

The Great Hunger

27 April 2020

Aims:

1. To explain why Ireland suffered famine between 1845-50
2. To investigate how Britain reacted to the famine.

**Resources:
Famine Poem
Worksheet**





**What is a
Famine?**

Food in Ireland

As you saw previously, under the harsh Penal Laws, Irish Catholics were stopped from owning land.

Many Irish Catholic farmers had to rent small pieces of land from richer English landowners.

These farms were so small that there wasn't enough room to grow crops or raise animals.

To feed their families, most Irish farmers on the west coast grew potatoes as their only crop.

Area	Gender	Breakfast	Dinner
Limerick	Men	4½ lbs potatoes & 1 pint skimmed milk	Same
	Women	Same	Same
Thurles	Men	3 to 5 lbs potatoes & 1 to 2 pints skimmed milk.	Same
	Women	3½ lbs potatoes and 1 pint skimmed milk.	Same

Why were many Irish so dependent upon the potato crop?

Potato Blight

Ireland's population was over 8 million by 1840. As you have seen, many lived on small plots of land on which it was possible to survive only because most of these people ate potatoes as the main part of their food.



Unfortunately in 1845 the potato crop failed, destroyed by a fungus, *Phytophthora infestans*. The potato blight killed most of the potatoes in the ground. The crop failed again in 1846 and 1848. Many Irish now faced starvation.



What is
happening
in this picture?

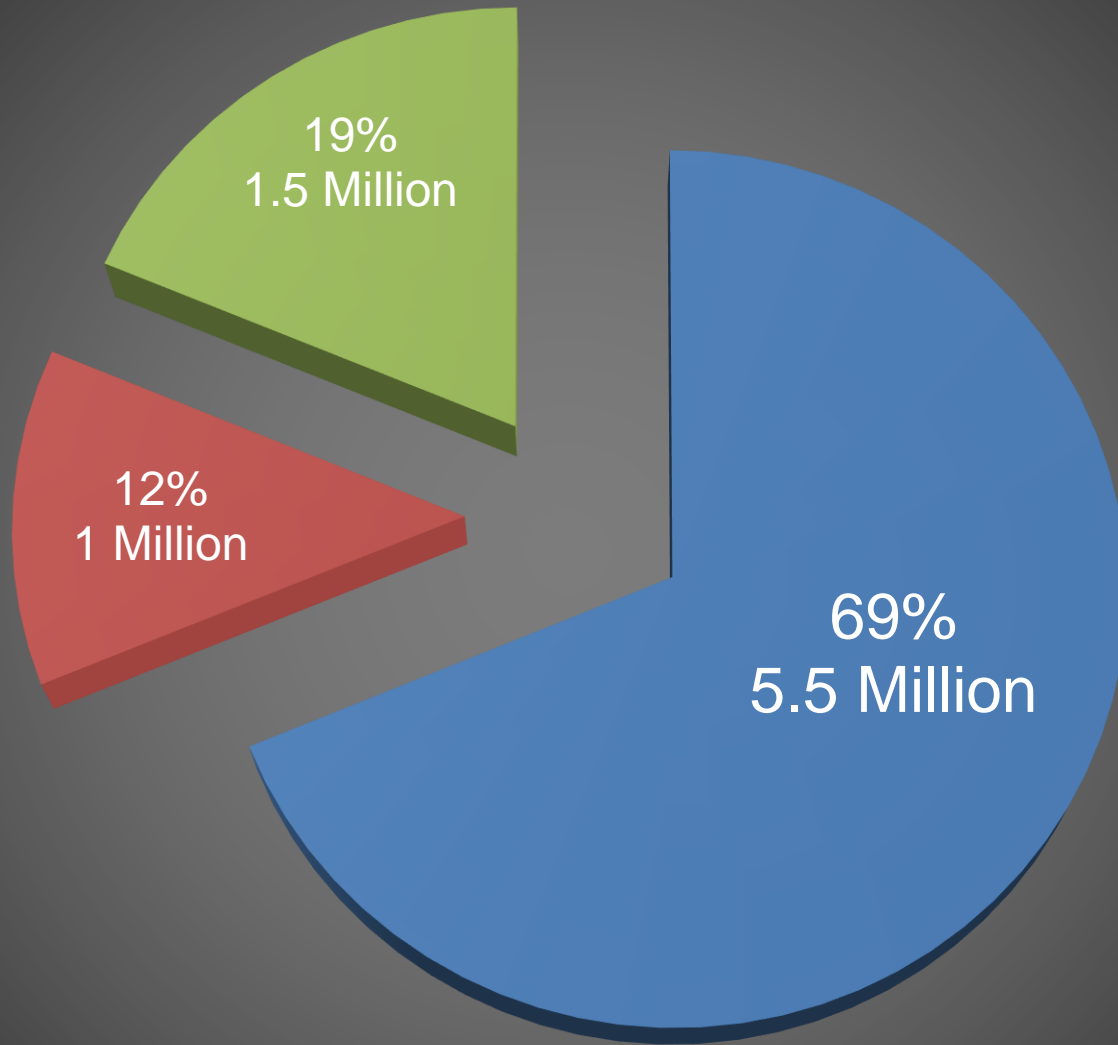


SEARCHING FOR POTATOES IN A STUBBLE FIELD.

“cowering wretches almost naked in the savage weather prowling in turnip fields Little children, their bodies half naked, their faces bloated yet wrinkled and of a pale greenish hue [colour] ... children who could never, grow up to be men and women..”

According to this source, what impact did the potato blight have in Ireland?

■ Survivors ■ Deaths ■ Emmigrated



Impact of the Famine

Britain's Reaction

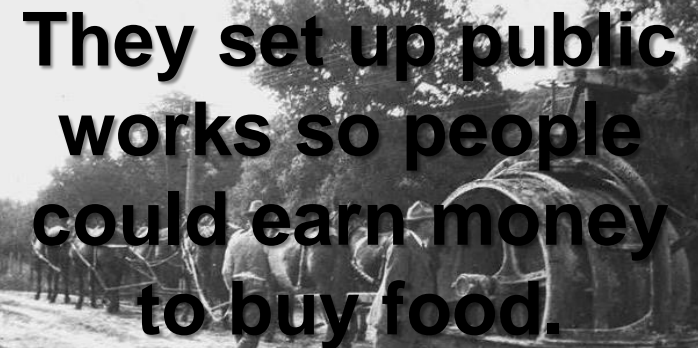
Britain in the 1840s was the richest country on the planet. It is now unbelievable to think that Britain would do nothing to help the starving in Ireland.

Unfortunately, help was limited. In Victorian times people believed that poverty was self-inflicted. Many in Britain felt that Ireland should sort out their own problems.

The British government did take some action to help, but it was not enough to help the vast majority of starving Irish farmers. In the end, Britain was reluctant to pay the full cost of helping.



Cheap corn from the USA was sold to the hungry.



They set up public works so people could earn money to buy food.

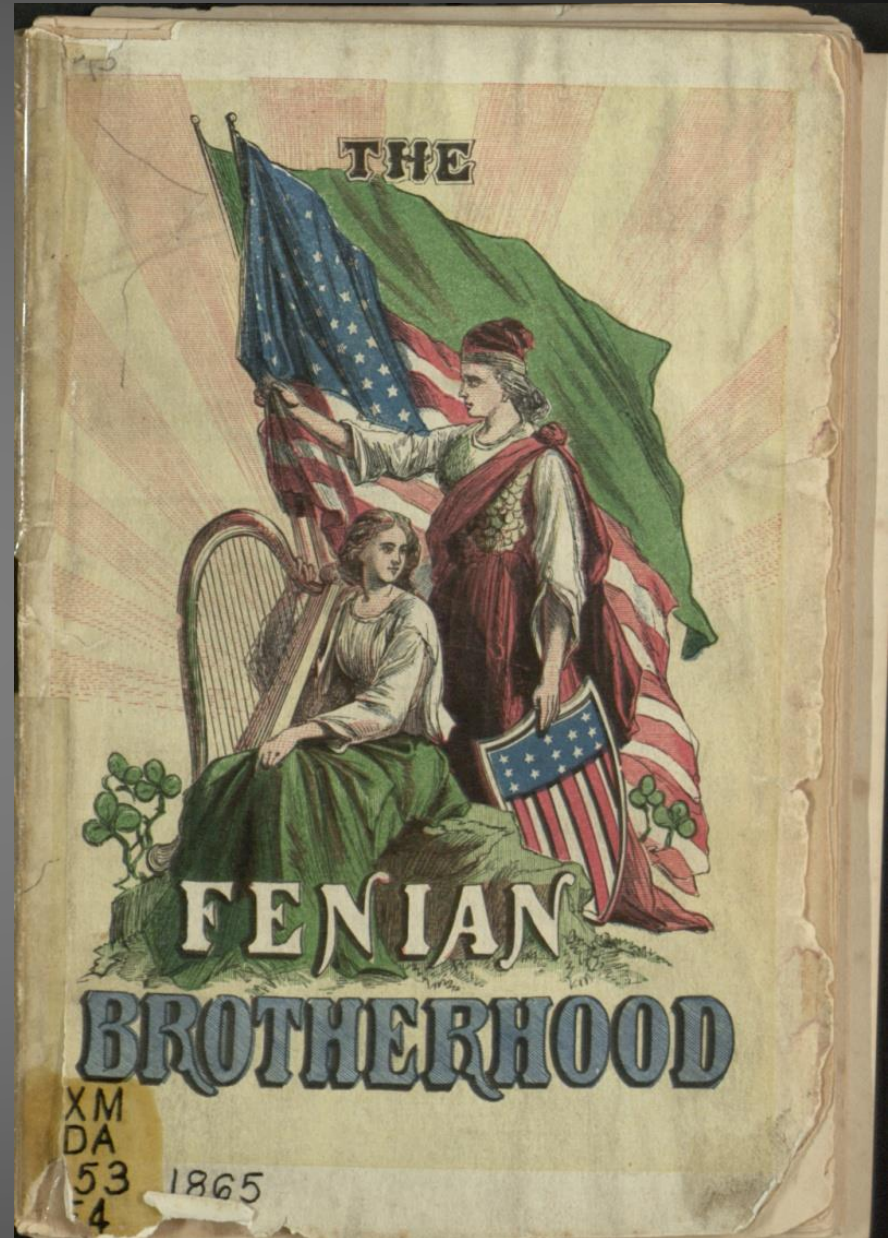


English Protestant Churches set up free soup kitchens.

Irish Reaction

How do you think many Irish viewed the British after the famine?

What do you think some Irish survivors of the famine now wanted?





Liverpool & Ireland

Many Irish emigrants headed to Liverpool. Many hoped to set sail from Liverpool to the “New World” of the USA & Canada.

Some Irish people remained in Liverpool. Cheap lodging houses became jammed. Crowds moved into cellars, condemned and abandoned buildings, or anywhere they could just lie down.

The overcrowding quickly led to disease – with a typhus epidemic followed by an outbreak of dysentery. Unfortunately, the famine continued to cause deaths even outside Ireland.



William Dillon, a shopkeeper, described areas of Liverpool ...

“There is a place in Liverpool called ‘Little Ireland’, for most part lived in by Irish... It is filthy dirty, and covers a small space in which a great many people live – perhaps as many as three families in a house.”

How would you describe living conditions for Irish immigrants in Liverpool (according to this source)?



CONTRASTED FACES.

"Look on this picture, and then on that."—SHAKESPEARE.



Fig. 747. — FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE.



Fig. 748. — BRIDGET McBRUISER.



How did some people in Britain react to this large scale Irish immigration?

The Famine (by Roisin Hambly)

This is a modern poem about the famine, written by an Irish teenager.

What effects of the famine does the poem refer to?

How does the narrator feel about the famine?

How does it make you feel?

