvest was considered to be physically easier to undertake than other general seasonal agricultural work; the largest percentage of the workers were women and teenagers who were traditionally paid lower wage rates than males; as part of their wages, workers received a range of perquisites or payment in kind.<sup>406</sup>

### *Payment in Cash*

The Irish workers were paid in cash at the end of the working week. Payment was made through a number of systems. Workers were remunerated for the time they spent working rather than the amount of work they undertook (piece-work). They were also given an upstanding wage or a set rate per hour. A range of these were used within a squad and were associated with specific work tasks (Table 8). Like other casual and seasonal workers in Scottish agriculture, squad members who gathered the crop or dug it with the graip, were paid by the hour, and only received a wage for the time they spent at work in the field. Thus, inclement weather, poor potato markets or periods of illness, and shifting time when they moved their employment from farm to farm, affected their wage. The effect of this latter cause was reported to considerably lessen their overall wage.<sup>407</sup> These workers did not, therefore, receive a steady wage or a minimum one until provision was made for it in wages legislation (see below). When the crop was harvested

with the graip, workers were paid according to the graip, a digger and a gatherer. Some reports state that the two workers in a graip shared that wage, but others suggest that the digger could receive a higher rate than the gatherer. The foregraip received a higher wage than the other graips which amounted to about five shillings per week in the 1930s.<sup>408</sup> When the crop was harvested by mechanical harvester – for example the spinner of elevator digger – the wage rate given to gatherers was lower than that for other squad members.

Only a few members of the squad received an upstanding wage, and thus a steady income. Males who undertook a range of specialised tasks, such as riddling and barrelling, the most physically demanding tasks on the harvest field, received this wage. Of all the workers, the gaffer received the highest wage. A report from 1961 suggests that he, his family, and some 'key' workers 'do fairly well'.<sup>409</sup>



**Table 8: Wage Rates for Squads of Irish Migratory Potato Workers, 1904 to 1961**

Year	Category of workers			
	Diggers and gatherers	Barrel men	Riddlers	Gaffers
1904	Between 18s and 21s	20s per per week	Between 25s and 35s	
1905	5s per graip; 2s to 2s 6d per worker	Between 18s and 21s per week	Between 26s to 30s	
1909	2s to 2s 6d per worker			
1913	4s to 6s per pair (25s to 30s per week) average wage 5s 6d per graip			
1919	5s 6d per day or 11s graip			
1923	7s 6d per graip			
1933	6d (max) an hour when working 6d to 40s per week	27s 6d to 32s 6d 30s per week	27s	
1934	6d an hour when working			45s to 50s per week
1936	4s 2d a day per worker			
1961	girls paid £6 12s 0d per week; males average £8 to £9			

Source: PP 1906, CXXXIII, Cd. 2865, p. 12; PP 1909, CII, Cd. 4919, p. 7; PP 1906, CXXXIII, Cd. 2865, p. 12; PP 1906, CXXXIII, Cd. 2865, p. 12; PP 1909, CII, Cd. 4919, p. 7; PP 1914, XCVIII, Cd. 7418, p. 7; *Ayr Advertiser*, 26 June 1913; *Scottish Farmer*, 14 July 1923; *Glasgow Herald*, 22 June 1920; National Archives of Scotland, HH1/569 (Seasonal Inflow. Irish Immigration), Letter from The Glasgow and West of Scotland Potato Trade Association, not dated, but relates to 1933; HH1/569, '(e) Lifting of Crops Sold by the Acre'; AF59/51, Evidence of Professor Alexander Gray; National Archives of Ireland, B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Housing Conditions of Potato Workers in Scotland'.

Wage rates were traditionally agreed between merchants and gaffers. From 1937, they also became subject to the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) (Scotland) Act which laid down a minimum wage rate; employers could pay a rate above that stipulated minimum.<sup>410</sup> Merchants distributed the wages to the Irish workers in one of two ways. The oldest, and most widely utilised, system was the payment of the bulk wage: the merchant gave the gaffer the wages for all of his squad members

which he then distributed to them.<sup>411</sup> However, observers and the workers themselves criticised this method of payment as they believed that the gaffers exploited their squads. They consider that they could submit false claims of the work that had been undertaken and in doing so, receive additional money from the potato merchant. For example, if a gaffer's squad completed the potato orders in a shorter time than he anticipated, he could state that his squad took longer to undertake that work than it actually did; the gaffer pocketed the difference in wages.<sup>412</sup> Where a merchant's fieldsman did not undertake a head count (count the number of workers employed on the field), the gaffer could claim that workers who were sick or unable to work were actually employed, and then keep their wages. A more modern, but less well used, method of payment was for the merchants to give the wages directly to each individual worker.<sup>413</sup> This was also criticised as any errors in counting the wages could not be proven.

### Perquisites

In addition to a cash wage, Irish workers were given a number of perquisites which also formed part of the wage given to farm servants and other seasonal and casual workers in Scottish agriculture. In Ayrshire, as throughout the other employment districts, these included housing, bedding materials (hay, straw and blankets), coal for cooking and heating and a supply of potatoes for eating. During the course of their work, they had transport from farm to farm and district to district. These perquisites were supplied free of charge by potato merchants and farmers on whose farms the workers were employed. However, in 1961, one report records that these were deducted from the workers' wages at the rate of 13s per week for male workers and 3d per hour for female workers. This sum was made up of 3s for potatoes and 10s for bothy accommodation which included 'attendance, furnishings, beds, bedding, fire and light'.<sup>414</sup> Deductions were also reported in the early 1970s after gaffers started to act as independent labour contractors for the potato merchants.<sup>415</sup> Some reports suggest that workers had their travel expenses to Scotland paid for them, though others report that this could be deducted from their wages after they started their employment. This would have been given by the potato merchant.

These perquisites allowed the workers to have few living costs during the harvesting season. As it gave them a 'considerable margin' for saving, they could accumulate relatively large sums of money.<sup>416</sup> In 1900, the *North British Agriculturist* remarks on that sum, and notes that 'it is surprising the amount of money remitted through the post office to friends in Ireland'.<sup>417</sup> In 1906, £7 or £8 was regarded to be 'a fair average saving' during the course of a harvesting season.<sup>418</sup> In 1927, a family group could accumulate between £50 and £60 during a season.<sup>419</sup> By 1962, individual workers saved around £70; some could save as much as £110 to £125 during a season.<sup>420</sup>



## 9: Accommodation

### *Methods of Accommodating the Irish Workers*

In the late nineteenth century, the Irish potato workers lived in towns and villages located near to the farms where they undertook their harvesting work. In 1903, Mr Hannah of Girvan Mains remarks that this arrangement did not suit them' as this 'took too much of their wages'; he offered them accommodation at his farm steading.<sup>421</sup> This new arrangement had a number of advantages. For the workers, it provided an inexpensive method of accommodation. It offered an easy and convenient method to house the large numbers of workers. As an observer points out: in 'most places, it would be impossible to get room for the large number employed unless this was done - the farms being too far away from any town or village'.<sup>422</sup> This practice became widely adopted. By 1910, it was regarded to be 'primarily a concession to the merchant on the part of the farmer, the latter merely allowing the diggers to find what accommodation they could in his out-buildings. At the present time, however, it has come to be considered a right'.<sup>423</sup> It continued to be used throughout the twentieth century and in all areas of Lowland Scotland where the Irish workers were employed.

### *Early Evidence of the Accommodation*

Evidence of this accommodation in Ayrshire is found in the attempts to improve it, both locally and nationally in Scotland and also in Ireland. In Scotland, the first detailed reference to it is made in 1897 when Dr John McVail, Medical Officer of Health for the Counties of Stirling and Dumbarton, investigated an outbreak of enteric fever at a squad on a farm in western Stirlingshire.<sup>424</sup> He undertook further investigations during the latter part of that harvesting season and in the following ones.<sup>425</sup> His early work was undertaken under his own initiative, but his later activities, especially after 1907, formed part of national schemes to investigate and improve the accommodation. James Grierson, a land agent from Achill Island, undertook a further survey after some of his tenants complained to him about its standard. His report provides the earliest detailed account of that accommodation in Ayrshire.<sup>426</sup> Patrick MacGill's autobiographical works, *Children of the Dead End* and *The Rat-pit*, published in 1914 and 1915 respectively, describe the accommodation on a farm in Rothesay during the 1905 harvest.<sup>427</sup>

### *Early Reports of the Accommodation*

James Grierson's report reveals much evidence on the nature of the accommodation for the Irish workers in Ayrshire. Many aspects of his report were



later reinforced by Patrick MacGill's account.<sup>428</sup> Grierson notes that the practice of accommodating workers at the farm steading was universal.<sup>429</sup> However, he only records the use of byres and pigsties as types of buildings used as housing. These outbuildings were not always suitable to provide accommodation for humans: they were not always wind and watertight and the workers and their bedding could become soaked during periods of inclement weather. Premises could be badly ventilated. They were not always cleared out or whitewashed well in advance of the arrival of the workers and cattle could be removed shortly beforehand; at one farm at West Kilbride the workers were accommodated alongside horses. Facilities were usually basic. Male and female workers did not always have separate sleeping apartments. In no case did Grierson hear of sanitary facilities being provided. Workers undertook their cooking and drying of clothes on fires which were usually located in the open air, sometimes at a distance from the accommodation. Few furnishings were made available.<sup>430</sup> For Grierson, the farmers did not generally appear to take much trouble over the arrangements though at some farms 'some trouble' was taken.

Grierson concludes that the accommodation of the Irish workers was unsatisfactory: 'Speaking generally, I concluded it was very defective in several respects, and making every allowance for the farmers difficulties, there is great need for improvement.'<sup>431</sup> He makes a number of recommendations that would improve it and the basic comfort of the workers. Importantly, he observes that as the workers were employed each year, some 'permanent' arrangement should be made to provide accommodation for them. He believes that many of the defects could be remedied without great expenditure.

### *Further Surveys*

In the mid 1900s, further surveys in Ayrshire were conducted as part of wider efforts to survey the accommodation of the potato workers throughout their area of employment. In 1906, Margaret Irwin, General Secretary of the Scottish Council for Women's Trades and Union for the Abolition of Sweating, was instructed to undertake an enquiry into it to highlight its 'appalling' condition.<sup>432</sup> Her report, which describes conditions on eight farms in the Lothians, was sent to John Sinclair, Secretary of State for Scotland.<sup>433</sup> That report led the Local Government Board for Scotland (L.G.B.S.) to write, in April 1907, to local authority sanitary inspectors in areas where seasonal potato workers were employed. It instructed them to survey the accommodation and take steps to improve it.<sup>434</sup>

The L.G.B.S. survey provides the first systematically gathered information on the accommodation of potato workers throughout nine counties of Scotland. In Ayrshire, it describes conditions on over 70 farms. Some of these had been earlier noted by both Grierson and MacGill. As in other counties, workers were

accommodated in a number of types of farm outbuildings. These included barns, granaries, outhouses, byres, stables and empty houses.<sup>435</sup> A few specially erected buildings were also available. These included two houses specially built for the workers and huts.<sup>436</sup> A sufficient amount of accommodation was generally supplied, though in several cases this was insufficient. Buildings were fairly well ventilated and there was little, if any, overcrowding.<sup>437</sup> The County Medical Officer notes that 'considerable improvement had been made during the last 4 or 5 years in the housing of these workers'.<sup>438</sup>

Following this survey, the L.G.B.S. undertook a range of action which it considered would improve the accommodation for the potato workers. It recommends that some types of buildings, such as loose boxes, should be prohibited for that use and that certain facilities should be provided to a specific standard. It advocates that administrative arrangements should be introduced to inspect the accommodation. At the beginning of July each year, it suggests, a circular letter should be sent to every farmer and all potato merchants who employed and accommodated potato workers, intimating that the accommodation would be inspected and asking when the workers were to be accommodated.

Although it is not known if the L.G.B.S. issued this letter, it wrote to a number of local authorities to encourage them to improve the standard of accommodation in their areas. It suggests that sanitary inspectors or medical officers could inspect the accommodation and if they found that it was insanitary they could take action to effect improvement. As a result of this action, further improvements were secured to premises in Ayrshire, as also in Stirlingshire, Dunbartonshire and Perthshire.<sup>439</sup> In addition, the L.G.B.S. also wrote to medical officers and sanitary inspectors to ascertain how the present statutes (contained in the Public Health (Scotland) Act 1897) were insufficient to deal with the accommodation.<sup>440</sup> A number of medical officers of health, including the officer for Ayrshire, recommended that local authorities should be given power to make byelaws for the proper accommodation of the workers.<sup>441</sup>

Although no immediate steps were taken to introduce new legislation, the L.G.B.S. continued to place pressure on local authorities and their officers to monitor and improve the accommodation for the workers. A circular of 13 June 1910, which encouraged them to use the powers available to them to bring premises which provided a poor standard of accommodation up to those that had a good one, brought a good deal of attention to the housing.<sup>442</sup> Again, this resulted in further improvements being made at some farms in Ayrshire and throughout their employment area.<sup>443</sup> These included the erection of new sanitary accommodation and better facilities for providing separate sleeping accommodation.<sup>444</sup> By 1913, the County Medical Officer of Ayrshire could comment that there had been a considerable improvement made to the accommodation.<sup>445</sup>



In the years immediately following that interest, the accommodation in Ayrshire, as throughout Lowland Scotland, received further attention by a number of organisations, institutions and individuals. Further surveys of conditions were made. In 1910, Dr Elizabeth McVail made an inspection of 36 farms in Ayrshire for her M.D. thesis which she submitted at the University of Glasgow in 1915.<sup>446</sup> On 8 March 1911, the Committees of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church and the Scottish Council for Women's Trades issued a joint circular to the county clerks in areas where the workers were employed. It made a number of recommendations that would provide good accommodation which had a minimum standard of decency and comfort.<sup>447</sup> In 1920, the bishops in the west of Ireland instituted the Bishops' (Gresham) Committee for Improving Conditions of Irish Migratory Workers in Scotland.<sup>448</sup>

A number of individuals and organisations wrote to the Secretary of Scotland, the Scottish Office and MPs to highlight the state of the accommodation and to ask for remedial action to be taken to improve it. Lord Pentland, Secretary of Scotland, and the Scottish Liberal Members of Parliament each received a deputation on the housing issue from the Scottish Council for Women's Trades.<sup>449</sup> In October 1916, the Shieldmuir Branch of the United Irish League sent a resolution regarding the accommodation to J. Duncan Millar, MP for North-east Lanarkshire.<sup>450</sup> A month later, The Ancient Order of Hibernians (Board of Erin) Division no. 211 also issued a further resolution to the Scottish Office.<sup>451</sup> In 1917, Father Thomas A. Hayes of Troon wrote a number of letters to Robert Munro, Secretary of Scotland, to enquire on the action that he would take to improve the housing which he regarded to be 'a disgrace to the employer, and degrading to the employees'.<sup>452</sup> In the following year, the Very Reverend Canon Lord Archibald Douglas, Girvan, and Father Michael Carey of St. Cuthberts, Maybole, also wrote to Robert Munro regarding the state of the accommodation.<sup>453</sup> Father Carey also wrote to John Dillon, MP, asking him to press for reform.<sup>454</sup> The state of the accommodation was also raised in the House of Commons on 15 August 1917.<sup>455</sup>

The accommodation was also commented on in the local newspaper press. In 1920, the *Ayrshire Post* asserts that 'there undoubtedly prevails a state of affairs that offers room for immediate improvement'.<sup>456</sup>

### **Further Improvements**

Although the accommodation continued to be criticised after 1910, its standard improved. In 1917, a larger number of buildings were available to provide separate sleeping rooms for each sex of worker and better facilities were on hand for cooking, washing and drying clothes. Indeed, arrangements were considered to provide a 'fair degree of comfort'. At several of the larger farms in the Carrick District, the 'whole arrangements' for the accommodation were regarded to be quite satisfactory.<sup>457</sup> By 1920, a number of observers confirm that it was of a

higher standard.<sup>458</sup> However, they also emphasise that neither the local authority nor its officers had sufficient powers to adequately deal with it or secure further improvements.<sup>459</sup>

### ***Towards Effective Powers and Legislation: The Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland Rural and Urban***

An explanatory minute prepared by the L.G.B.S. on 9 January 1908 suggests that it was 'for consideration whether the subject [of the accommodation for the potato workers] is not of sufficient importance to justify a special enquiry into the whole question, by means of a committee or otherwise'.<sup>460</sup> In 1910, the Scottish Council for Women's Trades and Union for the Abolition of Sweating suggested to Lord Pentland, Secretary for Scotland, that a departmental committee should be established to investigate that subject.<sup>461</sup> However, such a committee was not instituted until 1912. In that year, The Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland Rural and Urban was appointed to examine the housing of a wide range of occupational groups including seasonal workers such as fruit pickers and potato diggers. Its remit was to ascertain standards and the action that should be taken to remedy defective conditions. It did not publish its report until 1917.<sup>462</sup> The Commissioners gathered evidence on the housing of the potato workers throughout their area of employment, but their report centres on conditions in Ayrshire. They had a number of reasons for focusing on this county: it was an area where 'all varieties of housing are met with' and could therefore provide a representative account; furthermore, early potato growing had become 'a most important part of the agricultural industry' of the county and was therefore economically important.<sup>463</sup> The Commissioners gathered evidence from a number of key individuals in that county such as Dr Coll Reginald Macdonald, County Medical Officer of Ayrshire, and John Russell, Sanitary Inspector for the Carrick District of Ayrshire. They drew on Dr Elizabeth McVail's survey of housing which she submitted for her M.D. thesis. In June 1913, they also made a special visit of inquiry to the Carrick District.<sup>464</sup>

Although much of the Commissioners' report confirms the existence of conditions that had already been noted in earlier surveys, it also highlights further aspects of them. In particular, it records the ways in which the workers maintained their premises. The untidy state in which they kept them, with buildings being rarely cleaned and left in a very filthy state, was condemned.<sup>465</sup>

After considering the standard of the accommodation, the Commissioners made a number of conclusions about it. They conclude 'broadly that the housing of potato-diggers in Scotland is thoroughly unsatisfactory'.<sup>466</sup> For them, two aspects highlighted that arrangements were 'lamentably deficient': the lack of provisions for sanitary arrangements and for the separation of the sexes.<sup>467</sup> Furthermore, they



were 'not at all satisfied with the class of buildings often used for housing the workers'.<sup>468</sup> Like earlier reports, they also consider that significant improvements could be made without great expense being incurred.<sup>469</sup> Importantly, they made a number of recommendations which they consider would improve the accommodation. The responsibility for the accommodation and its maintenance when the workers were in residence should be placed on specific persons. They agreed that the farmer should be responsible to the local authority for providing accommodation of a satisfactory nature. If it was insufficient, he should be empowered to call upon the landlord on terms to be agreed between them. However, if the farmer and landlord could not agree, then the matter could be settled by an arbiter appointed by the Board of Agriculture for Scotland.

The Commissioners made a number of recommendations that would allow the accommodation to be inspected and for remedial action to be taken against defective conditions. They proposed that in March or another appointed month, the farmer should report to the local authority the number of workers he proposed to accommodate on his farm and the extent and nature of the accommodation which he proposed to supply. An inspector of the local authority would then visit it. If he found that it was satisfactory, he would approve it for use and state the number of workers that could be accommodated in it.<sup>470</sup> However, if it was unsatisfactory, the farmer could be called on to provide additional accommodation or be informed that if it was used, he would commit a punishable offence. After the accommodation had been approved, the farmer had to intimate to the potato merchant the number of workers that were permitted to be accommodated; he also had to inform the local authority of the date when he expected the workers would arrive and the number of each sex.<sup>471</sup> The potato merchant had to ensure that when two or more merchants wanted to accommodate their squads on a farm at the same time that the premises were not overcrowded; the second merchant was responsible for any overcrowding. Merchants were to take over the entire responsibility for their conduct, for keeping order and the cleanliness of the premises when the workers were in attendance, and for ensuring that it was left in a similar condition to that when they arrived. To undertake these duties and look after his interests, he could appoint a caretaker.<sup>472</sup>

As the Commissioners were not satisfied with the type of buildings used for accommodation, they recommended that alternative accommodation could be used. In particular, a local authority could permit the use of tents, provided that they were erected on approved sites and the conditions of the byelaws were complied with (they were made under section 73 of the Public Health Act 1897).<sup>473</sup>

Importantly, the Commissioners recommended – as had also a number of medical officers of health in 1910 – that the L.G.B.S. should be empowered to compel local authorities to use powers to frame byelaws to regulate the accommodation.<sup>474</sup> These byelaws would cover the nature and extent of the

buildings used for this purpose. They would regulate the nature of the accommodation and the provision of certain facilities and determine the persons responsible for the accommodation and for intimating to a local authority that workers would be housed; the LGBS would have power to issue an Order to regulate other matters which could arise. A local authority would make farmers and merchants aware of the duties devolved upon them in the byelaws. Furthermore, a copy of the byelaws was to be hung in every building or apartment occupied by the workers so that they would see and be aware of the nature of the accommodation that they were entitled to.<sup>475</sup>

### ***Improving the Accommodation after 1919: The Development of Byelaws and their Adoption in Ayrshire***

Many of the Commissioners' recommendations came into effect in section 45 of the Housing, Town Planning, etc. (Scotland) Act 1919, the first of a number of acts that were to regulate the accommodation for the potato workers and other seasonal workers.<sup>476</sup> The making of byelaws under this Act and later housing acts reveals a great deal about the difficulties of establishing new standards, the attitudes of the Scottish Office, Ayrshire County Council and the local agricultural community in providing accommodation for the potato workers. It also highlights the reasons why these byelaws changed, and the ways in which they did so.

### ***Byelaws under Section 45 of the Housing, Town Planning, etc. (Scotland) Act 1919***

The making of byelaws under section 45 of the Housing, Town Planning, etc. (Scotland) Act 1919 was a slow process. On 15 May 1920, Miss Elizabeth McMichael, Housing Inspector, Scottish Board of Health (S.B.H), wrote to the four district clerks in Ayrshire to request that they should frame byelaws under section 45.<sup>477</sup> By 11 August that year, the Bishops' (Gresham) Committee wrote to the S.B.H. 'with astonishment' that the byelaws had not been put in place.<sup>478</sup> By the time the Board received that letter, it had not received a reply from any of the four District Committees and had to remind them of the matter. In response, on 30 August, the Northern District Committee wrote to request a copy of model byelaws which it could use for guidance; it also requested that this should be sent to the other District Committees.<sup>479</sup> On 8 September, this was discussed at a conference attended by two representatives of the S.B.H., sanitary inspectors from the four districts in Ayrshire, the District Clerks, solicitors and a number of farmers from the early potato growing districts of Ayrshire.<sup>480</sup> Their provisions were agreed, and on 22 December 1920, a model set of byelaws which was applicable to the circumstances of the county of Ayrshire, was issued to all landward local authorities where potato workers were accommodated.<sup>481</sup>



However, not all parties in the early potato trade in Ayrshire would accept these model or draft byelaws.<sup>482</sup> At a special meeting of Ayr District Committee in February 1921, Thomas Robertson moved that they should not be adopted. He considers that they were 'ridiculous', impracticable and 'it was not possible that they could be worked out'. He also believes that their cost of implementation would reduce the extent of potato growing in Ayrshire.<sup>483</sup> Another committee member, T. C. Lindsay, Aitkenbrae, Monkton, a potato grower of 30 years experience, confirmed that the National Farmers' Union of Scotland and the Glasgow and West of Scotland Potato Growers' Association had agreed to ask the District Committee to carry out certain recommendations and alterations to the draft byelaws.<sup>484</sup> After that meeting was held, the National Farmers' Union of Scotland made representations to the S.B.H. and the Board of Agriculture for Scotland (B.A.S) on the draft byelaws.<sup>485</sup> A deputation of local farmers also met the B.A.S to discuss the draft byelaws that would apply in the Northern District. They considered that a number of provisions would be difficult to undertake: that they should give four weeks notice to the local authority that workers would be accommodated at a farm; the observation of the separation of the sexes; provision of separate living room accommodation and sufficient space in the sleeping apartments; provision of bedsteads and bedding and for the separate storage for food; provision of accommodation for workers who were sick. They also questioned the competency of the byelaws which required a farmer rather than his landlord to provide a proper water supply. As these provisions included some of the reforms that the Commissioners had recommended should be introduced, many of their objections were not upheld. Indeed, some of the facilities and standards which it claimed were impractical and unworkable, such as separate living room accommodation, were already found on many farms.<sup>486</sup> Nevertheless, a number of their objections were upheld. The draft byelaw which related to the provision of water was modified, while that relating to the provision of accommodation for sick workers was withdrawn.

Further representations were also made to the B.A.S. Mr J. M. Hannah, Girvan Mains, Girvan, a prominent early potato grower, wrote to John M. Ramsay, Secretary, to complain that 'the enforcement of these Byelaws will render it impossible to have the potato crop lifted in season'.<sup>487</sup> After reading that letter, Ramsay wrote to the Secretary of the S.B.H. to request a conference to discuss the draft byelaws.<sup>488</sup> During that conference, on 22 March 1920, the B.A.S. intimated that it was in general agreement with the scope of the proposed byelaws for the Northern District which the S.B.H. had adjusted. However, it made a number of further adjustments which would tighten up the draft.<sup>489</sup> Although the Northern District Committee had already submitted these byelaws for confirmation, the S.B.H. and B.A.S. discussed whether it was possible to accept these changes and submit them to the local authority for agreement before the start of the harvesting

season.<sup>490</sup> This was a moot point, and a particularly sensitive one: if the byelaws could not be introduced before that date then 'the farmers would have won their point to the extent of securing a further year's delay'.<sup>491</sup> Subject to these modifications, the S.B.H. confirmed the byelaws, and they came into force on 21 March 1921.<sup>492</sup>

These were the first byelaws to be confirmed in Scotland. Others were confirmed in the other county districts of Ayrshire before the start of that year's potato harvest. However, they were not confirmed for the burgh of Ardrossan until 15 October 1923; this was the second burgh in Scotland to make that provision, the first being in Dundee on 22 June 1921.<sup>493</sup> In other local authority areas they were adopted at a slower rate. By the end of 1921, they had been confirmed in only five areas, and by the end of the following year in a further four. Those in the Calder District of Midlothian and the Edinburgh District of Midlothian were not confirmed until 1925.

### *The Tragedy at Kilnford Farm, Dundonald, Ayrshire*

On 21 September 1924, fire broke out in the sleeping quarters of a squad of Scottish potato workers employed by the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society at Kilnford Farm in the parish of Dundonald, which resulted in nine workers (five women and four men) being suffocated.<sup>494</sup> Their sleeping accommodation was located upstairs in a granary, reached by a stone stair. This had three apartments: an outer apartment, a middle apartment and an inner one. The first and third of these had doors which opened out to a courtyard; they did not have an outside stair. The first and second apartments were used by the males, and the inner one was set apart for the females. As one sleeping apartment opened off another, the women had to pass through the ones that were used by the males to reach their one. At night, the apartments were lit by candles which sat on top of potato boxes. Bedding comprised 'an adequate supply of clean straw or other suitable material scattered on the floor of the sleeping apartments'. John Craig, Sanitary Inspector of Kilmarnock District, considers that the accommodation 'was as good as any in his district' and complied with the current byelaws.<sup>495</sup>

The testimony of one of the surviving workers, James Murray, suggests that a fire started near to the stairhead and the bed of John Greenan, who had earlier lit a candle. It is suggested that this set alight the straw bedding. Although all the workers were alerted that a fire had started, not all of them were willing to escape through the smoke; if they had, they would have stood a good chance of escaping. The farmer, John George Smith, came out of the farmhouse shortly after the fire broke out and burst open the outer door above the courtyard to assist the workers who remained inside in the building.

The Fatal Accident Inquiry into the tragedy, held at Ayr Sheriff Court on 10 October 1924, asked questions about the byelaws for seasonal workers including



the potato workers. It made five recommendations which would prevent a similar incident taking place. First, separate and independent doors should be provided in each sleeping apartment; no sleeping apartment occupied by one sex should be entered through an apartment used by another. Second, there should be two exits other than on the ground where the workers were housed. Third, bags or other similar means, should be supplied to hold straw used for bedding. Fourth, some safer method of lighting should be introduced. Fifth, an authentic record of the names and addresses of the workers should be kept by the employer, no matter how short the time they might be employed.<sup>496</sup>

Although the recommendations of the Fatal Accident Inquiry were not incorporated into the Housing (Scotland) Act 1925, Archibald Bain, Assistant Secretary of the S.B.H., wrote to the Secretary of the S.B.A. to state that his Department had written to sanitary inspectors in Kilwinning, Ayr, Kilmarnock, Maybole, Perth, Edinburgh, and Paisley, regarding the making of an Order under section 83(1)(f) of that act which would prescribe precautions against the risk of fire and means of escape in case of fire; enclosed was a copy of draft byelaws which would form a basis for discussion.<sup>497</sup> Model byelaws for the guidance of local authorities were not, however, issued until 29 September 1931.<sup>498</sup>

'The Seasonal Workers' Accommodation Byelaws (Scotland) Regulations 1931', made under the Order were adopted by a number of local authorities, including that of Ayrshire. By the time they were confirmed, the administrative unit of the district committee had been replaced by the county council and town council.<sup>499</sup> Although the first byelaws were not adopted until 1933, they were not put into place by Ayrshire County Council until 1934.<sup>500</sup> A number of other county councils and town councils, including Ardrossan, did not, however, revise their existing byelaws.

### *The Fire at Kirkintilloch*

In another fire, at 67 East Side, East High Street, Kirkintilloch, Dunbartonshire, in the early hours of 16 September 1937, ten male Irish potato workers aged between 13 and 23 years of age lost their lives.<sup>501</sup> The Fatal Accident Inquiry into the tragedy highlights that the housing legislation for the potato workers and other seasonal workers was inadequate. The accommodation at East Side was provided by a potato merchant rather than a farmer, or if required, a landlord. The premises were located in a burgh rather than on a farm. The workers were housed in one local authority area (the burgh of Kirkintilloch) and employed in another (the county of Dunbartonshire). Although byelaws were in operation in the county of Dunbartonshire they did not extend to the burgh of Kirkintilloch.<sup>502</sup> The jury made an important recommendation: that all accommodation for seasonal workers should be inspected and passed as 'safe and proper' by the official of the local authority concerned.

The findings and recommendations of the Fatal Accident Inquiry were included in section 19 of the Housing (Agricultural Population) (Scotland) Bill, which received its Royal Assent on 13 July 1938.<sup>503</sup> It provided that byelaws were to be adopted by all local authorities throughout Scotland unless they could show 'to the satisfaction' of the Department of Health for Scotland (D.H.S. - formerly the S.B.H.) that it was unnecessary to do so. They had to be made within six months of the Royal Assent of the Act, or within a period allowed by the D.H.S. Byelaws were confirmed for the county of Ayrshire and for the burghs of Ardrossan, Ayr (6 January 1940), Maybole (25 April 1939), Kilmarnock (25 January 1939), and Rothesay (23 May 1939).<sup>504</sup> However, the burghs of Kilwinning, Largs and Troon did not consider that it was necessary to introduce them.<sup>505</sup>

### *Further Changes*

J. G. Molloy, Ambassador at the Irish Embassy, London, sent a copy of a report conducted by Father Tuffy, parish priest at Ballina, Co. Mayo, on housing conditions in Ayrshire and Wigtownshire during the 1964 harvest, to the Secretary of the Scottish Home and Health Department (S.H.H.D. - formerly the Department of Health for Scotland) and requested that 'appropriate action' should be undertaken 'to ensure proper living conditions, in accordance with existing statutory bye-laws and regulations'. The S.H.H.D. requested the County Clerk in Ayr to ensure that all accommodation in Ayrshire complied with the byelaws.<sup>506</sup> In response, that local authority commented on Father Tuffy's report and the state of the accommodation.<sup>507</sup> In his report on inspections, the Chief Sanitary Inspector concludes that he was 'satisfied that most farms in the county comply with the Byelaws as to the accommodation for seasonal workers, apart from minor matters such as marking of sanitary conveniences, marking of exits, even if they may fall short of the degree of comfort envisaged by Father Tuffy'.<sup>508</sup> However, as a further step, the County Council reviewed its current byelaws, a move that was also taken by other local authorities.<sup>509</sup> That decision was an important one as it recognised that further improvements could not be made to the accommodation unless more satisfactory legislation was brought about.

In Ayrshire, the drafting of new byelaws under the Housing (Scotland) Act 1966 was a slow process. The Chief Sanitary Inspector showed his frustration at the 'protracted process involved in having revised Bye-laws for seasonal workers accepted'.<sup>510</sup> Unlike earlier byelaws, the Scottish Development Department (S.D.D.) did not draft a set of model byelaws and the local authority had to decide upon a standard that should be adopted. The Health Committee of Ayr County Council raised the issue of drafting byelaws on 3 March 1966, but it did not discuss a draft until 2 March 1967, when the County Clerk was instructed to submit it to the Secretary of State for Scotland for confirmation.<sup>511</sup> By September that year, the S.D.D. had formerly considered this draft and had approved it. However, the



Secretary of State for Scotland had not accepted it. He had received objections from the National Farmers' Union of Scotland and the Scottish Early Potato Growers' Association over the proposal that the number of hand basins and wash tubs should be increased.<sup>512</sup> As a result, he requested a public inquiry on the draft byelaws; this took place on 28 and 29 February 1968 in Ayr.<sup>513</sup> The draft byelaws were not, however, confirmed until 2 July 1968.<sup>514</sup> In Ayrshire, as in other counties, they did not immediately come into force: they gave farmers and potato merchants a period in which to bring their accommodation up to their new standard. In Ayrshire they came into effect on 1 January 1970. Other counties were later. For Perthshire this was 1 January 1971, 25 May 1972 in Renfrewshire, and 1 January 1974 in West Lothian.<sup>515</sup>

***The Impact of the Legislation on the Accommodation in Ayrshire: Byelaws Under Section 45 of the Housing, Town Planning, etc. (Scotland) Act 1919***

In Ayrshire, the local authority took out advertisements in local newspapers to inform the potato trade that byelaws had come into force for the 1921 harvesting season; it did not do anything further to enforce them.<sup>516</sup> In the following year, it continued to advertise their existence and in the Ayr District, the District Committee sent an intimation to each potato merchant and farmer. The local authority also took steps to enforce the byelaws. It was aware that not all farmers or potato merchants would comply with them: 'this was only to be expected during the first year of their operation'.<sup>517</sup> Although it found that generally the premises were fairly satisfactory and most of the farmers complied with the byelaws, not all did.<sup>518</sup> It estimated that 50 farmers should have reported that workers would be accommodated on their farms; only 18 intimations were received. Employers should have submitted 120 intimations; only three were received. The Carrick District Committee recommended that action should be taken against these defaulters, and proceedings were instituted against them in Ayr Sheriff Court.<sup>519</sup> In total, 21 potato merchants (including the largest employers of the Irish workers) and three farmers, were each fined for between one and four contraventions. Each was fined for a range of 'very technical offences'. For Robert Armstrong, potato merchant at Girvan, this was for failing to give notice to the local authority. Robert Crawford, farmer at Drumbeg, Kirkoswald, and James Crawford, farmer at Dowhill, Kirkoswald, each permitted a potato merchant to accommodate workers at their farms without having first told the Clerk of the Carrick District Committee. James Sloan and James Sloan Junior, farmers at Drumshang, Maybole, were fined for not providing adequate facilities: the workers had arrived before their accommodation had been made ready for them.

Administrative procedures ensured that the accommodation was generally brought up to the standards required by the byelaws before the workers arrived.

After the farmer notified that workers would be accommodated on his farm, his premises were inspected by a sanitary inspector to ensure that they were of the required standard. If they were not, he was instructed to take remedial action, and a further inspection was then made. At this time, organisations that were interested in the workers' accommodation also secured changes to it. Through her work in 1922, Mrs Gertrude Bland, Housing Inspector of the Bishops' (Gresham) Committee, used her persuasive skills to suggest that farmers should make further improvements to their premises. As the farmer at Turnberry and Little Turnberry had not lifted the workers' beds off the floor she 'sent him word that it must be done according to the bye-laws'. Although she did not have official power to enter premises or to effect any changes, she reported premises to the local authority and the S.B.H. so that it could use their powers to secure further improvements; one inspector travelled to Ayrshire to examine premises that she had surveyed.<sup>520</sup>



**Illus. 10: Accommodation for potato workers at Langlands, Tarbolton parish.**  
[Photo 1963; private collection.]

The byelaws made under section 45 had a significant impact on the standard of accommodation and the way it was maintained by the workers. In her survey of accommodation in 1922, Mrs Gertrude Bland notes that considerable changes had been made at some farms (Table 9). Some provided arrangements that went beyond the standard required by the byelaws. She also describes the accommodation in



terms of comfort: at Chapeldonan, Robstone and Bogside it was 'quite comfortable' and at Dowhill it was 'most comfortable'. At Doughill and Morriston it was 'very comfortable'. She suggests that farmers had wanted to see better provisions made for the workers. Mr Dunlop, Morriston, was 'anxious to make the workers happy' and Mr Crawford, Burnside, was 'very keen to have the workers comfortable'. Some farmers had spent large sums of money to bring their accommodation up to the standard of the byelaws. Mr Hannah, Girvan Mains, had spent several hundred pounds and at Chapeldonan, the farmer had 'expended a lot of money'.<sup>521</sup> Nevertheless, some of the farms that had smaller acreages, and which housed workers for only a few days, had made fewer improvements and were unwilling to spend large sums of money on these.

**Table 9: Improvements Made to the Accommodation on a Number of Farms in Ayrshire for the 1922 Harvest: Observations by Mrs Gertrude Bland**

Farm and Parish	Changes to the accommodation
Towerlands, Irvine	'some wonderful improvements all round'
Highfield, Dalry	'several improvements'
North Kilrusken, West Kilbride	'wonderfully improved in many ways'
Drumbeg, Turnberry	'quite a lot of improvements'
Fairfield Mains	'several improvements'
Monkton, Monkton & Prestwick	'several big improvements'
Kilnford, Dundonald	'a lot of improvements'
Drybridge, Dundonald	'some wonderful improvements all round'
Shawhill, St. Quivox	'great signs of improvements'
Humeston, Maybole	'wonderfully improved'
Drumshang, Maybole	'so far shows no signs of improvements'
Genoch, Maybole	'a lot of improvements'
Burton, Maybole	'several improvements'
Turnberry Lodge, Kirkoswald	'was a bad bothy ... on the whole it is now a good bothy'
Balchriston, Kirkoswald	'several improvements'
Shanter, Kirkoswald	'several big improvements'
Girvan Mains, Girvan	'was one of the worst ... today it is one of the very best'
Currah, Girvan	'some improvements'
Robstone, Girvan	'big repairs have been carried out'
Shalloch Park, Girvan	'big improvements'
Dunnymuck, Girvan	'some wonderful improvements'
Doohill Farm, Girvan	'some wonderful improvements'
Craigie Mains, Ballantrae	'very much improved'

Source: N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Bishops' (Gresham) Committee for Improving Conditions of Irish Migratory Workers in Scotland. Diary Showing Work During 1922 of the Committee's Inspector, Mrs G. Bland'.



### *The Standard of the Accommodation Under Section 19 of the Housing (Agricultural Population) (Scotland) Act 1938*

There are numerous references to the standard of accommodation provided under section 19, especially after the end of the Second World War. In 1950, an inspector of the D.H.S. 'expressed satisfaction with the standard of accommodation and cleanliness secured' at several farms.<sup>522</sup> In the following year, another inspector visited 'quite a number' of premises and comments favourably on the general standard of accommodation, though she also criticises standards on some farms.<sup>523</sup> In the parish of Stevenston, 'the regulations governing the housing of casual labourers are carefully carried out. The sleeping places are clean, well aired outhouses provided with wooden beds and comfortable bedding.'<sup>524</sup> In 1954, the Chief Sanitary Inspector in Ayrshire could note that 'the majority of Carrick District farmers are willing to provide accommodation for the potato squads of a standard above and beyond anything envisaged in the byelaws'.<sup>525</sup>

In Ayrshire, sanitary inspectors administered the byelaws with great seriousness. They acted as a mechanism to safeguard the health and safety of the potato workers who lived in the accommodation.<sup>526</sup> In 1951, the Chief Sanitary Inspector confirms that 'a strict code of conduct and structural provision has been drawn up; it is for my inspectors to see it applied and observed'.<sup>527</sup> Always aware of the tragedy at Kilnford, he regarded the threat of fire as a major risk to the workers and their accommodation.<sup>528</sup> Each year, he was happy to report that no major incidents had resulted from the accommodation.<sup>529</sup> Nevertheless, on a number of occasions, he criticised the workers for their carelessness in maintaining their safety and condemns their employers for their 'indifference' in this matter.<sup>530</sup> As he remarks in 1954: 'evidently they [the workers] have never heard of, or have long since forgotten, the death-rolls of Kilnford and Kirkintilloch'.<sup>531</sup> Inspectors paid particular attention to the provision of fire escapes, fire-fighting appliances and the safest forms of lighting in the sleeping apartments.<sup>532</sup> In 1950, they spent much of their time securing these and ensuring that they were maintained in working order.<sup>533</sup>

The administration of the byelaws required a great amount of effort. From 1949 to 1968, sanitary inspectors made between 125 and 305 visits each year to premises where the workers were accommodated. The number of their inspections varied according to the availability of staff to undertake the work (a temporary assistant helped out with inspection work in 1953 when 208 inspections were undertaken) or requests for further inspection work to be conducted (the Scottish Home and Health Department (S.H.H.D) made such a request in 1964).<sup>534</sup> After the S.H.H.D. made that request, some 305 visits were undertaken during the 1965 harvest (this was 118 more than in the previous year). Although accommodation was usually inspected twice, once before the workers arrived and also during their

occupation, some farms were also visited more frequently. In 1965, the accommodation at South Kilrusken was visited on 22 occasions, Biglies on 11, Chapelton and Campbelton each on nine, Glenhead on eight, North Kilrusken on six; Ardwell was visited on five and Craigie Mains, Curragh, Dunnymuck, Grangeton each on four occasions.<sup>535</sup>

The standard of the accommodation continued to improve. By 1951, the Chief Sanitary Inspector observes that 'standards have risen considerably'.<sup>536</sup> In the early 1950s, improvements were made in a number of ways. More satisfactory buildings were provided. New huts and special buildings were erected to be used as sleeping quarters and dining rooms.<sup>537</sup> Accommodation, such as that at King's Arms Hotel, Ballantrae, was rearranged and brought up to a high standard.<sup>538</sup> By 1957, a number of farmers had started to provide premises located away from the farm steading which provided a very satisfactory arrangement for both farmers and workers alike.<sup>539</sup> More modern facilities were also installed. In 1950, farmers were gradually converting from basic sanitary facilities such as the open trench system to the 'modern hygienic fitment' of the flush toilet.<sup>540</sup> As a result of these improvements, some farms in the Carrick District provided a standard that was higher than that envisaged in the byelaws.<sup>541</sup> By 1957, the Chief Sanitary Inspector for Ayrshire could conclude that 'generally the accommodation provided for seasonal workers is attaining a standard nearer the spirit as well as the letter of the byelaws'.<sup>542</sup>

However, the standards and facilities were also criticised. In each year during the late 1940s and the early 1950s, as also in later years, the annual reports of the Chief Sanitary Inspector in Ayrshire note that farmers and employers made a large number of contraventions to the byelaws. These ranged from 28 defects in 1949 to 74 in 1955; between these dates, an average of 56 defects were noted each year. In the latter 1950s they varied between 35 and 74 defects. These were usually of a relatively minor nature and could be remedied easily.<sup>543</sup> In 1952, they included failure to notify that workers were to be accommodated, failure to keep premises clean, straw found leaking from torn bed mattresses and ticks, and overcrowding; similar defects continued to be noted in following years.<sup>544</sup> However, by 1959, a 'goodly portion' of farmers were still unaware of their obligations to notify the local authority of their intention to accommodate workers.<sup>545</sup> Some farmers were persistent offenders and the same contraventions were recorded at their farms for a number of years; they also had numerous contraventions.<sup>546</sup>

Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, sanitary inspectors were aware that poor accommodation was provided at a small number of farms. They described these premises as being 'very unsatisfactory': they were 'bad from the structural point of view and with regard to cleanliness and preparation', they had become worn out from use, and defects that had been in need of remedial action for a



number of years were still outstanding.<sup>547</sup> On some farms, standards were unacceptable. In 1951, the Chief Sanitary Inspector remarks that:

Throughout the Ayr district my inspector discovers certain people who think that any kind of shed will suffice as a bedroom or dining room for the potato worker and who do not seem to realise that the standards have risen considerably.<sup>548</sup>

By 1954, he started to criticise a minority of farmers in the Carrick District for their attitude towards the accommodation and the work of the sanitary inspectors who were thought to regard 'potato-digger work' as 'a kind of amusement'.<sup>549</sup>

The accommodation in Ayrshire, as in Wigtownshire, was also criticised by a number of individuals outwith the local authority Sanitary Department whose views are recorded in Scottish and Irish newspapers. In 1962, Peadar O'Donnell observes that 'the housing that gets into the news, almost yearly, is that provided by farmers in the early crop area - Wigtownshire and Ayrshire'.<sup>550</sup> In 1951, the *Sunday Press* (Dublin) criticises the 'rat-pit' conditions of the accommodation in the Maybole and Croy Shore district.<sup>551</sup> 'The deplorable state of the accommodation' on Carrick farms is also reported in the Irish national press in 1961 and further coverage of conditions in south-western counties is recorded until 1965.<sup>552</sup> After Paddy Harte of Donegal County Council criticised conditions in 1961 (these were widely published in Irish newspapers), Peadar O'Donnell inspected accommodation in Ayrshire and Wigtownshire. After he completed his inspection work in 1961, he concludes that: 'I found poor housing as a general experience with odd examples of good housing - good washing facilities; flush toilets; good space and light'.<sup>553</sup> However, his conclusions are more favourable in the following year: 'there is a strong trend towards good housing; there is much good housing. There are bad spots'.<sup>554</sup> In 1964, Father Tuffy, Ballina, Mayo, investigated conditions at 47 farms in Ayrshire and Wigtownshire. He was more critical of conditions than Peadar O'Donnell had been. For him, 'the picture is one of conditions that are very unsatisfactory. It appears that the farmers in these areas are not very concerned about the Irish workers or their comfort. They give them as little as possible and expect them to be satisfied once there is a roof over their heads'.<sup>555</sup> Irish officials were also critical. For J. Fuke, acting for the Irish Embassy in London in 1961, the premises were 'sub-standard and not fit for human-beings'.<sup>556</sup> Workers, gaffers and their families complained about the accommodation.<sup>557</sup> One gaffer's wife who travelled to Scotland for the first time in 1961 was 'shocked and critical of conditions'.<sup>558</sup> The Chief Sanitary Inspector for Ayrshire was not surprised at their discontent. Their home conditions had become 'vastly improved' and the 'pretty good' homes and 'new houses with modern amenities' provided a sharp contrast to the 'spartan' arrangements on the farms in Ayrshire.

### *Dealing with Contraventions*

In the 1950s and 1960s, contraventions of the byelaws in Ayrshire were remedied in a number of ways. A verbal warning from a sanitary inspector to a farmer or employer was often sufficient to ensure that corrective action was taken. If this did not have any effect, the Sanitary Department issued a letter to intimate that action should be taken. In 1965, when the accommodation was intensively surveyed throughout the county, letters were sent to a number of farmers, with the worst offenders each receiving four.<sup>559</sup> If workers or gaffers made a complaint to the Sanitary Department, an inspector visited and inspected the premises, and if required, requested improvement.<sup>560</sup> Squads were also removed from unsatisfactory premises.<sup>561</sup>

Where farmers continually failed to secure these improvements then the Sanitary Department took even more stringent steps.<sup>562</sup> From the late 1950s, it recommended to the Health Committee of the County Council that proceedings should be instituted against defaulters. Between 1959 and 1971, the County Council passed a total of 13 cases of defaulters to the Procurator Fiscal. These amounted to one case a year, and two cases in each of 1963 and 1966; there were no cases in 1964 and 1969. In eleven cases farmers were fined, usually for a number of contraventions. Two farmers were each fined for 9 and 14 contraventions respectively.<sup>563</sup> Very few charges were dropped. In 1970, one farmer was fined on two charges, but was admonished on a further six. This action affected the accommodation in a number of ways. In the year following their prosecution, a number of farmers provided a higher standard of accommodation. At one farm, this was 'greatly improved',<sup>564</sup> though at another it was 'still not in full conformity with the Byelaws', but was 'made habitable'.<sup>565</sup> Not all farmers continued to make their premises available.

Sanitary inspectors also used their powers to ensure that standards were higher than those laid down in the byelaws. However, this was not an easy task and required 'much persuading and cajoling the farmer'.<sup>566</sup> The Carrick District Sanitary Inspector notes that in 1959 the 'wanton and malicious damage' to facilities 'does great harm in our endeavour to obtain improved conditions. Such adverse reports are often quoted when we suggest to farmers that modern facilities be provided'.<sup>567</sup> They encouraged the installation of water closets to be the most necessary of these facilities.<sup>568</sup> Although the conversion from privies to water closets was slow, by 1962 they were installed at almost 50% of the farms.<sup>569</sup> Inspectors also encouraged the installation of facilities for providing hot water.<sup>570</sup>



### ***Higher Standards of Accommodation under Section 171 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1966***

Under section 171, byelaws set better and more precise standards and thus provided a much higher grade of accommodation.<sup>571</sup> Great efforts were made to bring premises up to these standards. For example, hot water was provided by gas heating, electric lighting and coal fired boilers.<sup>572</sup> The co-operation between farmers and employers in providing the new facilities was reported to be 'extremely encouraging' and 'invaluable'.<sup>573</sup> They consulted the local authority on any points that caused difficulty.<sup>574</sup> In 'practically every instance' where farmers altered their premises, they discussed their plans and sketches with the local authority before they undertook any alteration work.<sup>575</sup> Inspectors also made a large number of advisory visits to farms to discuss proposed modifications to existing accommodation.<sup>576</sup>

By the time the workers arrived in Ayrshire at the start of the 1970 potato harvest, most farmers were able to provide reasonable accommodation that complied with the byelaws.<sup>577</sup> As farmers had worked closely with the Sanitary Department, only six contraventions were recorded in 1970.<sup>578</sup> In 1971, that figure was 28; five of these were notified to employers.<sup>579</sup> In 1972, only 11 contraventions were sent to farmers and seven to employers.<sup>580</sup> Throughout these three years, contraventions were mainly of a minor nature and were rectified by a verbal intimation to the farmer or the employer. However, two farmers were reported to the Procurator Fiscal and were fined in Ayr Sheriff Court.<sup>581</sup>

The higher standards had an impact on the availability of accommodation. The number of farms used to provide accommodation in Ayrshire, as in all counties where workers were housed, declined sharply. Between 1968 and 1969, they fell from 58 to 47 premises. This decrease was even more pronounced between 1969 and 1970, the first year when the new byelaws came into operation; only 26 farms made accommodation available for workers. Compared to other counties, Ayrshire continued to be an important district for the accommodation of seasonal potato workers. In Wigtownshire, West Lothian and East Lothian respectively only 14, 7 and 6 premises were used in 1970 for that purpose. The reasons for that decline are summed up by the District Sanitary Inspector for the Carrick District who believes that:

Many farmers feel that the cost of providing the necessary facilities from scratch is too high and some others who have already provided some of the facilities feel that, with machinery being evolved at the current rate, an automatised digger would be a better long term investment.<sup>582</sup>

After farmers and employers had made these alterations, he predicted that there would not be a further pronounced decrease 'in the immediate future'.<sup>583</sup>



## 10: Living Arrangements

### *Housekeeping Duties*

The workers had a number of arrangements to organise their daily and weekly domestic duties. In Ayrshire in 1911, each squad usually had an elderly man who was 'more or less' in charge of their well being.<sup>584</sup> At that time, a housekeeper or bothy woman could be appointed who also served as a cook for the squad.<sup>585</sup> In 1920 she was recorded on two farms in Ayrshire.<sup>586</sup> One merchant also authorised his foremen to allocate one or two women on a squad to clean the accommodation.<sup>587</sup> At this date, this arrangement was not used on all farms in the county. As in Edinburgh and Dunfermline, that appointment was not made obligatory until it was provided for in byelaws which regulated the nature and standard of the accommodation given to the workers which came into operation from 1921.<sup>588</sup> Through their implementation in other areas, this arrangement spread across Lowland Scotland.

The housekeeper was drawn from a number of sources. She could be a member of the gaffer's family such as his wife, or be 'well in with the gaffer'; she might be a 'fancy woman'.<sup>589</sup> Although the woman was designated to work in the bothy, she could also be employed as an outdoor worker in the harvest field. If she worked at the latter, she had a shorter working day than the other field workers so that she could undertake her domestic duties.<sup>590</sup> Others were employed on a full time basis.<sup>591</sup>

The housekeeping activities were clearly outlined in the accommodation byelaws for the potato workers. For example, in Ayrshire in 1970, these were very specific about the cleaning tasks and the frequency at which they should be undertaken. Each apartment had to be thoroughly swept out every day and cleaned out each week. The water closets, urinals, baths, showers, basins and sinks were to be kept in a good order and in a clean condition; the refuse receptacles were to be emptied every two days.<sup>592</sup> The extent of the work involved in cooking meals is recorded in a number of accounts of the domestic life of the Irish workers. One of Anne O'Dowd's informants, Michael McGreal, a former gaffer, says that two women were appointed to get up early in the morning to boil cans of water for the workers and cook a meal in the evening.<sup>593</sup> David Scobie recollects that she boiled water and cooked potatoes for the workers.<sup>594</sup>

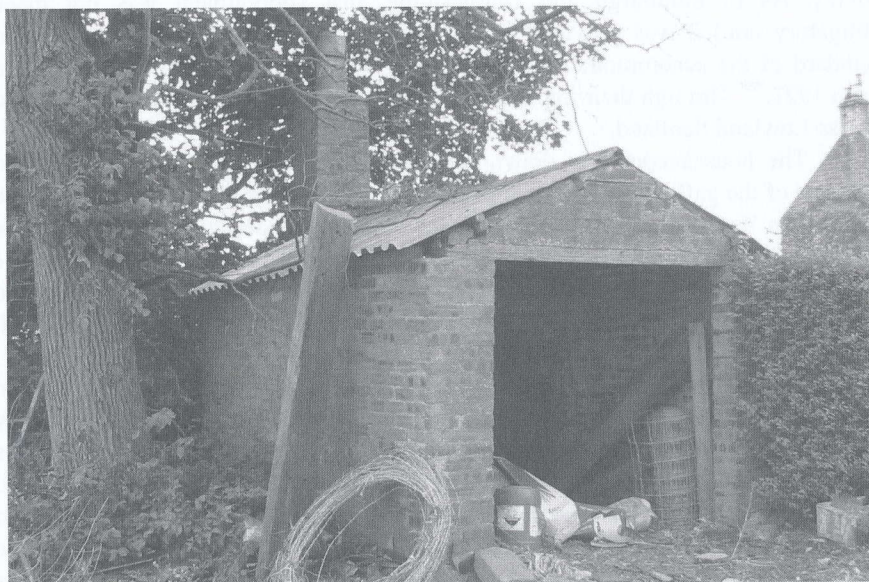
Women also undertook other household duties. In 1962, Peadar O'Donnell observes that they 'bring bed linen and tidy up the men's bothies, and in their free and easy but forthright way they see to it that the men obey the rules on tidiness which they lay down'.<sup>595</sup> They also assisted male workers in their domestic



arrangements. During the course of the 1905 harvest, Patrick MacGill notes that Gourrock Ellen, a Scottish worker, washed clothes of one of the workers, Dermot Flynn.<sup>596</sup> They also washed clothes for their family groups.<sup>597</sup>

### *Cooking and Eating*

As part of their general luggage, the Irish workers brought with them to Scotland a range of cooking facilities such as pans and dishes from their family homes in the west of Ireland.<sup>598</sup> After 1921, accommodation byelaws in Ayrshire laid down that an employer had to provide, to the satisfaction of the local authority, an 'adequate' supply of 'proper' cooking facilities in so far as these were not provided by the workers themselves.<sup>599</sup> Farmers also had to give them a supply of coal for cooking; this practice was a customary one.<sup>600</sup>



**Illus. 11: Potato workers' kitchen at Langlands, used in the 1960s.**  
[Photo 2004.]

Workers cooked their meals on a range of facilities which, until 1970, were often used to undertake other domestic functions, most notably the drying of clothes. In the 1900s, fires were often located in the open air. At five farms in Ayrshire in 1910, they were situated on the ground in the open air. Chauffers were also located in the open air but could be carried under cover in wet weather.<sup>601</sup> In other instances they were built on the ground in sheds which were often of the

'roughest description' and provided little shelter from the elements. Some were also situated in sleeping apartments.<sup>602</sup>

Just as the general standard of the accommodation improved in the 1900s, so too were more satisfactory arrangements made for the provision of cooking facilities. By 1913, a larger number of fires were placed under cover.<sup>603</sup> In that year, several farms also had a separate cooking place for the workers. One farm had a separate fireplace, located under cover, for each squad. More favourable arrangements were available in 1920, and included special facilities:

Hot-plates are used at West Kilbride, where there are three built against the walls at Carlung, and a circular one at Chapelton. A hot plate was introduced at Fairfield Mains, Monkton, but the workers ceased to use it, and 'chaffer' fires in an outside shed was reverted to. Mr Hannah, Girvan Mains, purchased a large cooking range at Turnberry Disposal Sale, and intends placing it at the disposal of IML [Irish migratory labourers], but doubts are entertained as to whether this will prove a success ...<sup>604</sup>

In the 1900s and 1910s, cooking and drying facilities were not always adequate. For Dr Elizabeth McVail in 1910, they 'were often unsatisfactory'.<sup>605</sup> They were not provided in sufficient numbers. In 1909, a particularly wet harvesting season, workers came in from the fields soaked to the skin and had absolutely no means of drying their saturated clothing.<sup>606</sup> Indeed, in 1903, the practice of sleeping in wet clothes was reported to be 'not an uncommon experience'.<sup>607</sup> In wet weather, workers also found it very difficult to cook their meals. As a result, Miss Gertrude Thornton (Mrs Gertrude Bland) reports that the workers were 'compelled to live on very little food, usually cold tinned meat, as they cannot cook food when the rain is bad'.<sup>608</sup> Fires were not always large enough to provide sufficient and adequate facilities. At Doughill in 1920, two small fires located in the open air were supplied for 100 workers.<sup>609</sup> Even if they were built under cover, they were not always located in a suitable place. At Monkton Hill in 1920 the fire was under cover, but 'the girls' eyes were quite sore from the smoke, and on this account it was very little comfort on a wet day, as it forced them out of the shed'.<sup>610</sup> At one farm at Irvine, it was located in a shed which had no chimney and smoked badly.<sup>611</sup>

In Ayrshire, facilities for cooking and drying clothes became regulated by byelaw in 1921. Farmers became responsible for supplying facilities for cooking and drying clothes to the satisfaction of the local authority. Although they could use numerous arrangements, they had to make that provision under cover.<sup>612</sup> After 1938 these facilities became more specific: a farmer had to supply 'a fireplace or hot plate or other suitable apparatus for the cooking of food' which was to be approved by the local authority for the requirements of the workers who were to be accommodated. Roofed sheds or buildings adjacent to the workers' accommodation could only be used where 'fires may be safely provided'. These



buildings also had to have a clothes-line or 'other suitable means' erected in them for drying clothes. Local authorities could also require a farmer to provide a source of heating to dry clothes.<sup>613</sup> Some farms had sophisticated cooking facilities. At Balnowlart, Ballantrae, in 1957, a hot-plate was supplied which operated 'very successfully', and was 'very popular with the workers'.<sup>614</sup> A new hot plate was also installed at Laggan in 1962.<sup>615</sup> However, even by 1961, one observer could remark that 'it is almost impossible to do anything but "rough" cooking'.<sup>616</sup> From 1970, the fire was to be safely provided in a building (but not in any sleeping apartment), on a fireplace, hot plate or other suitable apparatus. The front of the fire was to be adequately guarded to prevent the workers' clothing from coming into contact with it.<sup>617</sup>



**Illus. 12: Hearth in the potato workers' kitchen at Langlands.**  
[Photo 2004.]

The workers ate their meals, especially their breakfast and evening dinner, in their accommodation. In the first two decades of the twentieth century they did not always have a specially designated dining area and had to eat and sleep in the same place.<sup>618</sup> From 1921, byelaws provided that separate eating and sleeping apartments had to be provided. Some farms had separate buildings designated as dining apartments. For others, this was a 'portion of a large tool or machine shed, separated from the rest of the building by barricades of boards, boxes, sacks or bails of hay'.<sup>619</sup>

During the 1900s and 1910s, the accommodation had little or no dining furniture. Tables were seldom supplied, though at one or two farms they were made

from barrels which had boards placed across the top of them.<sup>620</sup> For the 1905 harvest, Patrick MacGill records that boxes were upturned to form seats.<sup>621</sup> In 1921, byelaws in Ayrshire laid down that farmers had to furnish a sufficient number of tables and seats for the use of the workers.<sup>622</sup> After 1938, that provision was more specific and they had to supply these in sufficient quantities so that the entire squad could be seated at the same time; each worker was to have two lineal feet of space at the table.<sup>623</sup> From 1970, these tables also had to have a smooth surface that was capable of being easily cleaned and be adequately supported from the floors or walls. Seating had to comprise properly constructed chairs or benches with back support.<sup>624</sup> Nevertheless, these furnishings could still be of a basic nature. In 1964, Father Tuffy points out that 'the dining quarters are generally poorly furnished. In many cases there are not enough tables or stools and these have to be made up by the use of boxes, boards, etc'.<sup>625</sup>

Between 1910 and 1920, no provision was generally made for the storage of food.<sup>626</sup> Potatoes, ready for boiling, were placed in galvanised pails; bread was put in white cotton bags and hung on a wall.<sup>627</sup> Food such as bread, butter and jam was left on tables; workers stored further supplies of food in their personal trunks.<sup>628</sup> An inspector of the Scottish Board of Health (S.B.H), who inspected housing throughout Ayrshire in 1920, found that only one farm, Carlung at West Kilbride, supplied shelves on which the workers could store their food. That inspector especially highlighted that this accommodation had been specially built by Lord Glenarthur.<sup>629</sup> In 1921, local authority byelaws laid down that sufficient facilities had to be provided in an area outwith the sleeping apartments.<sup>630</sup> In 1970, this was to be a ventilated cupboard, ventilated box or other suitable receptacle for their food, which could be easily cleaned.

The workers had a distinct diet. In 1905 this included an evening meal of potatoes, fish and eggs. Their morning meal comprised tea, and bread and butter, with cheese and tinned meats. Their mid-day meal, which was eaten in the field, was sandwiches, and generally tea; they did not drink beer or spirits.<sup>631</sup> Elements of this diet are also noted in following years. In the Girvan area in 1920, lunch was potatoes and butter with milk.<sup>632</sup> By 1961 the main elements of their diet consisted of milk and potatoes.<sup>633</sup>

These foods were obtained from a number of sources. As has been noted, the potato merchant supplied the workers with a supply of potatoes.<sup>634</sup> Until at least the 1960s, the workers obtained milk, eggs and vegetables from the farms where they were employed.<sup>635</sup> In 1920 and until at least 1961, bakers' vans called daily at farms; butchers and fish howkers also visited at frequent intervals.<sup>636</sup> Additionally, as the workers were employed near villages or towns, they purchased food from local shops; they could renew their supplies regularly, even daily.<sup>637</sup>



### *Washing Arrangements*

The workers utilised a number of facilities to undertake personal ablution and the washing of clothes. In 1907 and 1910, no special arrangements were made for the former of these activities and the workers brought their own pails and other utensils, as well as their towels.<sup>638</sup> They often undertook this activity in the open air at the farm pump.<sup>639</sup> In only one or two instances, was special provision made. At Girvan Mains, specially constructed buildings were erected in 1910.<sup>640</sup> Ten years later, that farm had a washhouse with an inside water supply.<sup>641</sup> Water troughs were available at Carlung.<sup>642</sup> Special facilities were not supplied throughout the county until 1921 when the farmer had to provide them to the satisfaction of the local authority.<sup>643</sup> That provision became more stringent. In 1938, the farmer had to supply 'suitable' tubs or sinks for washing clothes in the ratio of one tub or sink to not more than ten workers.<sup>644</sup> In 1970, he had to make available separate hand-wash basins for each sex of worker.<sup>645</sup> In addition, where more than ten workers were accommodated, one bath had to be supplied for each sex; otherwise, there was only to be one bath. From 1921, the farmer had to make available in each building, or near to it, a sufficient supply of water to undertake these tasks, and also for drinking and cooking. Especially in the early twentieth century, that water supply was usually unheated and workers had to heat their water on the cooking fire, a task that could be slow and laborious to undertake.<sup>646</sup> In later years, better provisions were demanded. By 1962, the Carrick District Sanitary Inspector recommends that personal ablution facilities should include hot water; some farms such as Laggan made it available.<sup>647</sup> Nevertheless, such facilities had to be afforded to heat water for washing clothes and personal ablution from 1970.

### *Bedding Arrangements*

A number of arrangements were made to provide bedding and bedding materials. In Ayrshire, hay or straw was used throughout much of the twentieth century. Hay was less frequently utilised than straw and workers preferred oat straw to wheat straw which was harder and coarser in nature and therefore less comfortable to sleep on.<sup>648</sup> The farmer traditionally supplied these materials; that supply became regulated by the accommodation byelaws in 1921.<sup>649</sup> Until prohibited by byelaws made under the 1931 Order, they were scattered on the ground, or on top of potato sprouting or chitting boxes.<sup>650</sup> Thereafter, they were placed in sacks which were used as mattresses or palliases.<sup>651</sup> However, by 1965 that practice appeared to be out of date. At that time, the Department of External Affairs in Dublin wrote to the Scottish Development Department (S.D.D.) to suggest that the beds of straw on timber ramps should be replaced by proper beds with spring mattresses.<sup>652</sup> However, the S.D.D. considers that they provided hygienic sleeping facilities which could be easily kept clean. It recommends that

they should continue to be used.<sup>653</sup> Indeed, the byelaws which came into force in Ayrshire in 1970 continued to advocate their use.<sup>654</sup>

In the 1900s, workers did not generally use bed frames. In 1910 it was 'quite exceptional' to find them. Instead, they slept on the floor of their sleeping apartment or made use of temporary arrangements.<sup>655</sup> Potato chitting trays were upturned to form a bed base.<sup>656</sup> After 1921, the character of that base was regulated by byelaw: workers had to sleep on bedsteads that had nine inches between them and the floor.<sup>657</sup> Subsequent byelaws also regulated the dimensions of bunk beds and their position from the walls in the sleeping apartment.<sup>658</sup> By 1959, some workers brought bedsteads with them from Ireland. However, this practice made it difficult to accommodate the squad in the available sleeping premises and in some instances they used accommodation that was not approved for that use.<sup>659</sup>

Bed covers comprised blankets and other coverings. In the 1900s, workers sometimes provided these, though more often they were supplied by their potato merchant at the start of the season.<sup>660</sup> Their provision and use became regulated by byelaws in 1921 which laid down that where workers did not provide a sufficient number of blankets for their own use, merchants had to do so, to the satisfaction of the local authority.<sup>661</sup> More definite standards for their supply were set out in later byelaws: merchants had to make available two clean blankets (of not less than five pounds per pair) to each worker employed between 1 May and 30 September, and four clean blankets at any other time.<sup>662</sup> Merchants purchased new supplies of blankets each year. In 1920, a survey of six potato merchants based in Glasgow and one in Stirling, notes that 75% of the blankets were annually destroyed, wasted or damaged by the workers.<sup>663</sup> From 1938, merchants had to ensure that the bedding and blankets were kept in a clean state.<sup>664</sup> Workers also had other bedding materials such as bags and sacks. Patrick MacGill records that Micky's Jim sat in a cattle-trough 'sewing bags together with a packing needle; these were to be used as a quilt'.<sup>665</sup> In the mid 1930s they brought sheets and pillowcases with them. However, in 1961, not all males had these.<sup>666</sup>



## 11: Recreation

The workers engaged in a number of recreational activities around the farms where they were employed and in their accommodation. They went courting on the farms.<sup>667</sup> They also spent time exploring them. For the 1905 harvest, Patrick MacGill reports that 'Dermot had a curious habit of going out into the fields and lying down on the grass sod when the evening was a good one'.<sup>668</sup> They also contributed to their well-being. Farmers rewarded them for catching rats. At Rothesay in 1905, members of Micky's Jim's squad were given a halfpenny for each rat's tail which they gave to the farmer.<sup>669</sup> Some workers also socialised with the farm servants.<sup>670</sup>

Workers also remained within their accommodation. Some were so tired that they retired to bed soon after they finished their work. In Wigtownshire in 1947, Sean Ó Ciaráin admits that 'more often I spent the evenings lying on my bed, so tired I was after been up since before the break of day. Several times I slept right through to the morning without taking off my clothes or going to bed properly'.<sup>671</sup> In Ayrshire, another worker confirms that 'you slept the most of the time because you were that tired all week ... and when you are young and you are not so strong I suppose you just needed your sleep'.<sup>672</sup> Workers played card games such as banker.<sup>673</sup> They wrote home, telling of their experiences.<sup>674</sup> For some workers, such as Norah Ryan, in 1905, or workers from Donegal during the Second World War, this activity formed part of their weekly routine.<sup>675</sup> They read letters and newspapers that their friends and relatives in Ireland had sent to them; they bought and read Scottish newspapers.<sup>676</sup> Women engaged in domestic activities such as sewing and mending clothes.<sup>677</sup>

At the weekends when workers had more recreation time, they engaged in a range of social events. Males occasionally visited local public houses. In the 1930s, they and their gaffer frequented a number of these such as the 'Hole in the Wall' in West Kilbride.<sup>678</sup> In the early 1960s, one worker reports that drinking was not 'over-done'.<sup>679</sup> Scottish workers in Irish squads, including females, also drank. The 'principal relaxation' of Gourock Ellen, a member of Micky's Jim's squad in 1905, was to get drunk every payday.<sup>680</sup> As in other counties, squads socialised with one another.<sup>681</sup> They had a number of meeting places which included their accommodation and nearby towns and Roman Catholic chapels. Farms located near a main road or a central point in a district where a number of squads were accommodated, were popular as was accommodation that could host a large number of workers. Workers regularly arranged dances in their accommodation and used their sleeping quarters as get-together rooms.<sup>682</sup> They also made music and sang.<sup>683</sup> Workers went into nearby towns and villages. Girvan was a popular meeting place. On Saturday afternoons and evenings they visited that town for



pleasure, entertainment and to buy food at the numerous shops; they also sent money and telegrams to their families and relatives in Ireland.<sup>684</sup> At these times, the workers appeared as a large and distinct group.<sup>685</sup> On Saturday afternoons and Sundays, Mass was an important event in their weekly routine.<sup>686</sup> Throughout the early and mid twentieth century, numerous accounts refer to their attendance at Roman Catholic churches throughout Ayrshire. Especially in the first decades of the twentieth century, St. Joseph's Church of the Sacred Heart, Girvan was a central place of worship.<sup>687</sup> In 1907 attendance at the Saturday mass in Girvan was reported to have been the largest on record.<sup>688</sup> Sizable congregations were recorded in following years, as in early July 1911 when a mass celebrated by Father Flanigan, Springburn, Glasgow, was attended by upwards of 400 potato workers.<sup>689</sup> Special masses were arranged at that church to cater for the Irish workers and summer visitors.<sup>690</sup> In 1907, two Sunday morning services were held at it and in 1922 Canon Mullina arranged for the service of an extra priest for the weekends during July.<sup>691</sup> In July 1924, at least three masses were conducted each Sunday morning; the 11 o'clock service was attended by large numbers of worshippers who included harvesters, a great many of whom came from a distance by motorcar, motorcycle and cycle.<sup>692</sup>

## 12: Health and Illness

A number of observers comment on the health of the Irish workers during their employment in Ayrshire. They were generally regarded to be healthy and suffered little illness. In 1910, Mr Craig, Sanitary Inspector for the Kilmarnock District of Ayrshire, notes that they were 'an extremely healthy class and that very little serious illness occurs amongst them'.<sup>693</sup> In 1920, 'comparatively few' cases of illness were recorded among them.<sup>694</sup> Observers such as James Grierson of Achill were surprised at the low rate of outbreaks of infectious diseases among them.<sup>695</sup> Writing in 1913, Dr Coll Reginald Macdonald, County Medical Officer of Health for Ayrshire, considers that their work in the open air helped to keep them healthy.<sup>696</sup> Workers also confirm this view.<sup>697</sup>

Cases of illness were, of course, noted among the workers. In 1920, Miss Gertrude Thornton records that extent. She observes that the young members of the squads were particularly susceptible. In several bothies she found boys or girls unsupervised and 'very ill' in their beds: at Girvan Mains they included two children aged 10 and 11 or 12 and at another farm, a young girl of 14 years of age was 'very ill'. At Highgrange, she saw a very young girl with severe rheumatism caused by dampness. At Ardmillan, two men were ill.<sup>698</sup>

Infectious diseases were recorded, as in other counties such as Stirlingshire, where enteric fever broke out among the workers in 1897.<sup>699</sup> Potato workers were generally affected by the influenza epidemic ('Spanish' flu) which spread across Scotland and the world in 1918.<sup>700</sup> Dr Nannetti, Interim County Medical Officer of Health for Ayrshire, reports that 'considerable numbers of workers at various farms were laid up with the disease'.<sup>701</sup> At Balchriston, where 28 workers were employed, 17 were affected; at Morriston that figure was 39 of the 105 workers; at Girvan Mains where 218 workers were in residence, 'a large proportion' who occupied one shed were affected; in another, there were '45 workers lying ill in various places'.<sup>702</sup>

### *Death as a Result of Illness*

Writing in 1911, Dr Coll Reginald Macdonald confirms that the death rate from illness among the workers was low.<sup>703</sup> A number were caused by pneumonia. Fatalities included Mrs Gaughan during the 1910 harvest and two males in 1916.<sup>704</sup> The influenza epidemic of 1918 claimed the life of John Keane, a seventeen year old employed at Girvan Mains, and a small number of workers in other counties such as Perthshire.<sup>705</sup> Martin Corrigan died at a farm at Kirkoswald in 1917; another male died at Ardmillan in 1920.<sup>706</sup>



### *Occupational Illness*

Some occupational illnesses were caused by the work in the harvest field. Its strenuous nature caused muscular pains in the workers' legs, arms and backs. Sean Ó Ciaráin observes that 'most of the people who stuck with it [potato work] for a number of years ended up with sore backs and rheumatism and other pains which they never got rid of'.<sup>707</sup> Not all women wore gloves when they gathered potatoes, and the skin on their hands became cut and hacked from soil abrasions.<sup>708</sup> One worker from Donegal recollects that 'all the tops of your fingers was all chipped and there were blood on them'.<sup>709</sup> Women who kneeled on the soil as they gathered the potatoes suffered from cut and scraped knees.<sup>710</sup>

Especially during the first two decades of the twentieth century, a number of hazards were caused by the workers' accommodation. Workers did not always keep their premises in a clean and tidy state and they became unsanitary and were regarded to be a health hazard not only to themselves but also to the farm servants on the farms where they were located. The workers did not always have proper facilities to provide a sufficient and satisfactory standard of shelter and warmth. Dr Elizabeth McVail considers that the greatest hardship that they had to endure was the lack of proper facilities to dry clothes in wet weather.<sup>711</sup> She points out that 'the discomfort and danger of sitting in wet clothes after work and putting them on again still damp in the morning are obvious'.<sup>712</sup>

### *Treating Illness*

Where workers had minor injuries, they treated themselves or sought assistance from other members of their squad, especially the women. Their use of mutual aid is commented on by an observer in 1961: 'I am sure the other women folk do the best they can for them under these very difficult circumstances'.<sup>713</sup> That aid is noted in autobiographical writing of former workers such as that of Patrick MacGill. In Micky's Jim's squad in 1905 one of the Scottish workers, Gourrock Ellen, bathed Norah Ryan's knees and bought liniments and ointments and applied them to her wounds.<sup>714</sup>

Workers also made use of a number of local health institutions. Women such as Mrs Gertrude Bland assisted the workers by ensuring that they received proper medical attention. During the 1922 season, a worker requested that she visit Turnberry Lodge to 'see if I could get anything done for young boy suffering from blood poisoning - had him looked after and made comfortable'.<sup>715</sup> Workers who required further assistance called on a local doctor.<sup>716</sup> In 1921, they were frequently sent to poorhouse hospitals or the casual sick house.<sup>717</sup> Indeed, during the 1920 harvest season, a male who fell ill at Ardwell was taken to Maybole workhouse where he was detained for several weeks.<sup>718</sup>



### 13: Institutional Assistance

In Ayrshire, the Irish workers drew on existing institutions and had recourse to others in Ireland; some were also developed specifically for them. The most important of these were the church and the trade union.

#### *The Roman Catholic Church*

The Roman Catholic Church in Scotland and Ireland, the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland assisted the workers in a range of ways. Of these, the first church had the most important role in Ayrshire. This is perhaps not surprising: the Irish workers were Catholics who drew on their own institution when they were employed in this area and the other harvesting districts of Lowland Scotland.<sup>719</sup> By the early twentieth century, the county had well-established Catholic communities which they could make recourse to.<sup>720</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church provided a range of support for the Irish workers. Church buildings formed central meeting points for them, both when they attended mass and at other times. For example, on one Sunday afternoon during the 1909 harvest, a 'Catholic schoolhouse' was used as a meeting point for a group of workers who wanted to select officers for their union.<sup>721</sup> The clergy were familiar with the workers, sometimes over long periods of time. As parish priest in Girvan in 1918, Lord Archibald Douglas could draw on his ten years of experience to describe their employment and housing conditions.<sup>722</sup> In that year, Reverend Michael Carey of Maybole recalls that he had 'moved a great deal among them for the past four years'.<sup>723</sup> Father Thomas A. Hayes of Troon retained an interest in the workers, their employment and housing conditions from at least 1917 until 1937.<sup>724</sup>

Priests attended the workers when they were ill.<sup>725</sup> They performed ceremonies which marked the rites of passage, important times of celebration and commemoration that brought squads and their migratory community together. A number of workers married in Ayrshire. In the late 1930s, Michael King attended a wedding of two potato workers at Sunnyside, Monkton.<sup>726</sup> They conducted funeral services for the small number of workers who lost their lives during their employment. In July 1910, the body of Mrs Gaughan was conveyed to the Church of the Sacred Heart in Girvan and placed in front of the High Altar. The Very Reverend Canon Douglas conducted a short funeral service for her in Doune Cemetery which was attended by 'upwards of 1,000 potato harvesters of both sexes'.<sup>727</sup>

Importantly, priests attempted to secure better employment and housing conditions for the workers.<sup>728</sup> In the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland and Ireland, that interest was expressed by a number of individuals and specially



organised groups. They included priests who had parishes in the worker recruiting districts or in the early potato growing districts of Ayrshire. At least one committee was set up in Ireland: the Bishops' (Gresham) Committee for Improving Conditions of Irish Migratory Workers in Scotland. Meeting between 1920 and 1923, it comprised the bishops in the areas where the workers were recruited.<sup>729</sup>

In order to secure improvements, these individuals and committees collected evidence on the workers and their conditions using two methodologies that were closely associated with their countries of residence. The clergy who had parishes located in Ayrshire undertook that work during the course of their pastoral duties; some also undertook special investigation within their parish area. Irish priests and committees conducted special investigations which extended throughout the worker employment districts of Lowland Scotland. Thus, in the harvesting seasons between 1920 and 1922, the Housing Inspector of the Bishops' (Gresham) Committee, Mrs Gertrude Bland (Miss Thornton), undertook wide-ranging surveys throughout Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, Dunbartonshire, Lanarkshire and western Midlothian. During the 1964 harvesting season, Father Tuffy, parish priest of Ballina, Co. Mayo, surveyed the accommodation at 47 farms in Ayrshire and Wigtownshire; in 1963 he investigated it around Edinburgh.

In Ayrshire, the most intensive activity by the Roman Catholic clergy to secure better accommodation for the Irish potato workers took place during the 1910s and early 1920s. In Ayrshire, the priests took individual rather than collective action to secure improvements. Nevertheless, in a number of instances, as in the influenza epidemic of 1918, they reported and informed one another of conditions.<sup>730</sup> They also assisted the Irish Roman Catholic clergy in their investigations and helped them to seek support for their cause. After Father Joyce, Secretary of the Bishops' (Gresham) Committee, contacted Father Thomas A. Hayes and Father Michael Carey to gather evidence on conditions, Father Hayes took him around the Ayrshire farms to show him the accommodation.<sup>731</sup> Like the Irish clergy, each approached organisations that had the power to take action to improve the accommodation for the workers: the local authority, Scottish government departments (especially the Scottish Board of Health (S.B.H) and the Scottish Board of Agriculture (S.B.A.)) and Members of Parliament. The 'Accommodation' chapter records the correspondence of these local priests with the Secretary of Scotland, the Scottish Office and MPs.

### *Securing Improvements*

In 1914, the *Ayrshire Post* suggests that the work of the Roman Catholic clergy and others had secured 'great improvements' to the accommodation of the Irish workers.<sup>732</sup> During her survey work, Mrs Gertrude Bland (Miss Thornton) of the Bishops' (Gresham) Committee was instrumental in making farmers and potato merchants in Ayrshire and other counties aware of the need to provide suitable and

satisfactory accommodation and facilities, and maintain premises in a satisfactory manner. At a number of farms, she secured better conditions and higher standards and ensured that workers maintained their premises in a better condition. As she continued her surveying work in 1921 when byelaws had come into force, she took steps to ensure that farmers were aware of their existence, the penalties for non-compliance and that their provisions were compiled with. Further changes were secured as a result of the pressure which the clergy placed on officials of local authorities and Scottish government departments. Following Canon Lord Archibald Douglas' visit to Shanter Farm, Maidens, the Sanitary Inspector at Maybole 'promptly went out & made great improvements, but of course only as far as the law gave him power'.<sup>733</sup> After Mrs Bland reported poor housing conditions to the Sanitary Department in Ayr, officials investigated conditions and took action to improve them. After byelaws came into operation, her surveying work led to proceedings being instituted against a number of farmers and potato merchants in Ayrshire who had not complied with the byelaws.<sup>734</sup> Father Tuffy's survey of 47 farms in Ayrshire and Wigtownshire during the 1964 potato harvest, led the Scottish Development Department (S.D.D.) to request that these two local authorities should make 'very thorough inspections and regular visits' to the farms which he had visited.<sup>735</sup>

The clergy also had a long lasting influence on the accommodation in Ayrshire and other districts. Their contact and negotiations with local authorities and Scottish government departments influenced the introduction of legislation and byelaws under them to deal with the workers' accommodation. Importantly, Father Joyce considers that the 'unwearied investigations and interminable correspondence in the press and with public officials' by the 'many' priests over a period of 'many years' had helped to assist the introduction of section 45 of the Housing, Town Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 1919: they pressed for a public inquiry into conditions and once that legislation received its Royal Assent, they helped to secure the speedy introduction of byelaws throughout the District Committee areas of Ayrshire.<sup>736</sup> Father Tuffy's survey of accommodation in Ayrshire and Wigtownshire was influential in persuading Ayrshire County Council to consider the need to revise the byelaws that had been introduced in 1938. It also led Wigtownshire County Council to ask the S.D.D. if it could revise its byelaws governing the accommodation for the workers.<sup>737</sup>

### *The Trade Union Movement and Institutional Organisation of Irish Workers*

The Irish workers also drew on institutional assistance from unions set up by themselves, established unions and other institutions that acted on their behalf. The importance of the trade union in improving their employment and housing conditions was commented on by a number of observers. Shortly after she started



her inspection work in Scotland during the 1920 harvest, Miss Gertrude Thornton (Mrs Bland) asserts that 'until all the "gaffers" are tied by the rules of a union, there is not much hope for the better treatment of the squads'.<sup>738</sup> Priests emphasised how unionisation could protect and assist the workers.<sup>739</sup> Trade unions recognised the need for the workers to be formally organised. In 1937, Joseph Duncan, General Secretary of the Scottish Farm Servants' Union (S.F.S.U.), remarks that 'the only real safeguard for the living and working conditions of these workers lies in their organisation'.<sup>740</sup>

Strike action – the most obvious outward manifestation of the desire to secure better conditions – was undertaken in 1907, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921 and 1938; a further attempted strike was recorded in 1912. In these years, as in a number of others, such as 1909 and 1915, the workers were also organised by a trade union. These actions primarily affected harvesting work in Ayrshire and played a notable part of the workers' institutional history in the county.

### *Provision of Institutional Organisation*

The workers were organised by a number of unions throughout the early twentieth century. In three instances, in 1909, 1915 and 1938 they formed their own union. In 1909, they tried, though unsuccessfully, to organise themselves through their gaffers. In 1915, they instituted, in connection with the Ancient Order of Hibernians, a union.<sup>741</sup> In 1938, they established the Achill Migratory Workers' Union which drew on the assistance of another union, the SFSU.<sup>742</sup> In other instances, the workers were also organised by established organisations. In 1909, Mr P. M. Gallagher of the United Irish League in Achill, attempted to organise them. However, his action did not appear to have led to any strike action being undertaken.<sup>743</sup> After this date, the workers were always organised by established trade unions in Ireland and Scotland, notably the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (I.T.G.W.U.), the S.F.S.U. and the Scottish Women Farm Servants' Union (S.W.F.S.U.); this latter union played only a minor role in providing institutional support. In 1918, the I.T.G.W.U. organised the workers and negotiated with the potato merchants. For the following two seasons, it worked in partnership with the S.F.S.U. to collect contributions and undertake a range of activities such as negotiation work. However, as a result of organisational difficulties during 1920, it suggested that the S.F.S.U. should organise the workers.<sup>744</sup> That union accepted this suggestion and in 1921, undertook this task and created a separate section for the potato workers, the Potato Workers Section, which continued to operate throughout the 1920s.<sup>745</sup>

### *Efforts to Provide Better Conditions for the Irish Workers*

Many of the attempts to organise the workers and undertake strike action took place when a range of efforts were being made to bring attention to and improve their accommodation and employment conditions. In 1907, their strike occurred when their housing had started to receive increased attention by government departments, local authority officials and philanthropic organisations. The extensive union organisation and strikes of 1918 to 1921 took place after the conclusions and recommendations of the Ballantyne Commission were given effect to in section 45 of the Housing, Town Planning, etc. (Scotland) Act 1919, and consideration was being given to the byelaws which would be made under it. Between 1920 and early 1923, bishops from the dioceses where the workers were recruited formed the Bishops' (Gresham) Committee to improve their conditions.<sup>746</sup> This period of activity was also marked by increased union activity and collective agitation in Ireland and Scotland. In Ireland the membership of the I.T.G.W.U. grew at a tremendous rate to incorporate nearly 40,000 farm workers.<sup>747</sup> The S.F.S.U. also had a sharply rising membership. Furthermore, at the end of the First World War there was a high, and growing, demand for labour to harvest the greatly extended national potato acreage which remained at a high level for a number of years.<sup>748</sup> The need for a large pool of harvesting labour ensured that the workers had a strong bargaining position. The collective organisation in 1938 took place in the aftermath of the tragedy at Kirkintilloch on 16 September 1937. At this time, Scottish government departments were revising the housing legislation for the potato workers and other seasonal workers. The Irish Government had set up an inter-departmental enquiry into seasonal migration to Great Britain which included an investigation of the employment and housing conditions of the Irish potato workers in Scotland.<sup>749</sup>

### *Strikes*

The extent and intensity of each episode of strike action varied. In 1907, it appears to have taken place on a small scale during the early part of the harvesting season in Ayrshire. The threatened action of 1912 was of short duration and 'passed off without any trouble'.<sup>750</sup> The longest running and most extensive action in the twentieth century took place in 1918 when the workers and gaffers undertook stay at home action until their demands were met; they did not arrive in Scotland until mid July. That of 1919 was on a smaller scale. Although it was of short duration during the last week to ten days of June, workers continued their unrest after they recommenced their work.<sup>751</sup> The 1920 harvest saw renewed activity among the workers when they went on strike for a few days around 22 June.<sup>752</sup> The majority of them stayed at home 'until the struggle [was] fought to a successful issue'.<sup>753</sup> Reports do not, however, indicate the extent of their action in 1921.<sup>754</sup> Although



they were organised in 1938, and achieved their demands before they travelled to Scotland, they did not stage a strike after they arrived to start harvesting work.<sup>755</sup> Most frequently, they took action after they arrived in Ayrshire.<sup>756</sup>

### *Reasons for Taking Action*

The workers had many reasons for attempting to organise themselves and take strike action. Each of these was usually specific to a period of action. Workers and their gaffers felt that they had to resolve a situation that they considered was unjust. In 1910, gaffers attempted to organise the workers 'for the purpose of repudiating certain statements' against them: they were alleged to have pocketed a proportion of their workers' wages and kicked a girl to death.<sup>757</sup> They wanted to have institutional support. In 1918 they placed an advertisement in *Irish Opinion: Voice of Labour*, the official organ of the I.T.G.W.U., to seek the backing of a union.<sup>758</sup> They wanted to protest against a number of adverse situations which arose after they started their work at the harvest. During 1921, the workers took action for a variety of reasons: the potato harvest was a poor one with a low yielding crop which meant that there was less work for them to undertake; the Scottish economy was in 'general distress' and there was a poor demand for potatoes which led to a slump in the potato market; there was a larger sized labour force than was normally employed which caused a glut in the labour market; a number of workers had accepted employment at a lower rate of remuneration than the one which had been agreed between the union and the potato merchants; from 1 August the merchants reduced the wage rate given to the workers.<sup>759</sup> They organised themselves as a response to tragedy within their migratory community. The fire tragedy at Kirkintilloch on 16 September 1937 motivated such action. Importantly, they simply wanted to complain against their general employment conditions. For example, after they resumed their harvesting work in 1919 they protested 'against the inadequate rate of wages paid to the workers during the short harvesting season', the 'inequality of the rates of wages paid for some work' and defective accommodation.<sup>760</sup>

### *Improving the Employment and Housing Conditions*

When they undertook their action, the workers made a number of demands to improve their conditions at the Scottish and Ayrshire potato harvest. In 1915, they requested a minimum wage of 7s per graip or 3s 6d per day for each worker, in addition to the 'usual perquisites' of accommodation, potatoes, coal, and their fare paid between Ireland and Scotland.<sup>761</sup> A range of demands were also made during each of the strikes in 1918, 1919, 1920 and 1921. The largest number were made in 1918 and related to the main aspects of their employment conditions in Ayrshire and throughout their area of employment. These included the introduction

of a more satisfactory system for the payment of wages. This had a number of separate elements: a higher overall wage rate (14s per graip per day instead of the current rate of 7s or 8s) and a higher rate for overtime (time-and-a-half instead of the flat working rate); the removal of the fluctuating wage so that they could receive a steady income; payment for enforced idle time and work stoppage caused by wet weather and poor markets when merchants did not send their potatoes to market; the introduction of a maximum period of one day in a week when they lost their pay owing to non employment due to inclement weather.<sup>762</sup> Second, they appealed for the payment of railway and travelling expenses and for full shifting time when they moved between farms. Third, they requested that they could start work at 5 o'clock instead of 3 o'clock in the morning.<sup>763</sup> Fourth, they stipulated better housing, including separate sleeping accommodation for each sex of worker, good beds instead of the existing makeshift arrangements and improved cooking facilities.<sup>764</sup> A smaller number of demands were made in the immediately following seasons. In 1919, these were described as 'a living wage, decent sleeping apartments and full shifting time' or simply 'higher wages'.<sup>765</sup> The ones in 1920 were similar to those in 1919, but were more limited in extent: they comprised an increase of 2s per day in the rate of remuneration and payment of wages owing to the stoppage in work as a result of a glut in the market or inclement weather.<sup>766</sup> A smaller number were made in 1921. Workers requested that their wage (which had been reduced by potato merchants at the start of August) should be restored to its original level.<sup>767</sup>

Numerous demands were also made in 1938. Initially, the workers called for an improved wage rate and a minimum rate of pay: '10d an hour for hokers, with a minimum of £1 5s per week, and 1s an hour overtime, 47s 6d minimum for timmers for a 50 hour week; with time and a quarter for overtime: 20s minimum for barrel men; 60s minimum for foremen; with similar overtime.'<sup>768</sup> They requested that they should be paid directly instead of by the lump sum. Some accounts also suggest that they wanted the right of collective bargaining. The earlier perquisite having lapsed, the workers called for payment for travel to and from Scotland (merchants were to pay their fare to Scotland and their return fare was to be paid by the Irish government).<sup>769</sup>

### *Successes and Failures*

The unions and their negotiators faced many difficulties in negotiating with the potato merchants. As a result of these, in 1918, they had to bargain with the merchants through the Glasgow Trades Council and for the workers' demands to be submitted to arbitration.<sup>770</sup> In 1938, negotiations were difficult and were not initially successful. Owing to their apparent failure, workers from Achill were instructed not to tie themselves to gaffers until the potato merchants agreed to the terms approved by 'the majority' of the workers; gaffers were instructed not to



recruit squads.<sup>771</sup> Although the potato merchants offered better terms, these were insufficient to 'improve the position of the workers to any extent' and workers stood their ground until further concessions were presented.<sup>772</sup>

The collective organisation and strike action had varying degrees of success in achieving better employment and housing conditions for the Irish workers. Although the outcomes of the action in 1907 and 1912 are not known, the demands made in 1915 appear to have been unsuccessful.<sup>773</sup> However, the action of 1918 represented one of the most successful efforts to gain concessions: the workers received a 50% to 100% increase in their wage rate, a change in their hours of employment for harvesting first early potatoes and payment for shifting time.<sup>774</sup> Female workers won the right to separate sleeping accommodation (this was soon to be provided for in byelaws which came into force in Ayrshire in 1921).<sup>775</sup> However, in many ways the strike was unsuccessful. The concessions awarded comprised only a small number of the total demands. The Glasgow and West of Scotland Potato Merchants' Association did not recognise the union and would not submit the workers' demands to the Glasgow Trades Council.<sup>776</sup> Furthermore, as the workers staged a stay at home strike, the merchants argued that they were not on strike.<sup>777</sup> The strike also adversely affected the workers' welfare. As they did not arrive until well after the harvest started, they lost part of their season's wages. Their arrival disrupted the temporary arrangements that had been put in place to supply harvesting labour and caused a 'sort of glut' in the labour market and an oversupply in the potato market.<sup>778</sup> As harvesting operations were regulated by the state of the potato market, workers in the Girvan area were put onto half-time work which reduced their remuneration even further.<sup>779</sup> Their influx also affected the traditional housing arrangements. As a result, some bothies in the early growing districts were very overcrowded.<sup>780</sup>

Although the outcome of the negotiations in 1919 and 1920 is not known, the organisation of the workers in 1938 led to a number of concessions being awarded to them.<sup>781</sup> The potato merchants gave the workers 'the right of collective bargaining, a bonus of 30s apiece ... direct payment of wages' and their fare home at the end of the season; in addition, 'negotiations for further concessions were to start after the season opened'.<sup>782</sup>

### *The Impact of the Strike Action on the Harvesting of the Early Potato Crop in Ayrshire*

In 1907, the action took place on a small scale, and had little effect on the harvesting of the early potato crop, as had the threatened strike in 1912.<sup>783</sup> However, in 1918, it had a significant impact. It disrupted, over a significant period of the early potato harvest, the supply of potatoes to the potato markets. By mid June, when new season potatoes were not available, the supply of old crop potatoes became scarcer. New crop Ayrshire potatoes only became available slowly: on 20

June very limited supplies were on the Edinburgh market and in the following week there were restricted supplies. However, it was not until the first week of July that there was a better availability.<sup>784</sup> By 13 July, the supply problem had been resolved. The *Scottish Farmer* notes that 'ample supplies of both local and Ayrshire [are] coming forward' to the Edinburgh potato market.<sup>785</sup> That strike action also affected the rate at which the early potato crop was dug. When the Irish workers started their harvesting work in 1918, a smaller acreage than usual had been cleared. On 4 July, the *Ayrshire Post* observes that 'if we had the usual quantity of diggers here a fortnight ago one third of the crop would have been in the market at rattling prices'.<sup>786</sup> By 11 July, another reporter notes that 'we have seldom seen such a breadth of ripe potatoes in the fields which might have been all in the market if the diggers had been forward'.<sup>787</sup> The delay in harvesting the crop also affected the structure of the Scottish potato market. As most of the Scottish new crop potatoes came from Ayrshire, their absence allowed suppliers from other parts of Britain to enter the marketplace. One English merchant 'who used to be a buyer in Ayrshire, informed the writer [of the *Ayr Advertiser*] that he had been steadily sending large quantities of potatoes from England to Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen, a thing quite unheard of hitherto'.<sup>788</sup> The delay in harvesting also caused the potato tubers to bulk up over a longer period of time and to produce higher yielding crops that were also taken to market at a later date than usual. These crops caused an over-supply and a fall in price and income; consequently, the potato trade was reported to be slow.<sup>789</sup> For the potato merchants, the strike caused 'considerable loss and inconvenience'.<sup>790</sup> Furthermore, the late harvesting disrupted the customary agricultural practices of the early potato growing farms. As the crop took longer to clear from the field, farmers could not timeously sow a second crop, usually ryegrass. In turn, this was reported to affect the lamb trade.<sup>791</sup>

In following years, the impact of the strikes on the harvesting of the early crop in Ayrshire is not always noted. Although the action in 1919 and 1920 lasted for only a few days, it created much disruption to operations. In 1920, it caused the potato trade to be in 'absolute paralysis' in late June. It also affected the general economy of Girvan: 'the streets ... which under ordinary circumstances would be a hum of industry, are practically deserted'.<sup>792</sup>

### *Difficulties in Organising the Workers*

Union organisers note that it was difficult to organise the Irish workers. As they were recruited in one country and employed in another, organisers had to travel extensively between Ireland and Scotland.<sup>793</sup> In some years, such as the early 1920s, when Ireland was engaged in civil war, they found that travel was problematical. The workers were also employed for only a part of the year, and it was difficult to organise them throughout that period and maintain their interest in their union. In Mayo, they were organised during the months immediately



preceeding their departure for Scotland and before digging was in full swing. Only after the S.F.S.U. started to organise them were arrangements put in place to recruit them after the end of the harvesting season.<sup>794</sup> The workers were not always willing to pay a yearly subscription for their union membership.

The workers themselves posed a number of obstacles to unionisation. Not all were aware that a union or partnerships of unions were available that could assist them. Their lack of knowledge was especially noted during the 1918 and 1919 harvests. At the start of the 1918 season, a number of workers 'crossed [to Scotland] in ignorance of the associations' attitude' towards starting work.<sup>795</sup> In the following year, a reporter on the *Irish Weekly Independent* notes how 'I interviewed some of the young men, but as they had never heard of a trade union, it was difficult to convince them that their conditions would be improved by organisation'.<sup>796</sup> Not all the workers knew how a union operated and the benefits it could give them. During the 1920 season, the *Ayr Advertiser* reports that at a meeting in the Girvan District held 'for the purpose of establishing discipline among the workers', the bulk of the workers were 'absolutely unacquainted with trades union rules'.<sup>797</sup> Some workers did not know how they could join a union. At Maybole, in 1920, Miss Gertrude Thornton (Mrs Bland) notes that 'the gaffer, Thomas Twolis, Achill, told me that they were anxious to join the Union but he did not know where to write'.<sup>798</sup> Workers also found that the union's administrative arrangements were not always flexible. At the Church Hut, Doune, Stirlingshire, in 1920, Miss Thornton observes that 'none of this squad were members of any Union, and when spoken to about it, the Gaffer told me he had written to the Union but was told that unless he called at the office he could not get the papers, etc'.<sup>799</sup> By the 1921 season, that situation appeared to have become more problematic: the S.F.S.U. had recruited Barney Kilbane to travel around squads to oversee arrangements and collect contributions.<sup>800</sup> Workers would not, or could not, always pay. During the 1918 season, this problem arose almost as soon as the workers started their employment in Ayrshire. Father Thomas A. Hayes of Troon reports that many workers he spoke to had not paid their subscriptions for weeks 'as no one interested knew what should be done'. So concerned was he at this state of affairs that he wrote to *Irish Opinion: Voice of Labour* to try to effect remedial action.<sup>801</sup> Statistics of the contributions collected from workers during the 1921 season show that non-payment was extensive among some squads. At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the S.F.S.U. on 10 October 1921:

The General Secretary reported that the workers were not paying contributions as had been expected. Up to date about half the contributions had been received which ought to have been paid, and it did not appear as if the others could be got to pay or those who had made certain payments could complete the necessary payments during the season.

The full extent of the problem is highlighted in the union's financial statement of contributions for that season:

The General Secretary submitted a Financial Statement showing that £592 had been paid in contributions during the year. 24 squads had paid 20 weeks, 31 squads had paid from 10 to 20 weeks and 12 squads less than 10 weeks. 30 squads had not paid any contributions at all.<sup>802</sup>

Workers also showed a lack of support in other ways. Some did not want to become union members. After talking to a squad at Roddinglaw in Midlothian, Miss Thornton comments that: 'I also had a complaint from the workers of this squad about a few of the members refusing to join the Union'.<sup>803</sup> Black-leggers were recorded on a number of occasions. The Potato Workers' Section of the S.F.S.U. suggests that they had caused a severe problem in the 1921 season: 'some of the squads had gone home but a large number were black-legging, and although repeated efforts had been made to stop the black-legging these efforts had been without result'.<sup>804</sup>

The character of the workers also created obstacles for union organisers. Miss Thornton reports a lack of fighting spirit among them which she firmly believes stood against them and their desire to secure better conditions. She concludes that: 'until some such spirit is shown by the Irish worker, there is no use even hoping to fight the Scottish farmer for better housing'.<sup>805</sup> As the majority of the workers were teenagers and young adults, they may not have understood why they should organise themselves or press for better conditions.

If the workers did not always support the union or unite in a group, neither did the gaffers. Not all approved of unionisation. Some were black-leggers: in 1918 they broke the strike by travelling to Scotland and also employed workers at rates below those agreed by their union. Others were willing to organise their squads but would not support their cause.<sup>806</sup>



## 14: Summary

This survey has examined the social and institutional history of Irish migratory potato workers who harvested the early potato crop in Ayrshire during the twentieth century. From inside their migration, it recorded the experience of workers, potato merchants and farmers who were involved in the early potato crop and the harvesting of that crop. Other witnesses stood outside the migratory community and also the agricultural community. They were officials who undertook their duties, sometimes as part of special investigations into the worker employment and housing conditions. Some of them, such as sanitary inspectors and Roman Catholic priests, were acquainted with the workers and their employment conditions over long periods. They had a sound understanding of them and could place their knowledge of them within the wider context of agrarian employment, seasonal migratory work and a local authority powers and duties.

### *The Extent of the Employment of the Irish Workers*

In Ayrshire, the Irish workers were employed in large numbers. Especially before early potato cultivation spread to other districts of south-west Scotland, the majority of them were employed in the county at the start of their migratory work and the Scottish potato harvest. They were employed in specific districts, where they appeared as a distinct community group. It is difficult to know precisely how many workers were employed in the county, or throughout their area of employment in Lowland Scotland, either at a specific period or throughout the twentieth century. Estimates suggest that in the early twentieth century between 1,500 and 2,000 workers were employed throughout Lowland Scotland. After the Second World War (1939-1945), and especially during the 1950s and 1960s, their employment declined across this area. This was caused by a range of social, economic and technological changes in Ireland and Scotland that affected the need to undertake seasonal employment and the demand for that migratory workforce. In Ireland these included the increase in the standard of living, the desire to undertake other forms of employment, the preference of emigration over seasonal migration and improved economic conditions caused by the introduction of a range of financial benefits such as unemployment benefit. In Scotland, they included changes in the husbandry practices for the growing, harvesting and marketing of the early potato crop, technological advances in harvesting machinery, the wish of farmers and potato merchants to move towards a less labour intensive, and more cost effective, harvesting system as well as changes to the byelaws that governed the accommodation for the potato workers, especially those made under section 171 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1966.



### *The Nature of the Workers and their Migratory Community*

The Irish workers had a distinct migratory community. The squads, or groups, of workers were recruited from western and north-western counties of Ireland, especially the counties of Mayo and Donegal, by gaffers who transported them to Scotland (on a number of modes of transport and routes which changed during the course of the twentieth century), kept them together throughout the harvesting season and oversaw their employment. Traditionally, their community was distinguished by the age of the workers (many were teenagers and young adults), their gender (the largest percentage of workers were females), kinship networks (squads comprised family groups), language (workers from Donegal spoke Irish in the early twentieth century), dress and appearance. Their character did not remain constant throughout the twentieth century. By 1964, when Father Tuffy undertook his extensive survey of the accommodation at farms in Ayrshire and Wigtownshire, he found that the squads had changed. Some retained their traditional character, but others had a higher percentage of males; few family groups were accompanied by one or both parents. In 1971, that character had altered even further as squads included an increased number of workers from urban areas throughout Ireland who had no experience of agricultural work or migratory work before they travelled to Scotland.

The migratory community had a distinct social organisation. In the harvest field, squads were organised by work tasks (such as digging, gathering, and preparing the crop for market). In their accommodation, they were organised around their domestic duties. An appointed woman undertook housekeeping and cooking for their squad. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, this arrangement was introduced at the discretion of a gaffer and his potato merchant. It was formalised in byelaws introduced in Ayrshire in 1921. Family groups and friends also assisted one another. The gaffer, as the leader of a squad, looked after the welfare of his workers and provided support for them. Throughout their migratory community, workers had social networks which allowed them to draw upon and provide mutual aid and support. These were especially demonstrated at ceremonies which marked the rites of passage and social activities such as dances which they held at weekends.

Although the migratory community was self-sufficient in many ways, it also had contact with communities in Ayrshire. Workers obtained their food and provisions from the farms where they were employed as well as local villages and towns. Their spiritual and physical well-being was looked after by a number of local, regional and national institutions. The Roman Catholic Church provided them with a range of spiritual support (as in the ceremonies surrounding marriage and death) and especially in the first two decades of the twentieth century local priests placed pressure on Ayr County Council, the Scottish Office, the Secretary of Scotland and MPs to ensure that the workers were provided with a decent standard

of accommodation. In the early twentieth century, workers utilised the sick house and hospitals, and doctors were called upon to assist them (their general level of health was considered to be very good). Local government departments, through the Health Committee of Ayr County Council and the local authority Sanitary Department, drafted, introduced and enforced byelaws relating to their accommodation. By the mid 1960s, when these byelaws appeared to be out of date, their officials pushed for higher standards than those provided for by statute. Scottish and Irish government departments ensured the well-being of the workers. Officials, some of whom travelled around the early potato growing farms of Ayrshire and their other employment districts, ascertained their standard of accommodation. They also assisted in introducing and revising the statutory framework that regulated the provision of their accommodation. Especially before 1938, the migratory community drew on a number of organisations and unions in Ireland and Scotland to organise themselves and push for better employment and housing conditions. Although their union organisation and strike action were not always successful, they achieved some concessions.

### *Potato Culture and the Irish Workers*

The customs used to market the early potato crop in Ayrshire provided a context for the employment of the Irish workers. The use of sale by the acre had a great impact on the nature and extent of their harvesting work. The buyers of the crop were potato merchants, largely located in Glasgow and the west of Scotland, whose names were well known to the workers, as were their reputations. To harvest their crops, they required to employ large numbers of workers over a short period of the year through the contract labour system. These labour contractors were the gaffers, the merchants' local representatives in north and north-west Ireland. A number of merchants purchased the crop at one farm, and each employed their own squads on it, sometimes at the same time. They purchased plots of potatoes which were generally under ten acres in size. As a result, squads were employed at farms for short periods of time from upwards of a few days; many were employed on a number of farms during their employment in the county. The merchants purchased crops from the same farmers for many years. Their workers, who were often members of their squads for a number of seasons, were familiar with the farms and the employment conditions at them.

A number of seasonal factors shaped the experience of the harvesting work. These included the character of the growing period, the impact of the weather on crop growth and yields, as well as the nature of the crop, such as the habit of the foliage. Harvesting did not start on the same date each year, and could vary by as much as a fortnight. The crop was not always cleared at the same rate each year, and some harvesting seasons were shorter than others. Weather and market conditions could cause much broken time, thereby affecting the wages of the



workers, most of whom were not paid upstanding wages. Harvesting tools and their associated techniques shaped work processes. As the first earlies were harvested when the crop was green (the harvest was referred to as the 'green howk'), they were handled by tools and implements and their associated techniques that could deal with shaws or haulm, immature tubers and take the perishable product to market quickly without damaging it. They included older harvesting technologies that were no longer used for later-ripening crops of potatoes throughout Scotland. The graip, a very labour-intensive tool which required a large and a skilled labour force to use it efficiently and effectively, continued to be employed until the second half of the twentieth century. It came to be used alongside, and then replaced, by mechanical harvesters which became used increasingly on a wider scale: the plough, spinner and elevator digger. Although these later mechanical harvesters also required a large labour force to gather the crop from the ground, they made harvesting work less laborious, easier and quicker to undertake. These continued to be widely used even when the crop was harvested by the complete or mechanical harvester in other areas of Scotland. However, as time progressed, the complete harvester became widely adopted.

### *Employment Conditions*

Traditionally, many of the living conditions of the Irish workers were shaped by the contracts established between farmers and potato merchants to grow, harvest and market the early potato crop, especially the latter two. By the early twentieth century, the widespread use of sale by the acre demanded that their provision was split between these two parties. Farmers supplied the accommodation, hay or straw for bedding, and fuel for the workers; merchants provided blankets, cooking utensils and potatoes. This system could easily furnish these conditions: the farmer, for example, provided facilities that were already available on his farm or which he could easily obtain; the merchant supplied provisions that he could easily purchase or make available. This system had further advantages: the housing of workers on farms ensured that a squad was kept together and was close to its place of employment. As the workers were provided with most of their basic living arrangements, they could save large sums of money during the course of the harvesting season.

Employment and living conditions received much attention in Ayrshire as throughout Lowland Scotland. In 1922, the Sheriff-Substitute of Ayr Sheriff Court could assert that 'the housing of potato diggers has been a moot point in the county for a good many years'. A range of observers were critical of its standard and prevailing conditions. They received attention as part of special investigations by individuals and committees and by national initiatives. Scottish government departments also monitored conditions and paid increased attention to them when legislation required to be introduced, model byelaws were drawn up, and

complaints were made. In Ayrshire many of the statutes introduced to deal with their accommodation were adopted and enforced. These included the most significant pieces of legislation which ensured that the highest standard of provision was available. As the county was an important employment district for the workers, byelaws in this area were amongst the first to be made and confirmed in Lowland Scotland. The accommodation was used as a standard for conditions throughout this area: model byelaws were drafted on conditions that applied in Ayrshire.

The accommodation was criticised generally (but also praised in particular instances) especially before legislation was introduced and when it required to be amended; when the housing standards for the settled population made those for the potato workers appear to be out of date; when farmers (and also potato merchants) provided standards that were lower than those laid down by the byelaws; when observers who had little knowledge of the workers and the rationale behind the migratory conditions, surveyed them and submitted their recommendations to government departments. These criticisms ensured that the standard of provision and facilities improved greatly during the twentieth century. In 1960, Thomas L. Samuel, Chief Sanitary Inspector, could assert that 'conditions are certainly improved since Patrick MacGill wrote his *Children of the Dead End* just before WW1.'<sup>807</sup> By 1970, byelaws in Ayrshire were able to 'set better and more precise standards' and provided a 'much higher standard' of accommodation than in the proceeding decades.<sup>808</sup>



## Appendix 1:

### Development of the Early Potato Industry in Ayrshire

It is not easy to chart the development of early potato growing in Ayrshire. In 1866, Archibald Sturrock could 'recollect in his youthful days of the wide extent of potatoes thus planted in Ayrshire'. He adds that the potato was widely grown as a field crop in that county at an earlier date than in most other parts of Scotland.<sup>809</sup> The first agricultural statistics collected by the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland between 1855 and 1857 note the total acreage (earlies and maincrops) grown in that county and throughout Scotland. By 1856, some 8,688.5 acres of potatoes were grown in the county, a figure that was substantially higher than that for Midlothian and East Lothian, important potato growing districts (6,668.5 and 6,082.5 acres respectively under crop).<sup>810</sup> The 1850s and 1860s saw an expansion. But large fluctuations are noted in the extent of the acreage: between 1856 and 1857 it declined by 1,613 acres.<sup>811</sup> In 1866, Archibald Sturrock notes that 'there has been an increase under *early* potatoes since 1857'.<sup>812</sup> William MacCreath recollects that the early potato industry developed very rapidly 'after the railway came to Maybole in 1860'.<sup>813</sup> The role of the railway in that development is also confirmed by John H. G. Lebon who notes that 'it is highly significant that early-potato production was started in the Girvan district in the very decade that saw the establishment of the railway there'.<sup>814</sup> The railway provided a means of conveying the potatoes to the extensive markets of Glasgow and the west of Scotland, as well as to others that were further afield.

After this date, the evidence for the development of the early potato crop is patchy. For many years after 1866, the June Returns, the annual agricultural census of the Board of Agriculture (later Department of Agriculture for Scotland and then Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland), which collected statistics for agricultural holdings over one acre in size, simply notes the total acreage of land under the potato crop; it does not record the acreage under early varieties until 1944.<sup>815</sup> As the acreage of first earlies was extensive in some parishes, these statistics provide insights into the development of the early potato industry. As in earlier years, that industry developed rapidly. Between 1866 and 1870, there was a steady increase in the potato acreage. This was followed by large fluctuations in the following decade. John S. Stevenson notes that by 1870 'a great number' of farmers were growing early potatoes along the coast.<sup>816</sup> By the early 1870s, a number of important pioneers were making an important contribution to the industry. Quintin Dunlop of Morriston 'did more than almost anyone else to establish it commercially'.<sup>817</sup> As James Edward Shaw notes:



Somewhere about the year 1875, Mr Quintin Dunlop, then tenant of Morriston, and Mr. Hannah, tenant of Girvan Mains, went together on a business visit to Jersey. They had observed the popularity of early potatoes imported from that favoured island and desired to study the method adopted there. A ready market for them existed in this country at what appeared to be a remunerative price. They found conditions of soil and climate in Jersey similar to the south of Ayrshire and resolved to experiment in a small way.<sup>818</sup>

James Clachan of Burnside and James Bone, Robstone, also made an important contribution to the expansion of that the acreage under the early potato crop. According to James Edward Shaw, they 'developed this crop to the maximum extent' on their farms.<sup>819</sup>

The maximum acreage under the potato crop in Ayrshire (and throughout Scotland) during the time that records of acreage are recorded in the nineteenth century is noted in 1881 when some 10,993 acres were cultivated. It was not, however, until 1906, 1914, and between 1917 and 1921 that it once again extended above 10,000 acres. From 1882 until the end of the 1890s, the acreage declined and rose in cycles. Low figures were noted in 1885, 1891 and 1897; corresponding peaks were recorded in 1888 and 1893. It was not until 1897 that the acreage once again stood at the same level as 1866. From that year onwards, it steadily increased until 1906 when a high peak of 9,924 acres was recorded; that rise was only interrupted by a small decline of 148.5 acres between 1900 and 1901. Thereafter, the acreage remained above the 8,261.75 acre low of 1911 and was maintained above this level until 1923 (7,551.75 acres).<sup>820</sup>

As throughout Scotland, the extent of the potato acreage fluctuated greatly during the First World War (1914-1918). There was a tendency for it to increase to meet the demands for home food production. Although the acreage in Ayrshire fell to 8,545.5 acres in 1916 (reflecting a national decline), it increased to 10,058.5 acres in the following year, the same level that had been grown in 1914. The largest acreage, some 11,434.75 acres, was noted in 1918; the acreage remained above 10,000 acres until 1921.<sup>821</sup>

After the First World War, changing social and economic factors such as the increasing use of the internal combustion engine, and the elimination of transport difficulties, especially in areas remote from a railway, allowed a large number of growers to be brought into the early potato industry.<sup>822</sup> However, at the same time, and as throughout Scotland, the potato acreage declined. In Ayrshire, it dropped from 11,434.75 acres in 1918 (an all time high) to 7,551.75 acres in 1923. But it increased in the following years and the extent of cultivation continued to be maintained around 8,500 acres until it fell sharply between 1929 and 1930. It remained around the 7,500 acre level in 1931. The following three years saw it

fluctuate between 7,692 acres (in 1935) and 9,199.75 acres in 1932. Thereafter, it remained above 7,000 acres until it fell sharply to 6,114.25 acres in 1939.<sup>823</sup>

After the Second World War, when there was a large expansion in potato cultivation (some 9,321.25 acres were grown by 1942), the decline in the acreage in Ayrshire reflected a wider drop throughout Scotland.<sup>824</sup> This trend was attributed to a number of factors which included the increasing specialisation of the handling of the potato crop, the impact of external markets on the growing and marketing of first earlies and changes to byelaws governing the accommodation for seasonal potato workers. That decline was accompanied by the reduction in the number of parishes that grew early potatoes, especially in 1967 and also between 1971 and 1975 (Table 10). Their numbers continued to fall until 1985 when there was a sharp increase for a year. Nevertheless, by 1990 that figure had once again fallen to the level recorded in 1975. But the most prominent areas of production continued to retain their importance, though with decreased acreages under crop.

**Table 10: Number of Parishes in Ayrshire which had Early Potatoes to be Harvested, 1944 to 1990**

Year	Number of parishes with potatoes to be harvested before 31 July
1944	40
1945	41
1946	42
1950	40
1955	38
1960	36
1965	39
1967	31
1969	27
1970	24
1971	20
1975	14
1980	13
1985	19
1990	14

Source: N.A.S., AF40/33/1; AF40/34; AF40/35/1; AF40/39/1; AF40/44; AF40/49; AF40/54/1; AF40/56/1; AF40/58/1; AF40/59/1; AF40/60/1; AF40/64/1; AF40/69/1; AF40/74/2; AF40/79/2 (Agricultural Returns).

Note: The June Returns record 44 parishes in Ayrshire



### *The Suitability of the County of Ayrshire for Growing Early Potatoes*

The climate and aspect of Ayrshire have facilitated the cultivation of large acreages of early potatoes. The climate is suitable for encouraging the growth of the potato plant and its tubers. The level of rainfall is 'moderately good and reliable from March to May'.<sup>825</sup> That level allows the potato tubers to bulk up and produce heavy yielding crops.<sup>826</sup> Storm maps indicate that 'Ayrshire is off the line of severest storms in the critical growing months of April and May'.<sup>827</sup> Although frosts are noted, their level is also low. John H. G. Lebon notes that 'only 60 or 70 frosts are recorded in the average year on this coast, not much more than half the figure of inland stations'.<sup>828</sup>

The geography provides a sheltered area for the crop to grow. Raised beaches and features such as Renfrew Heights in Ardrossan, West Kilbride and Largs, provide shelter which allows the north and south coast to be 'the sole producers of *first* earlies' (1932-33).<sup>829</sup> The character of the soil is an important factor which has allowed earlies to be grown. The heavy sandy soil of the coastal platforms warms early in the spring to permit the crop to be planted in February and March and for plant growth to take place from an early date. It is not too dry and allows crops to withstand drought. As it has a loose texture, tubers are able to grow large and well shaped. It can take heavy dressings of organic manure that are required for potato cultivation.

### *Potato Varieties*

First early potatoes grown in Ayrshire were synonymous with the 'Epicure' variety. Bred from a cross between 'Magnum Bonum' and 'Early Regent' in 1897 by James Clark of Hampshire (1825-1890), that variety was quickly adopted by potato growers in Ayrshire.<sup>830</sup> It was one of a number of varieties sold at public auction from the 1903 harvest onwards; by 1906 it was referred to as a 'well known' one.<sup>831</sup> Almost a decade later, in 1913, the *North British Agriculturist* reports that it 'may be said to be the mainstay of the Ayrshire potato growers'.<sup>832</sup> Indeed, at the end of that decade it was 'the principal variety grown in the Girvan district'.<sup>833</sup> Its importance continued in the county. One of the contributors to *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland* observes that it was 'almost universally grown'.<sup>834</sup> In 1961, first early potatoes 'were mainly' of that variety.<sup>835</sup> Although growers were criticised for their adherence to it in following years, they argue that other varieties were not as successful.<sup>836</sup>

A number of factors ensured that the Epicure quickly gained prominence to become regarded as 'a wonderful potato'.<sup>837</sup> It was a very prolific grower. It could withstand rough weather conditions and had 'great recuperative power' which allowed it to quickly recover from wind or frost damage, including late frosts.<sup>838</sup>

Even when ravaged by drought, it would always produce a crop. Importantly, it was a high yielding variety.<sup>839</sup> For example, in 1938, the crop yielded from 8 to 10 tons per acre at the start of the season; this figure increased to about 15 tons.<sup>840</sup> The need to grow a high yielding variety was especially important as the price of early potatoes fell at intervals of a few days after the start of the new marketing season. These yields allowed potato merchants to recover the costs of purchasing crops, especially where they had paid high prices.<sup>841</sup>

However, despite these favourable attributes, the Epicure was also criticised. Its quality was not always highly regarded. In 1913, one agricultural newspaper notes that it was 'not of very great quality as a rule'; similar comments were also made in the following decades.<sup>842</sup> It was not suited to all eating tastes (it was a dry and mealy potato) or all potato markets. For example, in the 1930s, it was not considered to be suitable for the London market.<sup>843</sup>

The Epicure was not the only variety of first early potato to be grown in Ayrshire. Before it was introduced, a wider range of varieties were cultivated.<sup>844</sup> In 1894, these included 'Superbs', 'Sutton's Regents', 'Puritans' and 'Jubilees'. Two years later, 'Goodriches', 'Dons', 'Nonsuch' and 'Albert Victor' are also recorded.<sup>845</sup> All of these were amongst the 'best and earliest varieties'.<sup>846</sup> After Epicure became established, other varieties had a smaller role to play. 'Arran Chiefs', introduced in 1911, were a 'minor' variety, as were other Arran varieties such as 'Arran Crest' and 'Arran Pilot'.<sup>847</sup>



## Appendix 2:

### Clearing the Crop

#### *Starting Dates*

In 1922 William M. Lockhart, solicitor in Ayr, notes that 'it was quite well known that many farmers could not tell when their [early potato] crop would be ready'.<sup>848</sup> Potato merchants note that there was no 'fixed' date for starting the harvesting work, as it varied from year to year.<sup>849</sup> These differences are noted in the local Ayrshire newspapers and the Scottish agricultural newspapers. In 1898, the date of the first dispatch of 'new' or first early potatoes was 17 June, though in 1899 it was almost a fortnight later.<sup>850</sup> In 1895, harvesting began on 14 June; in 1894 it was 11 June, but in 1893 it commenced as early as 31 May. In 1892, that date was 17 June and in 1891, 26 June.<sup>851</sup> During the 1950 season, work had commenced on a number of farms by 16 June.<sup>852</sup> In 1952, harvesting had started on several fields by 6 June.<sup>853</sup> The 1959 season was considered to be a record one: one grower with 70 years of experience of growing first earlies had never witnessed the digging of the crop for the commercial market as early as 1 June.<sup>854</sup> In 1961, the first potatoes were harvested about a fortnight earlier than in past years, making for an extremely early season.<sup>855</sup> By the 1950s, the *Farming News and North British Agriculturist* measures the earliness of the harvest by the appearance of the early potatoes on the market by the time of the Royal Highland Show in mid-June.<sup>856</sup>

The date when the crop was ready to harvest was shaped by the character of the growing season, especially during May and June, months that were critical to plant growth. Cold weather and strong winds had a detrimental effect on plant growth and could severely damage crops.<sup>857</sup> Crops suffered extensively from gales and strong winds during the spring of 1934.<sup>858</sup> Frosts were especially prevalent in some growing seasons, and could severely damage plant growth. Widespread damage was noted in 1894, 1915, 1938 and 1948.<sup>859</sup> The frost in May 1938 was severe and caused fields at Maidens and Ballantrae to become 'a dead loss': that on 11 May caused damage on all farms on the Ayrshire coast. So severe was that frost that one observer notes that he 'had never seen shore crops so badly burned up and blasted in the month of May'.<sup>860</sup> An exceptionally hard frost on 24 and 25 May 1948 caused some fields to be frosted twice within a month.<sup>861</sup> In some years such as 1898 and 1909, both inland as well as coastal farms were affected.<sup>862</sup> Drought also caused damage to the crops. An exceptional drought was noted in 1921, and in 1932 the crop 'suffered severely in June from the long drought'; it was also affected in the following year, 1935, and in 1939.<sup>863</sup> Adverse weather slowed plant



growth. Frosts were referred to as the 'delaying frosts'.<sup>864</sup> Cold weather prevented the tubers from quickly bulking.<sup>865</sup> Crops affected by drought also gave poor yields. During 1914 when the crop was affected by drought, the yield averaged only 5 or 6 tons an acre instead of the 10 or 12 or more tons that were usually noted.<sup>866</sup>

Adverse weather delayed the start of the harvesting work. Thus, in 1919, the slow germination of crops led one observer to note that the crop would be fully a fortnight later than in the past year.<sup>867</sup> As a result of the cold, icy, north-westerly winds in 1913, crop growth was retarded and it was anticipated that harvesting would begin ten days later than in the previous season.<sup>868</sup> The cold and wet weather of the 'freak season' of 1952 caused crops to reach shops nearly a fortnight later than usual.<sup>869</sup>

### *The Progress of Harvesting Work*

The potato harvest commenced with the digging or harvesting of a small number of token lots of very early ripening plots of first early potatoes. Local newspapers in Ayrshire and the Scottish agricultural press report, with much excitement, the harvesting of these. They brought prestige to the farmer and also in later years the first county – Ayrshire or Wigtownshire – that undertook the first digging work. These token lots were followed by gradual digging for commercial sale and widespread harvesting work.

The harvesting of the early potato crop did not become widespread until late June. Just as the date when the harvest started varied from year to year, so too did the date when general harvesting work commenced. On 27 June 1894, the *North British Agriculturist* reports that harvesting 'will now be continuous'.<sup>870</sup> On 20 June 1907, that newspaper reports that 'digging has commenced in earnest this week' along the Girvan shore.<sup>871</sup> During the 1912 season, harvesting was general along the Carrick coast by 27 June and in 1952 a general start had been made to that work during the week of 20 June.<sup>872</sup> In 1963, it was being extensively undertaken by 28 June and in the following season digging on a full commercial basis was noted by 26 June.<sup>873</sup> However, in 1951 the potato harvest was by no means general by 29 June.<sup>874</sup>

The rate at which the harvesting field was cleared of its crop is not, however, always noted. Evidence from 1960 indicates the rate at which the crop could be harvested in Ayrshire. Although work in that county commenced at a later date than in Wigtownshire, it started at an earlier date than in the Lothians. Along the coast from Ballantrae to West Kilbride, harvesting was being generally undertaken in the week prior to 18 June.<sup>875</sup> By 2 July, 33% of the crop had been cleared, and a week later that figure stood at 42%.<sup>876</sup> By 23 July, that figure had risen to 74% and in the following week stood at 85%.<sup>877</sup> That rate of clearance was

slower than in Wigtownshire, but was faster than in the Lothians. The rate of digging varied from year to year.

The harvesting or digging rate was affected by a number of factors. Poor growing conditions affected crop yields and thus the amount of man-hours required to harvest the crop: lighter crops required fewer man-hours, and heavier crops a larger number. The state of the potato market was critical to the harvesting rate. From the time when the first early potatoes were sent to market, the price for this commodity declined every few days.<sup>878</sup> Prices could fall rapidly within a short period of time or fluctuate daily.<sup>879</sup> When harvesting became general, merchants had to ensure that the potato supply from the harvesting field which they put on the market met consumer demand and the market could quickly and easily dispose of the potatoes; an overstocked market caused potato prices to fall.<sup>880</sup> Digging was also affected by the Glasgow fair holidays. That holiday period marked the time when the peak demand for early potatoes had been reached, and also the time when the work of harvesting the seed crop started. That work ensured that a smaller tonnage of ware potatoes was placed on the market for sale.<sup>881</sup> Although some work was undertaken during inclement weather, that weather could affect the rate at which harvesting operations could proceed.

The work of harvesting the early crop continued until the end of July or early August. Thus, in 1914, the coastal harvest was nearly completed by 23 July, and the potato workers had started to move to other districts.<sup>882</sup> In 1951, it was mostly finished by 27 July.<sup>883</sup> Some harvesting seasons could be much shorter than these dates indicate. For example, in 1949, a year of drought and low potato yields, the early potato digging was nearly finished by 15 July; a year later the crop was practically all lifted by 14 July.<sup>884</sup>



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> John Strawhorn and William Boyd, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland: Ayrshire* (Edinburgh, 1951), p. 28.
- <sup>2</sup> *North British Agriculturist and Edinburgh Evening News*, 29 July 1857.
- <sup>3</sup> *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 19 June 1954.
- <sup>4</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 14 June 1934.
- <sup>5</sup> John Strawhorn and William Boyd, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, p. 52.
- <sup>6</sup> National Archives of Scotland (hereinafter N.A.S.), AF40/35/1 (Agricultural Statistics).
- <sup>7</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 20 June 1888.
- <sup>8</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 18 June 1901.
- <sup>9</sup> John Strawhorn and William Boyd, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, p. 772.
- <sup>10</sup> *Scottish Farmer*, 28 May 1932, 24 June 1933, 30 June 1934.
- <sup>11</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 23 June 1921, 29 June 1922.
- <sup>12</sup> *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 12 July 1958. One report from 1948 suggests that the north of England had always been a recognised market for Scottish earlies (*Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 24 June 1948).
- <sup>13</sup> *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 12 July 1958.
- <sup>14</sup> John H. G. Lebon, *Ayrshire*. In L. Dudley Stamp, ed, *The Land of Britain: The Report of the Land Utilisation Survey of Britain: Part 1: Ayrshire* (London, 1937), p. 49; Edward Shaw, *Ayrshire 1745-1950: A Social and Industrial History of the County* (Edinburgh, 1953), p. 175; Archibald Sturrock, 'Report on the Agriculture of Ayrshire', *Transactions of The Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland*, 4<sup>th</sup> series, 1 (1866-67), p. 31.
- <sup>15</sup> John H. G. Lebon, *Ayrshire*, p. 49; Archibald Sturrock, 'Report on the Agriculture of Ayrshire', p. 32.
- <sup>16</sup> Archibald Sturrock, 'Report on the Agriculture of Ayrshire', p. 40.
- <sup>17</sup> John H. G. Lebon, *Ayrshire*, p. 49.
- <sup>18</sup> Archibald Sturrock, 'Report on the Agriculture of Ayrshire', p. 40.
- <sup>19</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 11 July 1900. The continued use of the same fields for early potato growing in other areas of Britain is noted by Walter P. Wright, *A Book about Potatoes and Other Vegetables* (London, c. 1917), p. 24.
- <sup>20</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 26 June 1913.
- <sup>21</sup> *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 14 June 1958.
- <sup>22</sup> *Mayo News*, 28 September 1929.
- <sup>23</sup> Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Agricultural Statistics Ireland, 1906. Reports and Tables Relating to Migratory Agricultural Labourers* (Dublin, 1907), p. 10, p. 11 (PP 1907, XCVII, Cd. 3372).
- <sup>24</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 30 June 1910.
- <sup>25</sup> John H. G. Lebon, *Ayrshire*; John Strawhorn and William Boyd, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*; James Edward Shaw, *Ayrshire 1745-1950*.
- <sup>26</sup> James Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland* (Cork, 1947).



- <sup>27</sup> Anne O'Dowd, *Spalpeens and Tattie Hokers: History and Folklore of the Irish Migratory Agricultural Worker in Ireland and Britain* (Blackrock, 1991); Jonathan Bell, 'Donegal Women as Migrant Workers in Scotland', *ROSC: Review of Scottish Culture* 7 (1991), pp. 73-80; Jonathan Bell, 'Migratory Labourers from Donegal', *Saothar* 9 (1983), pp. 100-106.
- <sup>28</sup> Heather Holmes, 'As good as a holiday': *Potato Harvesting in the Lothians from 1870 to the Present* (East Linton, 2000), pp. 185-246.
- <sup>29</sup> For example, Heather Holmes, 'The Kirkintilloch Bothy Fire Tragedy of September 16 1937: An Examination of the Incident and the Resulting Legislation', *ROSC: Review of Scottish Culture* 9 (1995-6), pp. 57-75; Heather Holmes, 'Organising the Irish Migratory Potato Workers: The Efforts in the Early Twentieth Century', *Rural History, Economy, Society, Culture* 11:2 (2000), pp. 207-229; Heather Holmes, "Unwearied investigations and interdeterminable correspondence": The Churches and Clerical Work in Improving Housing Conditions for Irish Migratory Potato Workers in Scotland', *Scottish Economic and Social History* 20:1 (2000), pp. 31-57.
- <sup>30</sup> John H. G. Lebon, *Ayrshire*, p. 48.
- <sup>31</sup> John Strawhorn and William Boyd, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, p. 45.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ayr Advertiser*, 23 July 1914.
- <sup>33</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 14 June 1934.
- <sup>34</sup> John H. G. Lebon, *Ayrshire*, p. 48.
- <sup>35</sup> John H. G. Lebon, *Ayrshire*, p. 48.
- <sup>36</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 20 June 1888.
- <sup>37</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 20 June 1894, 4 July 1894.
- <sup>38</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 1 July 1911.
- <sup>39</sup> James Edward Shaw, *Ayrshire 1745-1950*, p. 175.
- <sup>40</sup> Heather Holmes, 'As good as a holiday', pp. 30-33.
- <sup>41</sup> *North British Agriculturist and Edinburgh Evening Journal*, 29 July 1857.
- <sup>42</sup> *North British Agriculturist and Edinburgh Evening Journal*, 29 July 1857; John Strawhorn and William Boyd, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, p. 288, p. 353, p. 367; John H. G. Lebon, *Ayrshire*, p. 49.
- <sup>43</sup> *Scottish Farmer*, 30 June 1900.
- <sup>44</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 26 June 1913.
- <sup>45</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 20 June 1883; Redcliffe Salaman, *The History and Social Influence of the Potato* (1949; rpt. Cambridge, 1989), p. 404.
- <sup>46</sup> *North British Agriculturist and Edinburgh Evening Journal*, 29 July 1857.
- <sup>47</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 1 July 1868, 7 October 1868.
- <sup>48</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 20 June 1883.
- <sup>49</sup> Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, *Evidence Given Before the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland Rural and Urban* (Edinburgh, 1921), vol 1, p. 504, question 12,766.
- <sup>50</sup> For example, *North British Agriculturist*, 28 May 1902.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ayr Advertiser*, 28 June 1917; *North British Agriculturist*, 14 June 1934.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ayr Advertiser*, 28 June 1917.

- <sup>53</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 29 June 1887. T. P. McIntosh notes that in 1857 the crops in Ayrshire were sold 'mainly to dealers'. He adds that 'the sale of the crop by auction in the field was adopted at a later stage of development' in the potato trade in Ayrshire. (T. P. McIntosh, 'The Potato Industry in Scotland', *Scottish Journal of Agriculture* XXIV: July (1943), p. 138).
- <sup>54</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 4 July 1888.
- <sup>55</sup> For example, *North British Agriculturist*, 6 June 1894, 20 June 1894, 4 July 1894, 22 July 1894.
- <sup>56</sup> James Edward Shaw, *Ayrshire 1745-1950*, p. 174.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ayr Advertiser*, 30 June 1938.
- <sup>58</sup> *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 15 June 1957.
- <sup>59</sup> James Edward Shaw, *Ayrshire 1745-1950*, p. 174.
- <sup>60</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 12 July 1899.
- <sup>61</sup> For example at Robstone in 1912 seven of the ten plots were larger than ten acres. The largest was twenty acres one rood and one pole (*Scottish Farmer*, 22 June 1912).
- <sup>62</sup> *Scottish Farmer*, 14 June 1919; *Ayrshire Post*, 10 June 1921; *North British Agriculturist*, 18 May 1922.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ayr Advertiser*, 28 May 1925; *North British Agriculturist*, 8 June 1911; *Scottish Farmer*, 30 June 1923.
- <sup>64</sup> *Scottish Farmer*, 13 June 1896.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ayrshire Post*, 4 August 1922.
- <sup>66</sup> For example, *Ayr Advertiser*, 28 June 1917.
- <sup>67</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 5 May 1898; *Scottish Farmer*, 26 June 1915. In 1897 and 1898 the following merchants were from Glasgow: John Armstrong, Robert Armstrong, Alex Barr, James Fulton Jnr., John Gibson, James Gray and McLauchlan, William Hay and Co, John McArthur, John Nelson, R. & S. Paton, Andrew Paul, Thomson Bros., and Wotherspoon and Donald. John Armstrong was from Govan; William Brackenridge, and William Grant were from Hamilton; John Grant was from Cambuslang; Buchanan, Gray and McLauchlan were from Johnstone, Greig and Co, and Alex Greig were from Kilmarnock; Graham was from Kirkoswald; Jas. McClymont was from Mauchline and McMoreland was from Girvan.
- <sup>68</sup> *Scottish Farmer*, 26 June 1897.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ayrshire Post*, 4 August 1922.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ayrshire Post*, 4 August 1922; *Scottish Farmer*, 26 June 1897.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ayrshire Post*, 4 August 1922; *North British Agriculturist*, 23 June 1921, 19 June 1922. In 1921 and 1922 merchants at the sales included those from Glasgow: James Fulton Jnr., James Gray, Archibald Jackson, Robert Lyburn, J. & A. McArthur, William Murdoch, Reid, Graham and McRobbie, Paul and Weir, and Thomson Bros. John King and Son was from Bellshill; Thomas Shields was from Partick; William Grant was from Hamilton; J. & A. Henderson was from Airdrie; Galbraith's Stores, Ltd, was from Paisley; G. & D. Maxwell was from Forfar. The following were merchants from Ayrshire: John McClement (Irvine); D. Ramsay and Son (Riccarton); William Atkinson and Son (Prestwick); David Bone (Saltcoats).



- <sup>72</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 27 May 1903; *Scottish Farmer*, 20 June 1896.
- <sup>73</sup> *Scottish Farmer*, 20 June 1931, 17 June 1933; *North British Agriculturist*, 2 July 1922. G. & D. Maxwell purchased by private sale in earlier years (*Scottish Farmer*, 21 May 1921).
- <sup>74</sup> *Scottish Farmer*, 28 June 1930, 5 July 1930.
- <sup>75</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 14 June 1934.
- <sup>76</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 1 July 1938.
- <sup>77</sup> Anne O'Dowd, *Spalpeens and Tattie Hokers*, p. 194; 'Voices of the Twentieth Century', transmitted RTE, 13 May 2000; Jimmy O'Donnell, *The Arranmore Disaster*, Saturday, 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1935 (Ballyshannon, n.d.).
- <sup>78</sup> Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Agricultural Statistics, Ireland, 1905. Reports and Tables Relating to Migratory Agricultural Labourers* (Dublin, 1906), p. 13 (PP 1906, CXXXIII, C. 2865).
- <sup>79</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591 (Proposed Byelaws Re. Accommodation for Potato Workers), Letter of 10 August 1920; 'Irish Migratory Workers in Scotland. Report on Farms Visited in Ayrshire During August, 1920'.
- <sup>80</sup> N.A.S., AF59/63 (Housing Conditions of Migratory Workers), Note of Deputation to Lord Pentland from the Scottish Council for Women's Trades, Monday March 21 1910'; *Connaught Telegraph*, 18 June 1921.
- <sup>81</sup> Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, *Evidence*, vol 1, p. 115, paragraph 120; N.A.S., HH63/3/9 (County of Ayr, 1957), p. 68.
- <sup>82</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/9, p. 85.
- <sup>83</sup> *Connaught Telegraph*, 18 June 1921; Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, *Evidence*, vol 1, p. 114, paragraph 116.
- <sup>84</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/9, p. 68.
- <sup>85</sup> N.A.S., AF59/63 (Housing Conditions of Migratory Workers), Letter from County Chief Constable's Office, Ayr, 12 January 1911.
- <sup>86</sup> Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, *Evidence* vol 1, p. 115, paragraph 117; *Glasgow Herald*, 2 November 1910.
- <sup>87</sup> *Ayr Advertiser*, 23 July 1910.
- <sup>88</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62 (Housing Conditions of Migratory workers), 'Report on Migratory Labourers from the West of Ireland and Achill, and on the Conditions under which they Worked in Scotland'.
- <sup>89</sup> PP 1906, CXXXIII, C. 2865.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ayr Advertiser*, 27 June 1907.
- <sup>91</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, III, 'Housing of Potato Diggers'.
- <sup>92</sup> Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, *Evidence*, vol 4, p. 47, appendix XXIX, question 12,440, paragraph 19.
- <sup>93</sup> N.A.S., HH1/569 (Seasonal Inflow. Irish Immigration), Letter from Department of Agriculture for Scotland to C. C. Cunningham, Scottish Office, Whitehall, 15 March 1934; Letter from Ministry of Labour, Whitehall to W. S. Murie, Scottish Office, July 1934.

- <sup>94</sup> Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Agricultural Statistics Ireland, 1907. Reports and Tables Relating to Migratory Agricultural Labourers* (Dublin, 1908), p. 9 (PP 1908, CXXI, Cd. 4123).
- <sup>95</sup> *Ayr Advertiser*, 27 June 1907.
- <sup>96</sup> N.A.S., HH1/569, Letter from Department of Agriculture for Scotland to C. C. Cunningham, Scottish Office, Whitehall, 15 March 1934.
- <sup>97</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, 'Report on Migratory Labourers from the West of Ireland and Achill, and the Conditions under which they Worked in Scotland'.
- <sup>98</sup> N.A.S., HH1/569, 'Second Report. Immigration of Irish Workers. Substitution of Scottish for Irish Labour in Seasonal Work in Agriculture'.
- <sup>99</sup> Questionnaire from Galbraith and Roy, 27 March 1984, sent to Anne O'Dowd. Anne O'Dowd, *Spalpeens and Tattie Hokers*, pp. 304-305. Replies are housed in the Archives of Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin.
- <sup>100</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62 (Housing Conditions of Migratory Workers), 'Report on Migratory Labourers from the West of Ireland and Achill, and on the Conditions under which they worked in Scotland'.
- <sup>101</sup> Board of Trade, Labour Department, *Report by Mr Wilson Fox on the Wages and Earnings of Agricultural Labourers in the United Kingdom, with Statistical Tables and Charts* (London, 1900), Appendix III (PP 1900, LXXXII, Cd. 346).
- <sup>102</sup> Anne O'Dowd, *Spalpeens and Tattie Hokers*, p. 188.
- <sup>103</sup> National Archives of Ireland (hereinafter N.A.I.), B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Housing Conditions of Potato Workers in Scotland'.
- <sup>104</sup> School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, Sound Archive (hereinafter S.S.S., S.A.), 1995/128 (John Galloway).
- <sup>105</sup> N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Tatie Workers in Scotland, 1962, Peadar O'Donnell'.
- <sup>106</sup> Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo: An Emigrant's Memoirs of Ireland and Scotland*, (Dublin, 1991), p. 71.
- <sup>107</sup> Michael King, Yorkshire, 1998 (interview).
- <sup>108</sup> N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Housing Conditions of Potato Workers in Scotland'.
- <sup>109</sup> S.S.S., S.A. 1995/136 (David Scobie).
- <sup>110</sup> N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Housing Conditions of Potato Workers in Scotland'.
- <sup>111</sup> *Report of Inter-Departmental Committee on Seasonal Migration to Great Britain, 1937-38* (Dublin, 1938), p. 13.
- <sup>112</sup> Anne O'Dowd, *Spalpeens and Tattie Hokers*, p. 188.
- <sup>113</sup> Michael King, 1998.
- <sup>114</sup> S.S.S., S.A., 1995/137 (David Scobie).
- <sup>115</sup> S.S.S., S.A., 1995/128 (John Galloway).
- <sup>116</sup> *Mayo News*, 16 June 1928.
- <sup>117</sup> PP 1906, CXXXIII, C. 2865, p. 12.
- <sup>118</sup> *Report ... Seasonal Migration to Great Britain*, p. 62.
- <sup>119</sup> *Report ... Seasonal Migration to Great Britain*, appendix V.



- <sup>120</sup> *Report ... Seasonal Migration to Great Britain*, p. 12.
- <sup>121</sup> *Mayo News*, 16 June 1928.
- <sup>122</sup> Michael King, 1998.
- <sup>123</sup> Michael King, 1998.
- <sup>124</sup> N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Report on the Living Accommodation for Irish Workers Engaged in Potato Harvesting in Scotland'; Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 72.
- <sup>125</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End* (1914; rpt. London, 1985), p. 61.
- <sup>126</sup> *Mayo News*, 28 September 1929.
- <sup>127</sup> Michael King, 1998.
- <sup>128</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, pp. 60-61.
- <sup>129</sup> Jonathan Bell, 'Donegal Women as Migrant Workers in Scotland', p. 76.
- <sup>130</sup> Michael King, 1998.
- <sup>131</sup> Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 71.
- <sup>132</sup> *Sunday Independent*, 20 June 1971.
- <sup>133</sup> N.A.S., AF59/63 (Housing Conditions of Migratory Workers), Letter from County Chief Constable's Office, Ayr, 12 January 1911.
- <sup>134</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, (1915; rpt. London, 1986), p. 127.
- <sup>135</sup> *Mayo News*, 16 June 1928.
- <sup>136</sup> Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 72.
- <sup>137</sup> Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 72.
- <sup>138</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, pp. 60-61.
- <sup>139</sup> Michael King, 1998.
- <sup>140</sup> N.A.S., HH62/33 (Medical Officer of Health Report), *Report for Dunbartonshire, 1907*, p. 53.
- <sup>141</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 61.
- <sup>142</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, pp. 136-8.
- <sup>143</sup> Elizabeth M. McVail, 'An Enquiry into the Housing of Seasonal Workers in Scotland', unpublished M.D. thesis (University of Glasgow, 1915), p. 42.
- <sup>144</sup> N.A.S., HH62/39 (Medical Officer of Health Annual Report), *Report for Ayr, 1910*, p. 50.
- <sup>145</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591, Minute to Mr Heighton, 'Housing of Irish Potato Pickers'.
- <sup>146</sup> N.A.S., HH62/39, *Report for Ayr*, p. 50; Heather Holmes, 'As good as a holiday', p. 192.
- <sup>147</sup> N.A.S., HH62/39, *Report for Ayr*, p. 50.
- <sup>148</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 11 October 1924.
- <sup>149</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 11 October 1924.
- <sup>150</sup> N.A.S., AF59/63, Letter from County Chief Constable's Office, Ayr, 12 January 1911.
- <sup>151</sup> Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, *Evidence* vol 1, p. 119, paragraph 116.
- <sup>152</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, III, 'Housing of Potato Diggers'.
- <sup>153</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591 (Proposed Byelaws Re. Accommodation for Potato Workers), 'Irish Migratory Labourers in Scotland. Second Report by Miss G. Thornton. The Edinburgh District'; 'Report on Accommodation'.

- <sup>154</sup> *Connaught Telegraph*, 18 June 1921.
- <sup>155</sup> *Irish Weekly Independent*, 18 June 1938.
- <sup>156</sup> *Report ... Seasonal Migration to Great Britain*, p. 14, p. 62.
- <sup>157</sup> N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Report on Accommodation for Irish Workers Engaged in Potato Harvesting in Scotland'.
- <sup>158</sup> Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Agricultural Statistics, Ireland, 1908-1909. Reports and Tables Relating to Migratory Agricultural Labourers* (Dublin, 1909), p. 7 (PP 1909, CII, Cd. 4919); P. J. Joyce, *A Forgotten Part of Ireland*, (Dublin, 1910), pp. 160-1.
- <sup>159</sup> Heather Holmes, 'As good as a holiday', p. 194.
- <sup>160</sup> Heather Holmes, 'As good as a holiday', p. 195.
- <sup>161</sup> PP 1906, CXXXIII, C. 2865, p. 12.
- <sup>162</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 60-61.
- <sup>163</sup> S.S.S., S.A., 1995/130 (John Harvie).
- <sup>164</sup> Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 71.
- <sup>165</sup> S.S.S., S.A., 1995/129 (John Harvie).
- <sup>166</sup> Board of Trade, Labour Department, *Second Report by Mr Wilson Fox on the Wages, Earnings, and Conditions of Employment of Agricultural Labourers in the United Kingdom with Statistical Tables and Charts*, p. 144 (PP 1905, XCVII, Cd. 2376).
- <sup>167</sup> PP 1906, CXXXIII, Cd. 2865, p. 13; PP 1907, XCVIII, Cd. 3481, p. 10.
- <sup>168</sup> N.A.S., HH62/34 (Medical Officer of Health Report), *Report for Stirlingshire, 1907*, p. 53.
- <sup>169</sup> Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Agricultural Statistics Ireland, 1909-10. Reports and Tables Relating to Migratory Agricultural Labourers* (Dublin, 1910), p. 6 (PP 1910, CVIII, Cd. 5033).
- <sup>170</sup> *Report ... Seasonal Migration to Great Britain*, p. 12, p. 62.
- <sup>171</sup> PP 1906, CXXXIII, C. 2865, p. 13.
- <sup>172</sup> N.A.S., AF59/63, 'Notes of Deputation to Lord Pentland from the Scottish Council for Women's Trades, Monday March 24 1910'.
- <sup>173</sup> PP 1907, XCVII, Cd. 3372, p. 11; Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Agricultural Statistics, Ireland, 1910-11. Reports and Tables Relating to Irish Agricultural Labourers* (London, 1912), p. 7 (PP 1912-13, CVI, Cd. 6198).
- <sup>174</sup> *Ayrshire Post*, 22 July 1910; PP 1912-13, CVI, Cd. 6198, p. 7.
- <sup>175</sup> N.A.S., AF59/64 (Housing Conditions of Migratory Workers), Letter from The Very Reverend Canon Lord Archibald Douglas, The Presbytery, Girvan, 6 August 1918.
- <sup>176</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 14 August 1920; N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Ayrshire Potato Growing Districts. Housing, etc., of Irish Migratory Labourers as Seen in August, 1920'; Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland Rural and Urban, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland Rural and Urban* (Edinburgh, 1917), p. 192, question 1,272 (PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731).
- <sup>177</sup> *Glasgow Record*, 14 August 1920.
- <sup>178</sup> *Ayrshire Post*, 26 June 1914.
- <sup>179</sup> *Ayrshire Post*, 26 June 1914.



- <sup>180</sup> *Irish Independent*, 1 October 1937; N.A.I., B 102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Housing Conditions of Potato Workers in Scotland'; Letter from Fr. Tuffy, Ballina, Co. Mayo to Mr S. Kerrigan, Department of External Affairs, Dublin, 7 September 1964.
- <sup>181</sup> Royal Commission on Housing, *Evidence*, vol 1, p. 120, question 1,577.
- <sup>182</sup> *Irish Independent*, 30 June 1920; Peadar O'Donnell, *Adrigooole* (London, 1929), p. 187.
- <sup>183</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591, Minute to Mr Heighton, 'Housing of Potato Pickers'.
- <sup>184</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 86.
- <sup>185</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 86.
- <sup>186</sup> Michael King, 1998.
- <sup>187</sup> Jimmy O'Donnell, *The Arranmore Disaster*, Saturday, 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1935, p. 1.
- <sup>188</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 4 July 1900.
- <sup>189</sup> *Ayr Advertiser*, 20 June 1912, 19 June 1913, 26 June 1913.
- <sup>190</sup> *Mayo News*, 28 September 1929.
- <sup>191</sup> *Ayr Advertiser*, 23 July 1910; *Glasgow Herald*, 2 November 1910, 1 July 1929.
- <sup>192</sup> N.A.S., AF59/63, Letter from County Chief Constable's Office, Ayr, 12 January 1911.
- <sup>193</sup> PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 192, question 1,272.
- <sup>194</sup> Elizabeth M. McVail, 'An Enquiry into Housing of Seasonal Workers in Scotland', p. 9.
- <sup>195</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 83.
- <sup>196</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Irish Migratory Workers in Scotland. Report on Farms in Ayrshire During August, 1920'.
- <sup>197</sup> Tinkers are not traditionally reported but see George Gmelch and Sharon Bohn Gmelch, 'The Cross-Channel Migration of Irish Travellers', *The Economic and Social Review* 16:4 (1985), p. 289.
- <sup>198</sup> 'Brutality in the Potato Fields', *Observer*, 13 June 1971.
- <sup>199</sup> 'Brutality in the Potato Fields', *Observer*, 13 June 1971.
- <sup>200</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/4 (County of Ayr, 1952), p. 81.
- <sup>201</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/7 (County of Ayr, 1955), p. 84; HH63/3/13 (County of Ayr, 1961), p. 90.
- <sup>202</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/14 (County of Ayr, 1962), p. 85.
- <sup>203</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/5 (County of Ayr, 1953), p. 62.
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- <sup>205</sup> *Irish Press*, 27 July 1962.
- <sup>206</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/6 (County of Ayr, 1954), p. 82; HH63/24/3 (County of Wigtown, 1951), p. 64; HH63/24/5 (County of Wigtown, 1953), p. 68; HH63/24/6 (County of Wigtown, 1954), p. 78.
- <sup>207</sup> N.A.I., 102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), Father Tuffy, 'Report on the Living Conditions for Irish Workers Engaged in Potato Harvesting in Scotland'.
- <sup>208</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/14 (County of Ayr, 1962), p. 84.
- <sup>209</sup> N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), Peadar O'Donnell, 'Tatie Workers in Scotland, 1962'.
- <sup>210</sup> N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), Peadar O'Donnell, 'Tatie Workers in Scotland, 1962'.

- <sup>211</sup> N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), Peadar O'Donnell, 'Tatie Workers in Scotland, 1962'.
- <sup>212</sup> 'Brutality in the Potato Fields', *Observer*, 13 June 1971.
- <sup>213</sup> Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Agricultural Statistics Ireland, 1900. Reports, Maps, Tables, and Appendices Relating to Migratory Agricultural Labourers* (Dublin, 1900), p. 6 (PP 1900, CI, Cd. 341).
- <sup>214</sup> Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Agricultural Statistics Ireland, 1885. Reports and Tables Relating to Migratory Agricultural Labourers*, (Dublin, 1885), p. 3 (PP 1884-85, LXXXV, C. 4601).
- <sup>215</sup> PP 1907, XCVII, Cd. 3372, p. 6.
- <sup>216</sup> PP 1907, XCVII, Cd. 3372, p. 5.
- <sup>217</sup> PP 1912-13, CVI, Cd. 6198, p. 3.
- <sup>218</sup> PP 1912-13, CVI, Cd. 6198, p. 4.
- <sup>219</sup> Anne O'Dowd, *Spalpeens and Tattie Hokers*, p. 27.
- <sup>220</sup> See PP 1884-85, LXXXV, C. 4601, p. 3; PP 1900, CI, Cd. 341, p. 7.
- <sup>221</sup> Anne O'Dowd, *Spalpeens and Tattie Hokers*, p. 27.
- <sup>222</sup> Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Agricultural Statistics Ireland, 1902. Reports and Tables Relating to Migratory Agricultural Labourers* (Dublin, 1902), p. 9 (PP 1902, CXVI, Cd. 850).
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- <sup>224</sup> PP 1902, CXVI, Cd. 850, p. 5.
- <sup>225</sup> James E. Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland*, p. 171; Gerard Moran, "'A passage to Britain': Seasonal Migration and Social Change in the West of Ireland, 1870-1890", *Saothar* 13 (1988), p. 25; Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Seasonal Migration and Post-Famine Adjustment in the West of Ireland', *Studia Hibernica* 13 (1973), p. 57; Anne O'Dowd, *Spalpeens and Tattie Hokers*, p. 28.
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- <sup>228</sup> PP 1910, CVIII, Cd. 5033, p. 6.
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- <sup>230</sup> *North British Agriculturist*, 19 July 1899, 4 July 1900.
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- <sup>236</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/2 (County of Ayr, 1952), p. 36; HH63/3/4 (County of Ayr, 1952), p. 81.



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- 258 Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 82.
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- 274 See for example, H. S. Irvine, 'Some Aspects of Passenger Transport Between Britain and Ireland, 1820-50', *Journal of Transport History* 4 (1960), pp. 225-241.
- 275 *Mayo News*, 26 November 1932. On 26 November 1932, it was announced that the S.S. Tartar service would be discontinued.
- 276 'Voices of the Twentieth Century', RTE (Dublin), transmitted 13.5.00.
- 277 Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 61, p. 74.
- 278 *Ayrshire Post*, 26 June 1914. In 1910 the Laird Line had sailings from Sligo to Glasgow on a Wednesday and Saturday; the service from Ballina to Glasgow was held fortnightly on a Tuesday and on alternate Tuesdays a ferry from Ballina, via Sligo, served Glasgow (*The Western People*, 4 June 1910).
- 279 *Ayrshire Post*, 26 June 1914; *Ayr Advertiser*, 2 July 1925.
- 280 *The Western People*, 13 June 1910; *Ayrshire Post*, 22 July 1910.
- 281 PP 1906, CXXXIII, C. 2865, p. 7.
- 282 *Irish Weekly Independent*, 18 June 1938.
- 283 *Scottish Farmer*, 20 July 1918. The use of Glasgow as a port is noted in the song the 'Tattie Howkers':
- 'Wha saw the tattie howkers  
'Wha saw them gaen away  
'Wha saw the tattie howkers coming through the Broomielaw  
'Some of them had bits [boots] and stockings  
'Some of them had naen afou [at all]  
'Whae saw the tattie howkers coming through the Broomielaw.'
- 284 *Ayr Advertiser*, 8 July 1920.
- 285 *Ayr Advertiser*, 5 July 1923.
- 286 N.A.S., HH1/569 (Seasonal Inflow. Irish Immigration), '(e) Lifting of Crops Sold by the Acre'.
- 287 Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, p. 115.
- 288 *Connaught Telegraph*, 18 June 1938.
- 289 Peadar O'Donnell, *Adrigooole*, p. 175.
- 290 *Irish Independent*, 28 May 1926.
- 291 Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, p. 119.
- 292 Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, p. 121.
- 293 Peadar O'Donnell, *Adrigooole*, p. 175.
- 294 Peadar O'Donnell, *Adrigooole*, pp. 177-78; *Irish Independent*, 28 May 1926.
- 295 Peadar O'Donnell, *Adrigooole*, p. 177-79; Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, pp. 122-23.
- 296 Peadar O'Donnell, *Adrigooole*, p. 178.
- 297 Michael King, 1998.
- 298 Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, pp. 75-76.
- 299 *Connaught Telegraph*, 18 June 1938; *Irish Independent*, 10 June 1938.
- 300 *Ayrshire Post*, 4 July 1919.



- 301 *Irish Independent*, 27 June 1919.
- 302 *Ayr Advertiser*, 30 June 1921, 21 June 1928.
- 303 *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 14 June 1938; *Irish Press*, 14 June 1938.
- 304 *Ayr Advertiser*, 26 June 1924.
- 305 *Ayrshire Post*, 4 July 1919.
- 306 *Ayr Advertiser*, 20 July 1923.
- 307 Peadar O'Donnell, *Adrigoole*, p. 183.
- 308 Michael King, 1998.
- 309 Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 76.
- 310 *Irish Independent*, 28 May 1926.
- 311 *Mayo News*, 11 March 1933; Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 76.
- 312 N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Housing Conditions of Potato Workers in Scotland'.
- 313 N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Meeting with Potato Gaffers at Mulranny, May 19<sup>th</sup>'.
- 314 Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 85.
- 315 Mrs Deane, Co. Mayo, 1998 (interview); S.S.S., S.A., 1995/137 (David Scobie).
- 316 Michael King, 1998.
- 317 Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 85.
- 318 N.A.S., HH1/569 (Seasonal Inflow. Irish Immigration), '(e) Lifting of Crops Sold by the Acre'; S.S.S., S.A., 1995/128 (John Galloway).
- 319 Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 74; Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, p. 136; James Slight and R. Scott Burn, *The Book of Farm Implements and Machines* (Edinburgh, 1858), p. 500.
- 320 James A. S. Watson and James A. More, *Agriculture the Science and Practice of British Farming* (Edinburgh, 1924), pp. 201-202.
- 321 John Strawhorn and William Boyd, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, p. 367.
- 322 S.S.S., S.A., 1995/137 (David Scobie).
- 323 *Scottish Farmer*, 17 June 1939.
- 324 Henry Stephens, *The Book of the Farm*, vol 2, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. (1844; Edinburgh, 1891), p. 397.
- 325 Michael King, 1998; Peadar O'Donnell, *Adrigoole*, p. 185; Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 84.
- 326 For plough types see Heather Holmes, 'As good as a holiday', pp. 40-44; Lord Kames, *The Gentleman Farmer, Being an Attempt to Improve Agriculture, by Subjecting it to the Test of Rational Principles* (Edinburgh, 1776), p. 107; David McClure, (ed.), *Ayrshire in the Age of Improvement*, (AANHS, Ayr, 2002).
- 327 Potato Marketing Board, *Survey of Early Potatoes 1968* (Cowley, 1970), p. 10.
- 328 *Ayrshire Post*, 19 July 1918.
- 329 Heather Holmes, 'As good as a holiday', pp. 44-45; N.A.S., AF59/4 (Agricultural Supplies), number 120.
- 330 Potato Marketing Board, *Survey of Early Potatoes 1968*, p. 10.
- 331 S.S.S., S.A., 1995/137 (David Scobie).

- 332 James A. S. Watson and James A. More, *Agriculture the Science and Practice of British Farming*, p. 201; *North British Agriculturist*, 1 July 1938; Henry Stephens, *The Book of the Farm*, vol 2, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, p. 397.
- 333 Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 85.
- 334 Potato Marketing Board, *Survey of Early Potatoes 1968*, p. 11.
- 335 Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, p. 136.
- 336 Arthur W. Sutton, 'The potato', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England* 3rd series, 9 (1898), p. 636, p. 648. Such baskets are noted in Kintyre. See Angus Martin, *Kintyre Country Life* (Edinburgh, 1987), p. 42.
- 337 Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 74.
- 338 Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 75.
- 339 Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, p. 136.
- 340 Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, p. 136.
- 341 John Strawhorn and William Boyd, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, p. 52. In 1938, some 90% of the Ayrshire crop was sold for ware. These writers noted that 'only occasionally are varieties like "Arran Pilot" grown for seed'.
- 342 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 14 July 1961.
- 343 Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 85.
- 344 Henry Stephens, *The Book of the Farm*, vol 2, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (1844; Edinburgh, 1871), p. 360; Henry Stephens, *The Book of the Farm*, vol 2, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, p. 397.
- 345 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 14 July 1961.
- 346 S.S.S., S.A., 1995/137 (David Scobie).
- 347 N.A.S., HH1/569, '(e) Lifting of Crops Sold by the Acre'; Michael King, 1998.
- 348 Henry Stephens, *The Book of the Farm*, vol 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (1844; Edinburgh, 1851), p. 97; Henry Stephens, vol 2, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, p. 360; Henry Stephens, vol 5, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, p. 117; Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, pp. 137-138.
- 349 James Edward Shaw, *Ayrshire 1745-1950*, p. 175.
- 350 S.S.S., S.A., 1995/128 (John Galloway).
- 351 *North British Agriculturist*, 19 June 1901, 16 June 1910, 10 June 1911.
- 352 James Edward Shaw, *Ayrshire 1745-1950*, p. 175.
- 353 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 7 July 1961.
- 354 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 7 July 1961.
- 355 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 23 June 1961.
- 356 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 14 July 1961.
- 357 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 7 July 1961.
- 358 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 14 July 1961.
- 359 Potato Marketing Board, *Survey of Early Potatoes 1968*, p. 11.
- 360 S.S.S., S.A., 1995/128 (John Galloway); S.S.S., S.A., 1995/129 (John Harvie).
- 361 Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, p. 136; James A. S. Watson and James A. More, *Agriculture the Science and Practice of British Farming*, p. 187.
- 362 Peadar O'Donnell, *Adrigoole*, p. 185.
- 363 'Voices of the Twentieth Century'.
- 364 Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 74.



- 365 Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, p. 136.
- 366 Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 75.
- 367 Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 75.
- 368 Peadar O'Donnell, *Adrigooole*, pp. 185-186.
- 369 'Voices of the Twentieth Century'.
- 370 'Voices of the Twentieth Century'.
- 371 S.S.S., S.A., 1995/129 (John Harvie); Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 85.
- 372 *North British Agriculturist*, 28 May 1902, 26 June 1913.
- 373 *North British Agriculturist*, 26 June 1913.
- 374 James Edward Shaw, *Ayrshire 1745-1950*, p. 175.
- 375 *Ayrshire Post*, 1 July 1921; *Ayr Advertiser*, 29 June 1922.
- 376 *Ayr Advertiser*, 26 June 1913; S.S.S., S.A., 1995/137 (David Scobie).
- 377 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 2 July 1948.
- 378 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 23 June 1950, 20 July 1951.
- 379 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 2 July 1948.
- 380 For the development of the complete potato harvester see Heather Holmes, 'As good as a holiday', pp. 249-271.
- 381 N.A.S., HH72/37/15 (Burgh of Ardrossan, 1963), p. 6; HH72/37/16 (Burgh of Ardrossan, 1964), p. 6; HH72/37/18 (Burgh of Ardrossan, 1966), p. 6.
- 382 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 1 July 1966.
- 383 Potato Marketing Board, *Survey of Early Potatoes 1968*, p. 10.
- 384 Potato Marketing Board, *Survey of Early Potatoes 1968*, p. 10.
- 385 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 1 July 1966.
- 386 Potato Marketing Board, 'Crop Production Survey, 1980' (unpublished, 1980).
- 387 Potato Marketing Board, 'Crop Production Survey, 1980' (unpublished, 1980).
- 388 PP 1906, CXXXIII, Cd. 2865, p. 12; N.A.S., HH1/569 (Seasonal Inflow. Irish Immigration), Letter from The Glasgow and West of Scotland Potato Trade Association, no date; '(e) Lifting of Crops Sold by the Acre' (Papers in file are from 1934).
- 389 Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, p. 136.
- 390 *Ayr Advertiser*, 7 July 1938.
- 391 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 28 June 1958; Peadar O'Donnell, *Adrigooole*, p. 186; *Mayo News*, 11 March 1933; N.A.S., AF59/62 (Housing Conditions of Migratory Workers), 'Report on Migratory Labourers from the West of Ireland and Achill, and on the Conditions under which they Worked in Scotland'.
- 392 *Irish Independent*, 30 June 1920.
- 393 *Ayr Advertiser*, 30 June 1921.
- 394 *Ayr Advertiser*, 2 July 1925.
- 395 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 1 August 1947.
- 396 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 20 June 1952.
- 397 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 30 June 1956.
- 398 *Ayr Advertiser*, 30 June 1921.
- 399 *Farming News and North British Agriculturist*, 2 July 1955.

- 400 Peadar O'Donnell, *Adrigooole*, p. 188.
- 401 S.S.S., S.A., 1995/128 (John Galloway). For an account of early potatoes being taken to market in Kintyre see Angus Martin, *Kintyre Country Life*, p. 41.
- 402 Mrs B. Scanlon, Co. Mayo, 1998 (interview).
- 403 N.A.S., AF59/64 (Housing Conditions of Migratory Workers), 'A' in letter attached from The Glasgow and West of Scotland Potato Trade Association, 7 February 1918.
- 404 Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Agricultural Statistics Ireland, 1908. Reports and Tables Relating to Irish Migratory Agricultural Labourers* (Dublin, 1909), p. 12 (PP 1909, CII, Cd. 4919).
- 405 N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Housing Conditions of Potato Workers in Scotland'.
- 406 Richard Anthony, *Herds and Hinds: Farm Labour in Lowland Scotland, 1900-1939* (East Linton, 1997), pp. 88-90.
- 407 N.A.S., HH1/569, Letter from J. A. Chegwiddden, Ministry of Labour to W. S. Murie, Scottish Office, 28 June 1933.
- 408 S.S.S., S.A., 1995/137 (David Scobie).
- 409 N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Housing Conditions of Potato Workers in Scotland'.
- 410 Department of Agriculture for Scotland, *Twenty-seventh Report of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland; Being for the Year 1938* (Edinburgh, 1939), p. 15 (PP 1938-9, IX, Cmd. 5968); *Irish Press*, 17 December 1970; *Sunday Press*, 30 May 1971, *Scottish Daily Express*, 19 June 1971.
- 411 S.S.S., S.A., 1995/129 (John Harvie); S.A., 1995/136 (David Scobie).
- 412 'Irish Potato Workers Sleep in Scotch Byres', *Voice of Labour*, 7 June 1919.
- 413 S.S.S., S.A., 1995/136 (David Scobie).
- 414 *Sunday Press* (Dublin), 1 July 1962.
- 415 Mrs Deane, Co. Mayo, 1998 (interview); Sean Ó Ciaráin, *Farewell to Mayo*, p. 71. One report suggests that on some farms in 1961 the farmer requested 16s per week rental for accommodation (N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Housing Conditions of Potato Workers in Scotland').
- 416 PP 1906, CXXXIII, Cd. 2865, p. 13.
- 417 *North British Agriculturist*, 4 July 1900.
- 418 PP 1907, XCVII, Cd. 3481, p. 11.
- 419 N.A.S., HH1/569, 'Immigration of Irish Workers'.
- 420 N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Tatie Workers in Scotland, 1962. Peadar O'Donnell'; 'Housing Conditions of Potato Workers in Scotland 14.7.61'.
- 421 N.A.S., AF59/62 (Housing Conditions of Migratory Workers), 'Report on Migratory Labourers from the West of Ireland and Achill, and on the Conditions under which they Worked in Scotland'.
- 422 N.A.S., AF59/62, 'Report on Migratory Labourers from the West of Ireland and Achill, and on the Conditions under which they Worked in Scotland'.
- 423 N.A.S., HH62/39 (Medical Officer of Health Report), *Report for Ayr, 1910*, p. 48.



- <sup>424</sup> N.A.S., HH62/14 (Medical Officer of Health Report), *Report for Stirlingshire, 1897*, p. 27; HH62/13 (Medical Officer of Health Report), *Report for Dunbartonshire, 1897*, pp. 60-67.
- <sup>425</sup> Heather Holmes, 'Dr John C. McVail and the Improvement of the Housing of the Irish Migratory Potato Harvesters in Scotland, 1897-c.1913', *Ulster Folklife* 44 (1998), pp. 2-16.
- <sup>426</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, 'Report on Migratory Labourers from the West of Ireland and Achill, and on the Conditions under which they Worked in Scotland'.
- <sup>427</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, pp. 75-76; Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit*, pp. 140-141.
- <sup>428</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 81.
- <sup>429</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, 'Report on Migratory Labourers from the West of Ireland and Achill, and on the Conditions under which they Worked in Scotland'.
- <sup>430</sup> The use of potato boxes was first reported for sprouting potatoes in the early 1870s. It is suggested that Mr Lyburn, Balchriston, brought a sample box from Cheshire and was the first grower in Ayrshire to use them for sprouting potatoes. At around that same time, Thomas Hunter, implement maker, Maybole, obtained some boxes from England and started to make them in considerable quantities (James Edward Shaw, *Ayrshire 1745-1950*, pp. 173-174).
- <sup>431</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, 'Report on Migratory Labourers from the West of Ireland and Achill, and on the Conditions under which they Worked in Scotland'.
- <sup>432</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, Letter from Irwin to John Sinclair, 25 February 1907.
- <sup>433</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, Letter from Irwin to John Sinclair, 25 February 1907.
- <sup>434</sup> Local Government Board for Scotland, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Local Government Board for Scotland, 1906* (Glasgow, 1907) pp. 218-219 (PP 1907, XXIX, Cd. 3470); Local Government Board of Scotland, *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Local Government Board of Scotland, 1907* (Glasgow, 1908), pp. iviii-lix (PP 1908, XXXII, Cd. 4142); N.A.S., AF59/62, III, 'Housing of Potato Diggers'.
- <sup>435</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, III, 'Housing of Potato Diggers'.
- <sup>436</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, III, 'Housing of Potato Diggers'.
- <sup>437</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, III, 'Housing of Potato Diggers'.
- <sup>438</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, III, 'Housing of Potato Diggers'.
- <sup>439</sup> N.A.S., AF59/63 (Housing Conditions of Migratory Workers), 'The Housing of Potato Diggers', pp. 13-14; HH62/36 (Medical Officer of Health Report), *Report for Stirlingshire, 1908*, pp. 77-78; HH62/39 (Medical Officer of Health Report), *Report for Ayrshire, 1910*, p. 50.
- <sup>440</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, 'Housing of Migratory Workers, 9 January 1908'.
- <sup>441</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, Letter from Local Government Board of Scotland, 2 June 1908.
- <sup>442</sup> Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland Rural and Urban, *Evidence*, vol 1, pp. 27-28, paragraphs 471-477; N.A.S., AF59/63 (Housing Conditions of Migratory Workers), 14 April 1910.
- <sup>443</sup> N.A.S., HH62/29 (Medical Officer of Health Report), *Report for Ayrshire*, pp. 47-54; (Medical Officer of Health Report) *Report for Dunbartonshire*, pp. 48-53; (Medical

- Officer of Health Report) *Report for Renfrewshire*, pp. 92-93; (Medical Officer of Health Report) *Report for Stirlingshire*, pp. 25-30.
- <sup>444</sup> Elizabeth McVail, 'An Enquiry into the Housing of Seasonal Workers in Scotland', p. 32; N.A.S., HH62/41 (Medical Officer of Health Report), *Report for Ayr, 1911*, p. 32.
- <sup>445</sup> Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, *Evidence*, vol 1, p. 1,650, paragraph 23.
- <sup>446</sup> Elizabeth M. McVail, 'An Enquiry into the Housing of Seasonal Workers in Scotland'; Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, *Evidence*, vol 1, p. 119, paragraph 115, p. 502, paragraph 1,650.
- <sup>447</sup> Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, *Evidence*, vol 1, p. 133, paragraph 2,061. The letter suggests that someone on the farm should be appointed to look after the cleanliness, decency and order of the workers, and the keeping of fires; that sufficient dry and airy accommodation be provided, separate for each sex, to sleep in; that previous to the arrival of the workers the walls and roof of these houses be swept down to remove cobwebs and dust and the whole interior receive a coat of limewash; that a fire, under cover, be provided for cooking food and to dry wet clothing; that an abundance of dry, clean straw be supplied for making up the digger's beds; that where only one building is available, it is reserved for the women, and tents provided for the men; that sufficient sanitary accommodation be provided; that sufficient blankets be provided.
- <sup>448</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591 (Proposed Byelaws Re. Accommodation for Potato Workers), 'Migratory Labourers in Scotland. Report of Fr. Joyce'.
- <sup>449</sup> N.A.S., AF59/63, 'Notes of Deputation to Lord Pentland from the Scottish Council for Women's Trades, Monday March 21 1910'; 'Deputation from Scottish Liberal Members of Parliament to Lord Pentland on Housing of Workers in Seasonal Trades, 14 April 1910'.
- <sup>450</sup> N.A.S., AF59/64 (Housing Conditions of Migratory Workers), Letter from Shieldmuir Branch of the United Irish League, 17 October 1916.
- <sup>451</sup> N.A.S., AF59/64, Letter from Ancient Order of Hibernians (Board of Erin) Division 211, 8 November 1916.
- <sup>452</sup> N.A.S., AF59/64, Letter from T. A. Hayes, The Presbytery, Troon, Ayrshire; Letter to Robert Munro, 6 October 1917; Letter from T. A. Hayes, The Presbytery, Troon, Ayrshire, 9 August 1917.
- <sup>453</sup> N.A.S., AF59/64, Letter from the Very Reverend Canon Lord Archibald Douglas, The Presbytery, Girvan, 6 August 1918; Letter from Michael Carey, St. Cuthberts, Maybole, 15 August 1918.
- <sup>454</sup> N.A.S., AF59/64, Letter from Michael Carey, St. Cuthberts, Maybole, 9 November 1918.
- <sup>455</sup> N.A.S. AF59/64, 'Notice of question for Wednesday 15 August 1917'.
- <sup>456</sup> *Ayrshire Post*, 20 August 1920.
- <sup>457</sup> N.A.S., AF59/64, Letter to Robert Munro, 6 October 1917.
- <sup>458</sup> *Ayrshire Post*, 20 August 1920; N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Bishops' (Gresham) Committee for Improving Conditions of Irish Migratory Workers in Scotland. Diary Showing Work During 1922 of the Committee's Inspector Mrs G. Bland'.



- 459 N.A.S., AF59/64, 'Carrick District Committee. Extract of Minutes of State Meeting Held at Maybole on Mon. 2nd September 1918'.
- 460 N.A.S., AF59/62, 'Explanatory Minute - Mr McKinna'.
- 461 N.A.S., AF59/63, 'Notes of Deputation to Lord Pentland from the Scottish Council for Women's Trades, Monday March 21 1910'.
- 462 PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 2.
- 463 PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 191, paragraph 1,261.
- 464 PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 191; paragraph 1,261, Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, *Evidence*, vol 4, p. 46, question 12,440, vol 1, p. 119, paragraph 115, p. 502, paragraph 1,650.
- 465 PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 193, paragraph 1,275, paragraph 1,276, paragraph 1,277.
- 466 PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 192, paragraph 1,279.
- 467 PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 192, paragraphs 1,270, 1,271, 1,272, 1,273, 1,274.
- 468 PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 195, paragraph 1,290.
- 469 PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 192, paragraph 1,279.
- 470 Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, *Evidence*, vol 1, p. 497, paragraph 12,452.
- 471 PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, pp. 193-194.
- 472 PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, pp. 194-195.
- 473 PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 195, paragraph 1,290.
- 474 PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 195, paragraph 1,287.
- 475 PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 195, paragraph 1,294.
- 476 *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) House of Commons Official Report*, 5th series, vol 119 (London, 1919), 19 August 1919, column 2132.
- 477 N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'To District Clerks: Ayr, Maybole, Kilmarnock, Kilwinning'.
- 478 N.A.S., DD13/1591, Letter from Rev. P. J. Joyce, Keel P.O., Achill Island, 11 August 1920.
- 479 N.A.S., DD13/1591, Letter from County of Ayr Northern District Committee, 30 August 1920.
- 480 N.A.S., DD13/1591, Letter from Scottish Board of Health, 20 August 1920; Letter from County of Ayr Northern District Committee, 30 August 1920; 'Northern District Committee, Kilwinning, 18 March 1921'.
- 481 N.A.S., DD13/1591, Letter from Scottish Board of Health, 22 December 1920. The counties were Fife, Perth, Stirling, Renfrew, Lanark, West Lothian, Midlothian and East Lothian.
- 482 *Ayrshire Post*, 18 February 1921.
- 483 *Ayrshire Post*, 11 February 1921.
- 484 *Ayrshire Post*, 11 February 1921.
- 485 N.A.S., DD13/1591, '23rd March 1921. Memorandum for the Board'.
- 486 N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Northern District. Miss McMichael's Observations'.
- 487 N.A.S., DD13/1591, Letter from Board of Agriculture for Scotland, 17 February 1921.
- 488 N.A.S., DD13/1591, Letter from Board of Agriculture for Scotland, 15 March 1921.
- 489 N.A.S., DD13/1591, '23rd March 1921. Memorandum for the Board'.
- 490 N.A.S., DD13/1591, '23rd March 1921. Memorandum for the Board'.

- 491 N.A.S., DD13/1591, '23rd March 1921. Memorandum for the Board'.
- 492 N.A.S., DD13/1591, Letter from Secretary, Scottish Board of Health, 26 March 1921.
- 493 Byelaws were adopted in that burgh at an early date as a result of concerns expressed at the accommodation. In 1916 it was discussed at the Dundee Public Health Committee (*Catholic Herald*, 9 September 1916).
- 494 *Ayr Advertiser*, 25 September 1924.
- 495 *Glasgow Herald*, 11 October 1924.
- 496 *Scotsman*, 11 October 1924.
- 497 N.A.S., AF43/266 (Housing (Scotland) Acts 1925 etc. Seasonal Workers), number 1.
- 498 N.A.S., AF43/266, number 14. These regulations (and the byelaws made under them) gave workers protection from an outbreak of fire and ensured safety in the event of one. Farmers had to provide, in each apartment of a building, adequate means of ventilation and lighting (including artificial lighting) to the satisfaction of the local authority. Where lamps or lanterns were to be used to provide artificial lighting, they had to be fitted with non-breakable fuel containers or containers of a type approved by the local authority; these were to be fixed to the walls, rafters or ceiling, or a place approved by the sanitary inspector. In each sleeping apartment, the farmer had to supply fire fighting appliances, which comprised two pails clearly marked with the word 'fire'; one was to be filled with sand, the other with water. Each sleeping apartment had to have suitable emergency exits which were to be provided to the satisfaction of the local authority. Such exits, which were to be clearly marked 'EXIT', had to open directly to the outside of the building and, as far as possible, be placed at the end of the apartment opposite to the normal exit. Where sleeping accommodation was located in an upper floor, a suitable fixed ladder or other means was to be erected and had to extend from the emergency exit to the ground.
- The employer was also involved in the provision of fire safety. He was not to permit any worker to use a candle or other naked light in any sleeping apartment or any loose straw or other readily inflammable material there. He had to ensure that when the accommodation was occupied, fire-extinguishers were placed in accessible positions for immediate use; he had to take steps to ensure that all emergency exits were maintained in an efficient working order and were kept free from obstructions. He had to record the name and home address of each worker employed and accommodated by him. These details were to be recorded by him in a book which was to be produced on demand for inspection by an official of a local authority or any officer of the D.H.S.
- The regulations and byelaws also embraced recommendations that had been earlier made by sanitary inspectors in Ayrshire such as John Craig (Kilmarnock District) and Mr D. Andrew (Northern District). The employer was responsible for ensuring that workers of different sexes did not occupy the same sleeping apartment, except where accommodation was specifically provided for married couples. He had to ensure that workers were not occupied in the sleeping accommodation to a ratio of less than 300 cubic feet per person (under a height of 12 feet). He also had to ensure that the workers did not cook food in any sleeping apartment.
- 499 PP 1929-30, Bills, II (Local Government (Scotland) Bill).



- <sup>500</sup> N.A.S., DD13/227 (Camps, Hostels etc. Accommodation for Seasonal Workers), number 5.
- <sup>501</sup> Heather Holmes, 'The Kirkintilloch Bothy Fire Tragedy of September 16 1937', pp. 57-75.
- <sup>502</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 19 October 1937.
- <sup>503</sup> *Hansard*, 5th series, vol 338, 13 July 1938, column 1388.
- <sup>504</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1642 (Rothesay: confirmed Byelaws of 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1939), number 4, enclosure to 12, number 24.
- <sup>505</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1590 (Model Byelaws), number 32.
- <sup>506</sup> N.A.S., DD13/2684 (Accommodation for Seasonal Workers), number 1, number 5.
- <sup>507</sup> N.A.S., DD13/2648, enclosure with 7, number 8.
- <sup>508</sup> N.A.S., DD13/2648, number 26.
- <sup>509</sup> N.A.S., DD13/2648, number 26; HH72/4/4, p. 36; HH63/3/9 (County of Ayr, 1957), pp. 86-87; CO7/3/1/41 (1954-55. County Council Minutes and Papers Including Committee and Sub-committee Minutes), 20 April 1964; HH63/9/16 (County of East Lothian, 1964), pp. 86-87.
- <sup>510</sup> N.A.S., HH72/4/6 (County of Ayr, 1966), p. 43.
- <sup>511</sup> Ayrshire Archives (hereinafter A.A.), CO3/8/3/52 (County Council Minutes), Health Committee Meeting, 3 March 1966; A.A., CO3/8/3/53, Health Committee Meeting, 2 March 1967.
- <sup>512</sup> A.A., CO3/8/3/53 (County Council Minutes), Housing Committee Meeting, 6 July 1967; Health Committee Meeting, 7 September 1967; CO3/8/3/54 (County Council Minutes), Health Committee Meeting, 1 February 1968.
- <sup>513</sup> A.A., CO3/8/3/54, Health Committee Meeting, 1 February 1968; N.A.S., HH72/4/8 (County of Ayr, 1967), p. 40.
- <sup>514</sup> A.A., CO3/8/3/54, Health Committee Meeting, 5 September 1968; N.A.S., HH72/4/10 (County of Ayr, 1968), p. 36; N.A.S., DD13/2684, number 63.
- <sup>515</sup> N.A.S., HH72/22/11 (Counties of Perth and Kinross, 1970), p. 29; HH72/23/19 (County of Renfrew, 1972), p. 41; HH72/29/18 (County of West Lothian, 1972), p. 24.
- <sup>516</sup> *Ayrshire Post*, 4 August 1922.
- <sup>517</sup> A.A., CO3/1/16 (County Council Minutes), County Council Meeting, 3 October 1922 - public health report.
- <sup>518</sup> A.A., CO3/8/1/16, County Council Meeting, 3 October 1922 - public health report; *Ayr Observer*, 20 June 1922.
- <sup>519</sup> *Ayr Observer*, 20 June 1922; *Ayrshire Post*, 4 August 1922.
- <sup>520</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Bishops' (Gresham) Committee for Improving Conditions of Irish Migratory Workers in Scotland. Diary Showing Work During 1922 of the Committee's Inspector Mrs G. Bland'.
- <sup>521</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Bishops' (Gresham) Committee for Improving Conditions of Irish Migratory Workers in Scotland. Diary Showing Work During 1922 of the Committee's Inspector, Mrs G. Bland'.
- <sup>522</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/2 (County of Ayr, 1950), p. 36.
- <sup>523</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/3 (County of Ayr, 1951), p. 63.
- <sup>524</sup> John Strawhorn and William Boyd, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, p. 353.

- <sup>525</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/6 (County of Ayr, 1954), p. 82.
- <sup>526</sup> For example, HH63/3/3 (County of Ayr, 1951), p. 31; HH63/3/5 (County of Ayr, 1953), p. 81; HH63/3/11 (County of Ayr, 1959), p. 91; HH63/3/12 (County of Ayr, 1960), p. 101.
- <sup>527</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/3, p. 63.
- <sup>528</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/3, p. 63.
- <sup>529</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/3, p. 63; HH63/3/10 (County of Ayr, 1958), p. 80; HH63/3/13 (County of Ayr, 1961), p. 90.
- <sup>530</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/2, p. 36; HH63/3/3, p. 63; HH63/3/9 (County of Ayr, 1957), p. 84.
- <sup>531</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/5, p. 81; HH63/3/10, p. 80; HH63/3/11, p. 92.
- <sup>532</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/1 (County of Ayr, 1949), p. 30; HH63/3/2, p. 36; HH63/3/3, p. 63.
- <sup>533</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/2, p. 36.
- <sup>534</sup> N.A.S., DD13/2684, number 12; HH63/3/5, p. 61. That work was not always undertaken with large labour resources. In 1961 the Chief Sanitary Inspector, Mr T. Samuel, 'complained' of the shortage of staff in his section. N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Visit to Chief Sanitary Inspector, County Buildings, Ayr (25 July 1961)'.
- <sup>535</sup> N.A.S., DD13/2684, enclosure to 26.
- <sup>536</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/3, p. 64.
- <sup>537</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/1, p. 30; HH63/3/3, p. 63; HH63/3/5, p. 61.
- <sup>538</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/2, p. 36.
- <sup>539</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/9, p. 68.
- <sup>540</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/1, p. 30; HH63/3/2, p. 36, HH63/3/3, p. 63.
- <sup>541</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/5, p. 82.
- <sup>542</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/9, p. 68.
- <sup>543</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/2, p. 36.
- <sup>544</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/4, p. 81; HH63/3/10, pp. 79-80.
- <sup>545</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/11, p. 92.
- <sup>546</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/5, p. 62, p. 82.
- <sup>547</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/1, p. 30; HH63/3/7, p. 84; HH63/3/11, p. 92, p. 93.
- <sup>548</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/3, p. 64.
- <sup>549</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/5, p. 82.
- <sup>550</sup> N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Tatie Workers in Scotland, 1962. Peadar O'Donnell'.
- <sup>551</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/3, p. 63.
- <sup>552</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/13, p. 90; *Sunday Review* (Dublin), 13 August 1961; *The People's Press*, 2 June 1962; *The Western People*, 27 March 1965.
- <sup>553</sup> N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Housing Conditions of Potato Workers in Scotland. 14.7.61'.
- <sup>554</sup> N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Tatie Workers in Scotland, 1962. Peadar O'Donnell'.
- <sup>555</sup> N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Report on the Living Accommodation for Irish Workers Engaged in Potato Harvesting in Scotland'.



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- 560 N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Visit to Chief Sanitary Inspector, County Buildings, Ayr' (25 July 1961).
- 561 N.A.S., HH63/3/12, p. 102; HH72/4/6 (County of Ayr, 1966), p. 42.
- 562 N.A.S., HH63/3/5, p. 82; HH63/3/13, p. 90.
- 563 A.A., Ayr, CO3/8/3/45 (County Council Minutes), Health Committee, 2 July 1959, Health Committee, 3 December 1959; CO3/8/3/46 (County Council Minutes), Health Committee 7 July 1960; CO3/8/3/47 (County Council Minutes), Health Committee, 7 September 1961; CO3/8/3/48 (County Council Minutes), Health Committee, 7 June 1962; CO3/8/3/49 (County Council Minutes), Health Committee 4 July 1963, 5 September 1963; CO3/8/51 (County Council Minutes), Health Committee, 2 September 1965; CO3/8/3/52, Health Committee, 3 February 1966; CO3/8/3/52, Health Committee, 6 October 1966, 1 December 1966; CO3/8/3/53, Health Committee, 7 September 1967, 7 December 1967; CO3/8/3/54, Health Committee, 5 September 1968; CO3/8/3/55 (County Council Minutes), Health Committee, 3 January 1969; N.A.S., HH63/3/11 (County of Ayr, 1959), p. 92; HH63/3/12 (County of Ayr, 1960), p. 102; HH63/3/13 (County of Ayr, 1961), p. 90; HH63/3/14 (County of Ayr, 1962), p. 86; HH72/4/4 (County of Ayr, 1965), p. 36; HH72/4/6 (County of Ayr, 1966), p. 43; HH72/4/8 (County of Ayr, 1967), p. 40; HH72/4/16 (County of Ayr, 1971), pp. 37-38; HH72/4/18 (County of Ayr, 1972), p. 41.
- 564 N.A.S., HH72/4/12 (County of Ayr, 1969), p. 41.
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- 566 N.A.S., HH63/3/14 (County of Ayr, 1962), p. 85.
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- 569 N.A.S., HH63/3/7, p. 84.
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- 572 N.A.S., HH72/4/14 (County of Ayr, 1970), p. 37.
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- 575 N.A.S., HH72/4/14, p. 37.
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- <sup>608</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Ayrshire Potato Growing Districts. Housing, etc., of Irish Migratory Labourers as Seen in August, 1920'.
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- <sup>620</sup> PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 192, paragraph 1,268; Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, *Evidence*, vol 4, p. 46, XXIX, appendix XXIX, question 12,440, paragraph 11.
- <sup>621</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-pit* (1915; rpt. London, 1986), p. 142.
- <sup>622</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Byelaws under Section 45 of the Housing, Town Planning, etc. (Scotland) Act 1919, as to the Provision of Proper Accommodation for Potato-workers, Harvesters, Fruit-pickers and Other Seasonal Workers Employed on Farms or Fruit Farms'.
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- <sup>624</sup> N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Ayr County Council. Byelaws with Respect to Accommodation for Seasonal Workers'.
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- <sup>627</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591, Letter from Scottish Board of Health, September 1919.
- <sup>628</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Report on Accommodation'.

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- <sup>632</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Irish Migratory Labourers'.
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- <sup>636</sup> N.A.I., B102/2/1 (Foreign Affairs), 'Housing Conditions of Potato Workers in Scotland'; N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Report on Accommodation'.
- <sup>637</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Irish Migratory Labourers'; 'Report on Accommodation'.
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- <sup>639</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62 (Housing Conditions of Migratory Workers), III, 'Housing of Potato Diggers'.
- <sup>640</sup> PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 191, paragraph 1,265.
- <sup>641</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Report on Accommodation'.
- <sup>642</sup> PP 1917-18, XIV, Cd. 8731, p. 191, paragraph 1,265.
- <sup>643</sup> N.A.S., DD13/1591, 'Byelaws under Section 45 of the Housing, Town Planning, etc. (Scotland) Act 1919, as to the Provision of Proper Accommodation for Potato-workers, Harvesters, Fruit-pickers and Other Seasonal Workers Employed on Farms or Fruit Farms'.
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- <sup>646</sup> 'Voices of the Twentieth Century'.
- <sup>647</sup> N.A.S., HH63/3/14 (County of Ayr, 1962), pp. 85-86.
- <sup>648</sup> Elizabeth M. McVail, 'An Enquiry into the Housing of Seasonal Workers in Scotland', p. 45; N.A.S., AF59/62, III, 'Housing of Potato Diggers'.
- <sup>649</sup> N.A.S., AF59/62, III, 'Housing of Potato Diggers'; DD13/1591, 'Byelaws under Section 45 of the Housing, Town Planning, etc. (Scotland) Act 1919, as to the Provision of Proper Accommodation for Potato-workers, Harvesters, Fruit-pickers and Other Seasonal Workers Employed on Farms or Fruit Farms'.
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