

2011 NATIONAL FAMINE COMMEMORATION TO BE HELD IN CLONES, COUNTY MONAGHAN

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan, T.D., Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, today announced the plans for the 2011 National Famine Memorial Day.

Minister Deenihan said: *'I am delighted that Clones, County Monaghan, is to be the location for the National Famine Commemoration in 2011 and to learn of the great support in the local communities in Monaghan for this event. It is evidence of the deep respect still held today for all those who perished, suffered and emigrated during this tragic period in our history. I look forward to discussions taking place over the coming weeks between my Department and the relevant stakeholders to make the necessary arrangements and I hope to announce the date of this year's commemoration very shortly.'*

There is nothing else in the history of the Irish people that can be likened to the Great Famine, either for its impact or its legacy of emigration, cultural loss and decline of the Irish language. That legacy also includes a strong appreciation among Irish people of issues such as food security and a strong commitment to humanitarian aid and relief, even today in these very difficult economic times.

Respected historians have pointed to the significant impact of the Famine in Ulster as a whole and to the particular impact in south Ulster. Indeed, Clones was amongst the hardest hit areas in all of Ireland. Before the Famine, Monaghan and neighbouring parts of Fermanagh had one of the highest population densities in all of the island of Ireland. In 1841, the population of the Clones Poor Law Union was 42,225. However, by 1851 this had fallen by 27,487, a decline of 35% and the number of inhabited homes dropped by 2,000. As Brian McDonald states in the Clogher record:

'More than 2,000 families gone from townlands and parishes, the traces of potato ridges, the fallen thatch and crumbling walls the only tangible evidence of their having lived and loved this place they knew as home'.

At least 13,000 people died from starvation and disease in Monaghan between 1847 and 1850. By the end of March 2007, the Strangers' Burial Ground of St. Tighernach's Church of Ireland was full. A memorial plaque at the Clones Famine and Workhouse mass grave bears the following moving inscription:

'Erected in memory of all the people from Clones Union who died because of the Great Famine 1845-1850; Also those who died in the workhouse 1845-1921; The meek shall inherit the earth...'

Famine relief schemes were set up throughout the country during the Great Famine and one of them in Clones gave rise to the world renowned Clones Lace. In 1847 Rev. Thomas Hand and his wife Cassandra arrived in Clones from Surrey and were so horrified by the devastation caused by the Famine that Cassandra set up the lace/crochet making as a relief scheme. By 1851, almost every family in Clones was involved in the crochet industry.

When making the announcement today in Clones, Co. Monaghan, Minister Deenihan also expressed his gratitude to the members of the National Famine Commemoration Committee for their commitment in ensuring that the catastrophic events of the Great Famine are appropriately remembered and that the extraordinary contributions of those who emigrated and of their many descendents abroad are justly celebrated.

PRESIDENT MCALEESE TO OFFICIATE AT THE 2011 NATIONAL FAMINE COMMEMORATION

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan, T.D., Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and Chair of the National Famine Commemoration Committee today announced that President McAleese has accepted an invitation to lead the official representation at this year's National Famine Commemoration.

The National Famine Commemoration ceremony will take place on Saturday, 10th September 2011 in Clones County Monaghan. The commemoration will comprise a programme in which the local communities in County Monaghan will be prominently involved followed by the formal State ceremonial event, which will include military honours and wreath laying ceremonies.

Minister Deenihan commented: *'President McAleese's involvement in this commemorative event shows the deep respect and honour that the Irish nation has for the victims of the great famine. This year's event promises to be a great success and a fitting tribute to those that perished many years ago but who will not be forgotten. As Chair of the National Famine Commemoration Committee, I would like to thank President McAleese for her participation in this year's event.'*

CUIMHNEACHÁN NÁISIÚNTA AN GHORTA MHÓIR 2011 LE REÁCHTÁIL I GCLUAIN EOIS, CONTAE MHUINEACHÁIN

D'fhógair an tAire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta, an tUasal Jimmy Deenihan, T.D., na pleananna do Lá Cuimhneacháin Náisiúnta an Ghorta 2011 inniu.

Dúirt an tAire Deenihan: *'Is cúis mhór áthais dom go mbeidh Cuimhneachán Náisiúnta an Ghorta Mhóir ar siúl i gCluain Eois, Contae Mhuineacháin i mbliana agus is mór agam an tacaíocht ollmhór don imeacht seo atá curtha ar fáil ag an bpobal áitiúil. Léirítear leis sin an meas mór atá go fóill ar na daoine úd a d'éag, a d'fhulaing agus a chuaigh ar imirce le linn na tréimhse léanmhaire sin i stair na tíre. Táim ag tnúth go mór leis an bplé a bheidh idir mo Roinnse agus na páirtithe leasmhara ábhartha sna seachtainí amach romhainn chun na socrúithe riachtanacha a dhéanamh agus tá súil agam go mbeidh ar mo chumas dáta chuimhneachán na bliana seo a fhógairt gan mhoill.'*

Níor tharla aon tubaiste eile i stair na hÉireann a raibh a oiread de thionchar aige agus a bhí ag an nGorta Mór ná a d'fhág lorg chomh mór ar chúrsaí eiseimírce, cultúir agus Gaeilge. D'fhág an tubaiste sin chomh maith go bhfuil tuiscint níos fearr ag muintir na hÉireann ar cheisteanna a bhaineann leis an soláthar bia a choinneáil slán agus go bhfuil siad tiomanta do chabhair dhaonnúil agus faoiseamh daonnúil a chur ar fáil, fiú amháin sa lá atá inniu ann agus cúrsaí geilleagair mar atá.

Tá aird tarraingthe ag staraithe mór le rá ar thionchar suntasach an Ghorta Mhóir ar chúige Uladh ina iomláin agus ar dheisceart an chúige ach go háirithe. Go deimhin, ba é Cluain Eois ceann de na háiteanna ba mhó in Éirinn inar fhulaing na daoine. Roimh an nGorta Mór, bhí an dlús daonra i Muineachán agus i gceantair chomharsanachta i bhFear Manach i measc an dlúis daonra is airde ar oileán na hÉireann. Sa bhliain 1841, ba ionann pobal Aontas Dhlí na mBocht i gCluain Eois agus 42,225. Bhí an uimhir sin tar éis titim de 27,487 faoin mbliain 1851, áfach, laghdú de 35%, agus bhí líon na dtithe a raibh cónaí ar dhaoine iontu laghdaithe de 2,000. Mar a deir Brian McDonald sa *Clogher Record*:

'Agus níos mó ná 2,000 teaghlach imithe as na bailte fearainn agus as na paróistí, ní raibh d'fhianaise ann gur mhair daoine riamh san áit ach an lorg d'iomairí prátaí ar an talamh, cinn tuí a bhí tite isteach agus ballaí leagtha'.

Fuair 13,000 duine ar a laghad bás de dheasca ocrais agus galair i Muineachán idir 1847 agus 1850. Faoi dheireadh mhí an Mhárta 2007 bhí Reilig na Strainséirí i Séipéal Naomh Tighernach, Eaglais na hÉireann, lán. Seo atá scríofa ar phlaic chuimhneacháin an Ghorta Mhóir ag olluaigh Theach na mBocht Chluain Eois:

'Erected in memory of all the people from Clones Union who died because of the Great Famine 1845-1850; Also those who died in the workhouse 1845-1921; The meek shall inherit the earth...'

Bunaíodh scéimeanna faoiseamh gorta ar fud na tíre le linn an Ghorta Mhóir agus is a bhuíochas le scéim a reáchtáladh i gCluain Eois a cuireadh Lása Chluain Eois, a bhfuil cáil air ar fud an domhain, ar fáil. Tháinig an tOirmhinneach Thomas Hand agus a bhean chéile

Cassandra go Cluain Eois ó Surrey sa bhliain 1847 agus chuir an scrios a bhí á dhéanamh ag an nGorta Mór an oiread sin uafáis orthu gur chuir Cassandra an tionscal lása/cróise ar bun mar scéim faoisimh. Faoin mbliain 1851, bhí baint ag beagnach gach teaghlach i gCluain Eois leis an tionscal cróise.

Agus é ag tabhairt an fhógra i gCluain Eois, Contae Mhuineacháin inniu, ghabh an tAire Deenihan buíochas freisin le comhaltaí Choiste Cuimhneacháin Náisiúnta an Ghorta Mhóir as an dua agus dúthracht a chaith siad leis an obair chun a chinntiú go gcuimhnítear ar imeachtaí tubaisteacha an Ghorta Mhóir mar ba chúí agus go ndéantar ceiliúradh cuí ar chion tairbhe iontach na ndaoine úd a chuaigh ar imirce agus sliocht a sleachta thar lear.

Críoch