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Funeral Customs in Nineteenth Century Ireland

Diego Albano

October 2011

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Dublin, Trinity College

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Summary

The first part of the thesis is dedicated to the funeral customs of the lower classes. Chapter one analyzes the 'merry wake' through a wide arrange of memorials and contemporary sources, stressing the importance of its psychological function, in the light of Sean Connolly's and Ó Súilleabháin s studies. The lower classes' attitudes towards tragic and 'untimely deaths' are also taken into consideration. The second chapter assesses the impact of the Famine on funeral customs, demonstrating that although the crisis disrupted such customs, it did not have a lasting effect.

The importance of the lower classes hospitality, mirrored by the excessive expenditure for wakes and funerals, is investigated in chapter three. The core thesis of a substantial continuity of funeral customs of the lower classes is also confirmed in the chapter on clerical opposition to wakes. Evidence collected, such as confidential correspondence of Catholic bishops, suggests that the efforts of the Roman Catholic clergy were not effective in the long period, as strategies devised by the higher clergy were inherently weak.

Part two opens with a chapter dedicated to public order and funeral customs. Thanks to a survey of the outrage papers and constabulary reports held at the national archives, the chapter demonstrates how wakes funerals were rarely related to crimes, notwithstanding the large amount of alcohol consumed on such occasions. The peculiar case of Belfast is also investigated, unveiling the concern of authorities as regards funeral cortèges of victims of the 1864, 1872 and 1886 riots. The second chapter focuses on the 1824 and 1868 burial acts, suggesting that during the period 1824-68 sectarian conflicts related to burials were substantially rare, as a tolerant *modus Vivendi* set in.

The third chapter offers an overview of the body-snatching period in Ireland, also investigating the impact of the Anatomy Act on the Irish attitudes towards death. The study shows how the workings of the Anatomy Act – i.e. the medical dissection of paupers' bodies - were probably kept out of the public eye. The last chapter deals with wakes in times of epidemics, demonstrating the difficult implementation of the 1878 Public Health Act, as well as the resilience of the funeral customs of the lower classes to lay and clerical opposition.

Part three is constituted of a chapter on the higher classes' funerals. From a wide sample of contemporary newspaper reports, the study analyses the higher classes' funeral cortèges, highlighting the emergence of the trading sector during the second half of the century. Data from the census, as well as from contemporary newspapers, hint at the presence of a developing funeral industry during the post-Famine period. The second part of the chapter is finally dedicated to the funerals of Roman Catholic and Protestant bishops, highlighting the conciliatory value of such cortèges. As a conclusion, the peculiarity of Masonic funerals is investigated through contemporary press reports as well as manuscripts from the Grand Lodge of Ireland's archives.

Acknowledgements

I owe my deepest gratitude to Dr. W.E. Vaughan, for his help and patience through the years. I also wish to express a sincere thanks to Dr. Joseph Clarke, for his kindness and support during my final year of research.

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List of abbreviations

I.F.C.	Irish folklore Commission Archive
N.A.I.	National Archives of Ireland
N.L.I.	National Library of Ireland
D.D.A.	Dublin Diocesan Archive
U.F.M.	Ulster Folk and Transport Museum
P.R.O.N.I	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
T.C.D.	Trinity College Dublin
H.C.	House of Commons
R.I.A.	Royal Irish Academy
I.C.R.	Irish College of Rome

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Introduction

1. Aim of the Study

The objective of the present study is to offer a historical and social analysis of funeral customs in nineteenth century Ireland. An exhaustive treatment of the topic is, of course, beyond the limits imposed by a PhD thesis. However, within the frame provided by the European and Irish historiography, funeral customs have been analysed according to specific historiographical issues.

2. European Historiographical Context: the French, Italian and British Cases

France plays a major role in the European historiography in funeral customs. The background for death studies have been heavily influenced by Philippe Ariès and his longue durée theories which defined five principal models of cultural approaches to death in the history of western civilisation.[1] In his wake, Michel Vovelle provided a longue durée perspective of the concept of death in the western world in terms of mentality.[2] Particularly influential has been his stress on the importance of understanding the demographic context behind attitudes towards death.[3] Moreover, he set the paradigm for an approach that takes into account folklore, demography and the role of disciplining agencies such as the Catholic Church in the analysis of funeral customs.[4]

The French historiographical approach, spearheaded by Ralph Giesey's studies on the royal funerals of the French monarchs, has also focused on the occupation of the public sphere through the instrumental use of state funerals.[5] Since the 1960s the approach to research has widened,[6] to now include the funeral customs of the lower classes in conjunction with related topics, such as burial customs and sectarian conflicts (Keith P.

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[1] Namely the 'tame death', the 'death of the self', the 'remote and imminent death', the 'death of the other' and the 'invisible death'. See Antonius C.G.M. Robben, *Death, Mourning and Burial. A Cross-Cultural Reader* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 3-4.

[2] Michel Vovelle, *Mourir Autrefois: Attitudes Collectives Devant la Mort aux xviie et xviiie siècles* (Paris, 1974).

[3] Vovelle 1983

[4] Thomas kselman, 'Death in Historical Perspective' in *Sociological Forum*, ii, no. 3 (1987), p. 596.

[5] Ralph E. Giesey, 'The Royal Funeral in Renaissance France' in *Renaissance News*, vii, no. 4 (1954), pp. 130-131.

[6] See also Pierre Chaunu, 'Mourir a Paris (xvie-xviie siècles)' in *Annales. Histoire, Science Sociales*, no. 1 (1976), pp. 29-50.

Luria)[7] and stillbirths (Vincent Gourdon and Catherine Rollet)[8]. Recently Thomas Kselman, in his Death and the Afterlife in Modern France provided an insight into funeral customs of the lower classes, setting a precedent for a fruitful use of memorial sources.[9] Kselman's research has also been paramount in directing the attention of the present study towards historiographical issues related to the use of such sources. In particular, it highlights the importance of popular beliefs as a system parallel to the set of cultural values provided by the Catholic Church. In these terms the present study has followed the same approach applied to the peculiar Irish situation, where the absence of a lay disciplining agency left wider room for the actions of Catholic priests. Kselman's attention to the social implications of death (such as suicide and death related to epidemic diseases) further contributed to directing the investigation towards analogue patterns within the Irish case.

The Italian historiography on death has focused on the process of secularisation and on the political use of funeral cortèges. Of note is Fulvio Conti's contribution to a history of cremation in Italy in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century Italian 'lay religions', such as the one provided by the Communist party,[10] while Dino Mengozzi investigated the laicisation of funeral customs in nineteenth century Italy.[11] His study of the complex ritual of public mourning centred on the funeral of prominent public figures such as Giuseppe Garibaldi, Aurelio Saffi and Andrea Costa. Mengozzi's core thesis implies the formation of a model of 'lay death' developing in Italy between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's, a model which had its paramount example in political funerals as instrumental events for the building of a national identity. Further studies centred on the aspects of a lay approach to death, such as cremation, which has also been observed from a regional perspective. In particular Fulvio Conti, Anna Maria Isastia and Fiorenza Tarozzi identified cremation as an alternative funeral custom, which assumed political value of opposition to the Church in the context of a growing 'laicisation' of death.[12]

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[7] Keith P. Luria, 'Separated by Death? Burials, Cemeteries and Confessional Boundaries in Seventeenth-Century France' in *French Historical Studies*, xxiv, no. 2 (2001), pp. 185-222.

[8] Vincent Gourdon, Catherine Rollet, 'Stillbirths in Nineteenth-Century Paris: Social, Legal and Medical Implications of a Statistical Category' in *Population*, lxiv, no. 4 (2009), pp. 601-34.

[9] Thomas Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife in Modern France* (Princeton, 1993).

[10] Fulvio Conti, 'Liturgie Funerarie e Religioni Civili fra Otto e Novecento', in *Italia Contemporanea*, no. 226 (2002), pp. 103-118.

[11] Dino Mengozzi, *La Morte Laica da Garibaldi a Costa* (Manduria, 2000); see also Dino Mengozzi, 'Riti funebri e Laicizzazione nell'Italia del XIX secolo' in *Studi Tanatologici*, i (2005), pp. 57-74.

[12] Fulvio Conti, Anna Maria Isastia, Fiorenza Tarozzi, *La Morte Laica, I, Storia della Cremazione in Italia, 1880-1920* (Torino, 1998).

In similar terms, these issues have been addressed for the British case by Peter Jupp, who provides a history of cremation within the general process of secularisation of death during the years between the nineteenth and the mid-twentieth century. Jupp's core thesis argues that as cremation undermined belief in the resurrection of the body, it was linked with atheism well beyond the nineteenth century. [13] Although related to the Italian case, a further perspective on this problem, has also been proposed by Catia Sonetti with an analysis of the relationship between Italian anticlericalism and cremation societies in Livorno.[14]

In England, the influence of French historiography is evident in the output of studies of public mourning and the British monarchy. In particular, the work of Paul Fritz offered an analysis of more than thirty royal funerals between 1685 and 1830, focusing on the evolution of court ceremony and protocol, along with its impact on the trading sector related to royal death (such as the high fashion or the silk trading). [15] Fritz's work also highlighted how the court fashion for mourning was gradually transmitted, by the nineteenth century, to the middle-classes. The political aspect of funeral cortèges has been recently tackled by Eveline Bouwers, who contributed with a comparative study on political funerals in Paris and London,[16]while James Stevens Curl has highlighted the Victorian culture of mourning, as well as its burgeoning commercialisation of death.[17] His work, however, primarily focused on the rise of the Urban cemetery in the general context of the progressive medicalization of death.

Victorian mourning has been also analysed by Patricia Jalland in her Death in the Victorian Family.[18] Thanks to a wide range of private sources – such as diaries, letters and private memoirs – Jalland focuses on middle-classes' attitudes towards death in the Victorian period. Her study, though limited to those classes able to leave written memories (politicians, doctors or clergymen) has been complemented by the work of Julie-Marie Strange on the British working classes. Strange has the merit of having uncovered the

[13] Peter Jupp, From Dust to Ashes: Cremation and the British Way of Death (Basingstoke, 2006).

[14] Catia Sonetti, *Una Morte Irriverente: la Società di Cremazione e l'Anticlericalismo a Livorno* (Bologna, 2007).

[15] Paul Fritz, 'The Trade in Death: the Royal Funerals in England, 1685-1830' in *Eighteent-Century Studies*, xv (1982), pp. 291-316; John Wolffe, 'Royalty and Public Grief in Britain: an Historical Perspective, 1817-1997' in Tony Walter (ed.), *The Mourning for Diana* (Oxford, 1999); see also Robin Eagles, '"No More to be Said?' Reactions to the Death of Frederick Lewis, Prince of Wales' in *Historical Research*, lxxx, no.
209 (2007), pp. 346-67; Michael Schaich, 'The Funerals of the British Monarchy' in Michael Schaich (ed.), *Monarchy and Religion: The Transformation of Royal Culture in Eighteenth Century Europe* (Oxford, 2007).

[16] Eveline Bouwers, 'Public Commemorations and public interests: the Politics of State Funerals in London and Paris, 1806-1810' in Jensen Lotte, Joseph T. Leerssen, Marita Mathijsen (eds), *Free Access to the Past: Romanticism, Cultural Heritage, and the Nation* (Boston, 2010); see also John Wolffe, *Great Deaths: Grieving, Religion, and Nationhood in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (Oxford, 2000).

[17] James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (Gloucesterhire, 2000).

[18] Patricia Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford, 1999).

lower classes experience of grief and bereavement, hidden behind the unsympathetic view of poor law reports and medical officers. Moreover, it has stressed the importance of understanding socially codified behaviour such as a silent acceptance of bereavement, putting the working class attitudes towards death within a precise social and historical frame.

Research on the Victorian funeral industry, however, still lacks a comprehensive treatise whereby regional insights would been published.[19] On the other hand, studies on the attitude of the labouring classes towards death have focused on issues related to burials and grief.[20] Conflicts related to funerals and the pauper burial have also marked the recent historiography of funeral customs.[21] While focused on the British case these studies have been vital in setting the discourse of the present work on funeral processions of the higher classes, particularly on their structure and significance as public expressions of wealth and status. As in France and Italy, laicisation of death and processes of sanitation have caught the attention of social history, with a marked attention towards urban realities.[22] Finally, attention to commemoration – mainly from a political perspective – has proved a fruitful approach in the field of the history of mentality.[23]

3. The Irish Historiographical Context

In the European context the paucity of studies on Irish funeral customs in evident. Since the 1967 Irish Wake Amusements, by Seán Ó Súilleabháin, little has been written on the topic – indeed none from a more general perspective. With regards to the lower classes, attention has been focused on death related folklore. Contributions from Lawrence Taylor,

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[19] Michael Smith, 'The Church of Scotland and the Funeral Industry in Nineteenth-Century Edinburgh' in *The Scottish Historical Review*, lxxxviii, no. 1 (2009), pp. 108-133; see also Glennys Howarth, 'Professionalising the Funeral Industry in England, 1700-1960' in Glennys Howarth, Peter C. Jupp (eds), *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (Basingstoke, 1997); Paul Fritz, 'The Undertaking Trade in England: its Origins and Early Development, 1660-1830' in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, xxviii (1994-1995), pp. 241-53.

[20] Margaret Cox (ed.), *Grave Concerns: Death and Burial in England*, 1700-1850 (York, 1998). See also Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, 2005).

[21] Helizabeth T. Hurren, Steven King, "Begging for Burial": Form, Function and Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Pauper Burial' in *Social History*, xxx, no. 3 (2005), pp. 321-41.

[22] Pam Fisher, 'Houses for the Dead: the Provision of Mortuaries in London, 1843-1889' in *London Journal*, xxxiv, no. 1 (2009), pp. 1-15; see also Sylvia M. Barnard, *To Prove I am not Forgot: Living and Dying in a Victorian City* (Stroud, 2008); David Brandon, Alan Brooke, *London, City of the Dead* (Stroud, 2008).

[23] Sarah Tarlow, 'Death and Commemoration' in *Industrial Archaeology Review*, xxvii, no. 1 (2005), pp. 163-69; see also Harold C. Mytum, 'Death and Remembrance in the Colonial Context' in Susan Lawrence (ed.), *Archaeologies of the British: Explorations of Identity in the United Kingdom and its Colonies, 1600-1945* (London, 2003).

Nina Witoszek and Pat Sheeran have focused on the cultural framework of the Irish lower classes' attitude towards death.[24] The ritual lament of the dead, as well as popular beliefs, have been detailed by contributions from Patricia Lysaght.[25] Gearóid Ó Crualaoich has provided a first approach to the study of the Irish 'Merry Wake', highlighting the importance of hospitality and providing an interpretative frame along the dichotomy between timely and untimely deaths.[26] Although narrow in its scope, Ó Crualaoich's article has been paramount in establishing the primary research lines, especially as regards to the lower classes. It structural analysis of the Merry Wake had the merit of highlighting the importance of the notion of 'respectability', in turn leading the research towards key issues such as 'untimely' deaths.

Ó Súilleabháin's Irish Wake Amusements, on the other hand, appears to be the only wide treatment of funeral customs of the lower classes written to date, thus a fundamental first step for the present work. Although more enumerative than analytical, his study provided a first survey of the different aspects of Merry Wakes as well as its related beliefs and customs; in other words, it suggested a preliminary range of issues worth investigating. Overall, Ó Súilleabháin's study highlighted the importance of disciplining groups within Irish society, the foremost being the Roman Catholic Church. Thanks to its treatment of 'faction fighting' at wakes it also pointed towards the germane issue of funeral-related conflicts.

As regards Patricia Lysaght and Sean Connolly, both have been fundamental in focusing the analysis of the psychological importance of funeral customs from a functionalist perspective, as opposed to a more structuralist approach. This approach provided support for the core thesis of the substantial continuity in funeral customs of the lower classes, thus directing the investigation, among other topics, towards the reasons for the Roman Catholic Church's failure to curb 'abusive' behaviour at wakes. In this context, the recent work of Cara Delay has had a profound impact, as it reassessed the notion of

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[24] Lawrence J. Taylor, 'Bàs InEirinn: Cultural Constructions of Death in Ireland' in *Anthropological Quarterly*, lxii, no. 4 (1989); Nina Witoszek, Pat Sheeran, *The Irish Funerary Tradition* (Galway, 1990).

[25] Patricia Lysaght, *The Banshee. The Irish Supernatural Death Messenger* (Dublin, 1996); see also Patricia Lysaght, 'Caoineadh os Cionn Coirp: The lament for the Dead in Ireland' in *Folklore*, cviii (1997). On the Irish lament see also Seán Ó Coileáin, 'The Irish Lament: An Oral Genre' in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 24 (1988).

[26] Gearóid Ó Crualaoich, 'The 'Merry Wake'' in James S. Donnelly, Jr., Kerby A. Miller, *Irish Popular Culture, 1650-1850* (Dublin, 1998); Patricia Lysaght, 'Hospitality at Wakes and Funerals in Ireland from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century: Some Evidence from the Written Record' in *Folklore*, cxiv,
no. 3 (2003), p. 421.

'devotional revolution', providing further evidence of the continuity in the lower classes' attitudes towards religion in the post-Famine period. [27]

Moreover, Regina Sexton contributed highlighting the role of food and alcohol at wakes, while an in-depth study on hospitality at wakes has been provided by Patricia Lysaght.[28] The importance of hospitality as a pivotal feature of wakes has also been confirmed by Maurna Crozier,[29] while Ilana Harlow has investigated further aspects of the Merry Wake, such as practical jokes involving the corpse.[30] Historians in the wake of British historiography have recently focused on the political impact of funeral processions.[31] In particular, the recent work of Thomas Brophy on the Roman Catholic Church opposition to Fenian funerals has given an important contribution to the study of political funerals in nineteenth-century Ireland,[32] whereas the burial question and its development in pre-Famine Ireland has been addressed by John and Cliona Murphy.[33]

4. The Thesis in the Current Historiographical Context

The present work, in the light of the above European historiographical context, attempts to fill a gap in the Irish historiography of mortuary customs. With respect to the lower classes, research has been directed towards contemporary key social problems, such as the burial question, relationship between Catholics and Protestants, the role of the Roman Catholic Church in its opposition to the traditional Irish wake. The choice of the entire nineteenth century as the period under examination reflects the need to analyse the

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[27] Cara Delay, '"The Gates Were Shut": Catholics, Chapels, and Power in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland' in *New Hibernia Review*, xiv, no. 1 (2010). See also Cara Delay, 'The Devotional Revolution on the Local Level: Parish Life in Post-Famine Ireland' in *U.S. Catholic Historian*, xxii, no. 3 (2004).

[28] Regina Sexton, 'Food and Drink at Irish Weddings and Wakes' in Laura Mason (ed.) *Food and the Rites of Passage. Leeds Symposium on Food History* (Trowbridge, 2002); Lysaght, 'Hospitality at Wakes'.

[29] Maurna Crozier, 'Powerful Wakes: Perfect Hospitality', in Chris Curtin and Thomas M. Wilson (eds), *Ireland from Below. Social Change and Local Communities* (Galway, 1988).

[30] Ilana Harlow, 'Creating situations: practical jokes and the revival of the dead Irish in tradition' in *The journal of American Folklore*, cx, no. 436 (1997).

[31] Dermot Keogh, Gabriel Doherty, '"Sorrow but no Despair - the Road is Marked" : The Politics of Funerals in Post-1916 Ireland' in Dermot Keogh, Gabriel Doherty (eds), *Michael Collins and the Making of the Irish State* (Cork, 1998); see also Pauric Travers, 'Under the Great Comedian's Tomb. The Funeral of Charles Stewart Parnell' in Donal McCartney, Pauric Travers, *The Ivy Leaf. The Parnells Remembered* (Dublin, 2006).

[32] Thomas J. Brophy, 'On Church Grounds: Political Funerals and the Contest to Lead Catholic Ireland' in *The Catholic Historical Review*, xcv, no. 3 (2009), pp. 491-514. On Fenian funerals see also Patrick Travers, '"Our Fenian Dead': Glasnevin Cemetery and the Genesis of the Republican Funeral', in James Kelly, Uáitéar Mac Gearailt, *Dublin and Dubliners: Essays in the History and Literature of Dublin City* (Dublin, 1990).

[33] John. A. Murphy, Cliona Murphy, 'Burials and Bigotry in Early Nineteenth-Century Ireland' in *Studia Hibernica*, xxxiii (2004/2005).

evolution of funeral customs – or their continuity – during a significant period of time. In this period two major agents of change have been identified. The Great Famine is, understandably, to be considered the major watershed of the century, in terms of social and demographical change. To understand its effects on the funeral customs of the lower classes, beyond the general assumption of its paramount influence, has been vital to this study. On the other hand, opposition of the Roman Catholic Church, although constantly mentioned by the literature on the subject, is a widely uncharted territory. The importance of hospitality at wakes, previously covered by scholars, has also been investigated taking into consideration its financial aspects.

In the light of studies on the Victorian attitude towards death, funeral customs of the higher classes have been analysed taking into account how different social groups – such as the higher clergy and the landed gentry – participated in the Victorian culture of mourning. The funeral procession, as opposed to the wake, represents the crucial moment through which public standing, occupation of the political sphere and mourning were intermingled. Relationships between classes as well as between conflicting social elites (i.e. the Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church) are also investigated. As the lack of quantitative sources on the Irish funeral industry – in particular for the pre-Famine period - does not allow a thorough investigation in the growth of the funeral industry in nineteenth century Ireland, the analysis has been focused on its social impact, such as the variety of services offered to the higher classes and its influence in the shaping of funeral customs.

5. Thesis Structure

This work is divided into three main parts. Part One is dedicated to the funeral customs of the lower classes; part Two to social conflicts related to funeral customs, while part Three focuses on the customs of the higher classes. This structure separates the treatment of class related issues in part one and part three, grouping under the general label of 'conflicts' various contemporary issues centred on funeral customs. Part One is opened by the chapter 'The Merry Wake', which analyses the custom of the Merry Wake, its social meaning, also its peculiarities when performed by the Protestant lower classes. The second chapter is dedicated to the impact that the Great Famine had upon the funeral customs of those who were more affected by the crisis. The third chapter concentrates on the expenditure for wakes and funerals, in the context of the lower classes' culture of hospitality. The fourth

chapter, which closes part One, deals with the opposition to wakes by the Roman Catholic Church and its effects in shaping the funeral customs of the lower classes.

Part Two opens with a chapter dedicated to conflicts related to wakes and funerals. In particular, the years of sectarian tension in Belfast is analysed in detail. Additionally a chapter dealing with the burial question – from the early emergence of the question during the 1820s to the 1868 burial act – is included. The third chapter copes with the Anatomy Act and its effects on the lower classes' attitude towards burials, as well as with the phenomenon of the body snatchers and the trading of bodies for dissection. Part Two is then closed by an overview on the conflicts between sanitary authorities and the lower classes sparked by wakes held on victims of infectious diseases.

In part Three, the first chapter depicts the Irish funeral industry and its services provided for the higher classes. The 'funeral of the rich' in analysed in the frame of the contemporary Victorian culture of mourning. Expenditure for funerals is also assessed in detail. The second chapter subsequently deals with funeral processions of the freemasons and of members of the Roman Catholic and Protestant clergies.

6. Methodology

The continuity of the Merry Wake custom has been framed within the theoretical model previously provided by the studies of Sean Connolly and Peter Narváez, who stressed the psychological value of the wake.[34] The study addresses the issue of continuity and change in the funeral customs throughout the nineteenth century. This fundamental question led the research towards the identification of two potential agents of change in the custom of the Irish lower classes, such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Great Famine. The latter had by all means an impact on funeral customs during the food crisis; nonetheless, its effects in the long term are more difficult to gauge. The vast range of parliamentary reports, concerning the relief of the poor, has been utilised in order to investigate the impact of the crisis during the years 1845-48. Contemporary newspapers as well as memorial sources from the Irish Folklore Commission also provide a vivid picture of the disruption of funeral customs at the peak of the crisis.

The Irish Folklore Commission collected information on rural customs from the 1920s to the 1970s. Tales recorded during the 1920s have been particularly valuable to the present thesis, as the witnesses interviewed had a first hand experience of late nineteenth-century traditions. Later memories, however, kept their importance

in the light of a possible continuity of funeral customs up to the twentieth century. As the present study deals with the nineteenth century, the memories collected in the twentieth century functioned mainly as a starting point. Their content has been compared to a variety of contemporary printed sources, from newspapers and reports to the House of Commons. In doing so, the research has highlighted a substantial identity between late oral sources and contemporary written accounts, in turn suggesting continuity in funeral customs.

Although care must be taken in dealing with either oral or written sources, the use of twentieth century oral sources such as the Irish Folklore Commission (IFC) manuscripts has shed considerable light on the main features of Irish funeral customs, which were certainly kept alive beyond the late nineteenth century. They also suggest that, although the main bulk of the IFC sources used deal with the west of Ireland, further research should be undertaken in order to investigate regional patterns or peculiarities in funeral customs. To maximise the reader's awareness of the different areas and times in which folklore memories were recorded, I have included these data in the notation of the Irish Folklore Commission manuscripts.

The issue of continuity has been addressed by comparing contemporary accounts from the pre- and post-Famine period. Accounts from contemporary middle-class observers, such as travellers' diaries and antiquarian studies – the likes of John Prim and John O'Donovan – are useful in order to gain a clearer picture of the middle-class perception of funeral customs and, indirectly, of their evolution. The Roman Catholic Church's, regular condemnation in national newspapers allows the historian to track the tenacity of the custom throughout the century. Furthermore, an investigation of the strategies put in place by the Catholic hierarchy has been deemed paramount. Material held by the Dublin Diocesan Archive, in particular the correspondence of prominent bishops including Paul Cullen, has proved vital in understanding the problems that the implementation of the regulations against wakes encountered at a parish level.

The Merry Wake has been identified as a custom peculiar to the Catholic lower class. However, material from the Ulster Folk Museum has been utilised in the investigation of the funeral customs of the Protestant lower classes. The evidence thus gathered has been implemented with details provided by contemporary observers –

[34] Peter Narváez, '"Tricks and Fun:" Subversive Pleasures at Newfoundland Wakes' in *Western Folklore*, liii, no. 4 (1994

inquiries over the state of the poor in Ireland, as well as IFC manuscripts concerned with Protestant customs. Furthermore, the pivotal role of hospitality at wakes has been analysed from a cultural and financial point of view. Funeral accounts and prices have been drawn from the report on the state of the poor of Ireland as well as from family account books. Other available sources, especially with regards to pauper burials, include accounts provided by institutions such as hospitals and poor houses and friendly societies who provided useful data, although their customers were drawn from the better-off sections of the labouring classes.

With respect to the volume of conflicts related to funeral customs, research has relied upon a wide sample of contemporary reports and newspaper accounts. In particular, for the pre-Famine period the Outrage Papers have proved a rich source, as for the post-famine period the constabulary reports provide a detailed picture of the nature of crimes during the years under examination. A survey of a number of issues of the Freeman's Journal – published in years of sectarian tension - has contributed additional data to the survey. The choice of the Freeman's Journal as a main source (alongside with other newspapers and periodicals) is due to the availability of digitised issues, which cover the greater part of the nineteenth century. Also, the Freeman's Journal constantly reprinted news from regional newspapers. In relation to the burial question and wakes in times of epidemics, these issues were covered by national newspapers and in addition by reports from the House of Commons. These records are precious in successfully unveiling the higher classes' disciplining strategies towards the funeral customs of the lower classes. Overall, the object of the survey has been to provide further ground for the notion that funeral customs were not an occasion of conflict; moreover, burial-related issues and wakes in times of epidemics highlighted the continuity of the customs of the lower classes. Furthermore family papers have been paramount for collecting data on the funeral expenses of the higher classes. From data collected from funeral expenses accounts, as well as from surviving undertakers' account books, it has been possible to outline the variety of services that the burgeoning funeral industry would provide to the higher classes. Although quantitative data related to the growth of the funeral industry are not surviving, corroborative information has been sought through advertising on contemporary regional newspapers. Overall, the study investigates the effectual participation of the Irish higher classes in the Victorian culture of mourning, with its renowned lavished funeral procession.

Thanks to a sample of funeral reports drawn from national and regional contemporary newspapers, funeral procession of the elite such as the Freemasons or the Protestant higher clergy have been analysed, with particular attention to the importance of processions in conveying political meaning in addition to defusing conflict from a symbolic perspective.

I

The Lower Classes

1.1. The Merry Wake

1. Introduction

The traditional 'Merry Wake' represented the core of the funeral customs of the poor.[1] Although opposed by the Roman Catholic clergy throughout the nineteenth century, the 'Merry Wake' was performed right up to the first half of the twentieth century. This chapter investigates its main features, along with its functions in the social and cultural context of the time.

2. The 'Laying out' of the corpse

The 'laying out' of the corpse - namely the preparation of the corpse after death - was provided by non-professional carers in the immediate aftermath of death. The role of 'neighbouring women' in taking care of the corpse is pointed out by James Mooney as late as 1888 and their prominent role is also confirmed by IFC sources.[2] The first procedure of the laying out consisted of the washing the corpse. Before the washing, carers would have waited for time to elapse.[3] This interval was due to the belief that the soul of the deceased was still present in the corpse and therefore the washing would have disturbed its departure from the body. In County Limerick, the custom of not touching the corpse for twenty minutes from the moment of death was also reported. The reason given was that 'people say it is time devoted to the judgement'.[4] Also, when a person dies 'then they leave the corpse alone for twenty minutes before they touch it because they say the dead person is consulting with God for twenty minutes'.[107]According to IFC manuscripts, this procedure was still common well into the twentieth century. 'They wouldn't have much washing, do you see' – stated a witness to the IFC during the 1970s 'they'd wash their feet and their hands and their face. Long ago they used to take them out on the floor and wash them

[1] Although seldom used by contemporary sources, the term 'merry wake' appeared in a pamphlet on wakes as early as 1802. See *The Tragical History of the Merry Wake: a Story Founded on Fact* (Dublin, 1802).

[2] James Mooney, 'The Funeral Customs of Ireland' in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, xxv, no. 128 (1888), p. 267. See also I.F.C., MS 550 (County Cork, 1938), p. 38; U.F.M., MS 63/q3/77; U.F.M., MS 63/q3/78; U.F.M., MS 63/q3/96.

[3] I.F.C., MS 1838 (County Fermanagh and Cavan, 1974), p. 74.

[4] I.F.C., MS 93 (County Limerick, 1934), p. 41.

altogether all over. But...of late the people doesn't [sic] do that'.[5] After being washed, the body would be placed on a table – or under it, 'laying it down facing the east'.[6]

Overall, the laying out procedure highlights how a network of neighbours was deputed to take care of a bereaved family. In her work on the Irish working class in nineteenth century Britain Julie Marie Strange has also highlighted the importance of the laying out as an act of condolence performed on behalf of the relatives of the deceased.[7] The community would take care of the corpse, as well as provide for materials needed for the laying out, such as sheets and candles. A witness to the IFC from County Carlow in the 1940s stated that 'it is a custom, and still it is for some woman in every townland to buy a 'set' of sheet and pillow covers for use at wakes'.[8] On the other hand the prominence of non-professional services implied that the undertaking business, although in expansion during the post famine period, did not interfere with the funeral customs of the lower classes until the early twentieth century. According to the 1841 report of the census commissioners in Ireland in the city of Dublin only five coffin makers were returned, 'whereas in a single street, there were found to be no less than twelve persons of this description. It was ascertained that they had returned themselves as carpenters or undertakers'.[9] A century later a 64 year-old farmer from County Cork stated that there was no local coffin maker. He also confirmed that although 'several undertakers' had established themselves in the local area, the coffin 'was made in the workshop'.[10] Memorial sources report of coffins made by 'the local carpenter' outside the wake house or in a neighbouring house or barn.[11]

As the corpse was laid out, the keening of the dead could finally take place (however, not during the day: only when the night had set in).[12] The keening, or Caoineadh, was a ritual lament performed by 'professional' keeners, depositaries of the oral tradition to which the lament belonged. The keening signalled the start of the wake, intensifying then at each crucial moment of the ceremony. Keeners would raise their lament when a new person arrived at the wake house, when the corpse was placed in the coffin, when the funeral cortege headed for the graveyard and, finally, at the moment of

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[5] I.F.C., MS 1838 (County Fermanagh and Cavan, 1974), p.74.

[6] Mooney, 'The Funeral Customs of Ireland', p. 267.

[7] Julie-Marie Strange, '"She Cried Very Little": Death, Grief and Mourning in Working Class Culture, c. 1880 – 1914' in *Social History,* xxvii, no. 2 (2002), p. 152.

[8] I.F.C., MS 971 (County Longford, 1944) p. 126.

[9] *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to take the Census of Ireland, for the Year 1841* p. xxi, H.C. 1843 (504), xxiv, 21.

[10] I.F.C., MS 971 (County Cork, 1944), p. 169.

[11] I.F.C., MS 1457 (County Louth, 1941), p. 554; see also U.F.M., MS 63/q3/36; U.F.M., MS 63/q3/199; U.F.M., MS 63/q3/15.

[12] I.F.C., MS 550 (County Cork, 1938), p. 49.

burial.[13] The lament was also performed at intervals between the wake house and the graveyard. [14] Informants to the IFC testified to the emotional impact that the ritual keening had on mourners. 'I don't remember the keening' - stated an informant in 1939 - 'but I heard about it. It was carried out in this county when my grandfather was a young chap. They used hired an ould woman to come and keen. She was so well able to do it that she'd put the whole crowd crying'.[15] Other informants described a 'heartrending wail',[16] thanks to the fine 'voice and skill in improvising' that, according to James Mooney, denoted professional keeners.[17] A less dramatic picture had been provided by Thomas Carlyle, recollecting a rural funeral he encountered on his way to Roche, County Louth, in 1849:

> 'the Irish howl', for these are his words, was totally disappointing, there was no sorrow whatever in the tone of it. A pack of idle women, mounted on the hearse as many as could, and the rest walking; were hoh-hoh-ing with a grief quite evidently hired and not worth hiring[18]

The ritual cry was composed of stanzas recited by the keener, who was then followed by a chorus of mourners. James Mooney also highlighted the role of the keener as director of the chorus of mourners: she would start each stanza of the ritual cry; when she would pause at the end of each stanza 'the other women take up the mournful chorus'.[19] As the lament for the dead was essentially a spontaneous oral performance – a poem 'born out of a moment' – no contemporary record of the actual performance survives.[20] However, nineteenth century observers did leave descriptions of the caoineadh – often marked, as pointed out by Patricia Lysaght, by their lack of understanding of the Irish language[21]– such as the one provided by Thomas Westropp. In his study on the folklore of Connaught, Westropp reported the keening to be a 'monotonous chant of three or four lines', which would end in 'aye, aye, aye, no more, more, more, my little house is empty, evermore, more, more.'[22]

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[13] In Northwest Donegal the keening was performed 'every night after rosary and again after the filling of the grave'. See U.F.M., MS 63/q3/79.

[14] Patricia Lysaght, "'Caoineadh os Cionn Coirp": the Lament for the Dead in Ireland' in *Folklore*, cviii (1997), p. 74.

[15] I.F.C., MS 631 (County Carlow, 1939), p. 254.

[16] I.F.C., MS 550 (County Cork, 1938), p. 68.

[17] Mooney, 'The funeral Customs of Ireland', p. 271.

[18] T. Griffin O'Donoghue, 'Carlyle's Irish Tours' in The Irish Monthly, xiv, no. 161 (1886), p. 622.

[19] Mooney, 'The funeral Customs of Ireland', p. 272.

[20] Lysaght, 'The Lament for the Dead', p. 68.

[21] Ibid., p. 69.

[22] John Westropp, 'A Study of the Folklore on the Coasts of Connacht, Ireland. (Continued)' in *Folklore*, xxxiv, no. 4 (1923), p. 338.

John Kenny, Roman Catholic Dean of Killaloe, described the keening in County Clare of a keening woman in 1856, on occasion of the wake of an old woman 'of great respectability'.[23] When 'a dozen or so' of mourners gathered at the front door, led by the keener, they proceeded where the body of the deceased was laid out, and 'cried in chorus for some minutes'. The keeners then consumed food and alcohol provided by the bereaved family. 'The keener - stressed John Kenny' – 'never left the corpse for the night [...] I think she joined every party who cried'.[24] Landed proprietor and antiquarian Denis H. Kelly also described how a keener would bend over the body of the deceased and cry - joined in chorus by those present - when members of the deceased's family or 'dear friends' would come into the room where the body was laid out.[25]

Similar to the laying out of the corpse, the keening was a prerogative of women. Although certainly widely practised up to the mid-nineteenth century, 'keening' was in part affected by the social impact of the Great Famine, which contributed to the gradual disappearance of the custom. Nonetheless, the fact that keening for the dead was still reported by IFC witnesses by the beginning of the twentieth century is a testimony to its functional value within the context of the Irish wake. Patricia Lysaght has highlighted the importance of the Caoineadh as a necessary part of Irish funeral customs due to its 'deep-rooted significance', which made the custom resistant to the passing of time.[26] Indeed, the presence of keeners was fundamental for the social standing of the deceased and the lament – a laudatory composition – expressed a ritualized celebration of the departed. Geologist and antiquarian George Henry Kinahan pointed out that the presence of a keener, particularly in Cork and Kerry, was considered 'a point of respectability to have as many of them as possible present'.[27] As a ritualised performance, it offered mourners a structured expression of grief, under the guidance of the keening woman (who was, according to Lysaght, 'usually a close relative of the deceased').[28] Its intensity was balanced by its limited duration within the context of the wake. Thus, it provided a paramount psychological function for the bereaved relatives, while being also a celebration of the deceased and a reaffirmation of their social standing among the community.

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[23] Evelyn Philip Shirley, John O'Donovan, 'Extract from the Journal of Thomas Dineley, Esquire, Giving some Account of his Visit to Ireland in the Reign of Charles II (Continued)' in *The Journal of the Kilkenny and South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society, New Series*, ii, no. 1 (1858), p. 29

[24] Ibid., p. 30.

[25] Ibid,, p. 31.

[26] Lysaght, 'The Lament for the Dead', p. 68.

[27] George H. Kinahan, 'Notes on Irish Folk-Lore' in *The Folk-Lore Record,* iv (1881), p. 100.

[28] Lysaght, 'The Lament for the Dead', p. 71.

3. The Merry Wake

Complaining about the 'extravagances' often seen at wakes in 1811, a writer to the *Belfast Monthly Magazine* considered the custom to be a legacy of 'barbarous times [...] in what other light can be viewed the practice of previously preparing the body as if for a public exhibition, and then of numbers collecting together for no other purpose than to spend the night in rioting and noisy mirth?'[29] Descriptions of the Catholic 'Merry Wake' reported in contemporary accounts in the pre-Famine period focused on the 'debauchery', merriment and the heavy consumption of alcohol that were, according to commentators, invariable features of these gatherings. Other items such as food, tea and tobacco were offered by the bereaved family whereas tea, butter and jam were offered in the second half of the nineteenth century: 'luxury novel provisions befitting special occasions'.[30] Although neither IFC manuscripts nor contemporary printed reports contain details about food offered at wakes, Regina Sexton mentions in her study on food at Irish wakes that 'funeral buns' and 'funeral biscuits' were popular by the end of the century.[31] However, contemporary evidence does highlight alcohol as the main item offered to those present. A description of a wake sketched in a fictional tale published by the *Dublin Penny Journal* in 1834 stressed the communal merriment of the wake, where 'young and old of both sexes' were 'laughing, chatting, and smoking quite at their ease'.[32]Memorial sources also indicate chalk pipes among the all-present items prepared for the celebration at Roman Catholic wakes.[33] Neighbours or relatives were commissioned to provide these items, which IFC manuscripts label as 'the charges'.[34] A home- made liquor called 'Potheen' was also provided.[35] The comforting function of these items is acknowledged by a popular explanation that refer to the Virgin Mary as the first tobacco smoker at a wake. Witnesses to the IFC explained that 'she was terribly sorry and broken hearted the day her son was crucified and for comfort she got a pipe and tobacco and took the first few draws herself'.[36]

Post-famine contemporary accounts do not differ considerably from the image of unrestrained merriment depicted by earlier sources. In 1887 William Shaw Mason noted

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[29] N.S., 'Observations on the Manner of Conducting Funerals: with a Few Remarks Respecting Ancient Customs, &c.' in *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*, xvii, no. 41 (1811), p. 429.

[30] Regina Sexton, 'Food and Drink at Irish Weddings and Wakes' in Laura Mason (ed.), *Food and the Rites of Passage. Leeds Symposium on Food History* (Trowbridge, 2002), p. 130.

[31] Ibid., p. 133.

[32] J.L.L., 'Kenny Kilfoy: or Murder Will Out' in *The Dublin Penny Journal,* iii, no. 119 (1834), p. 117.

[33] U.F.M., MS 63/q3/73; see also U.F.M., MS 63/q3/16; U.F.M., MS 63/q3/113.

[34] I.F.C., MS 1457 (County Longford, 1955), p. 554.

[35] I.F.C., MS 550 (County Cork, 1938), p. 87.

[36] I.F.C., MS 227 (County Mayo, 1935), pp. 92-93.

how these celebrations were marked by 'unbounded mirth and festivity, which are not restrained by the presence of the nearest relatives of the deceased'.[37] In County Westmeath, they were productive of 'nothing but riot, intoxication, and indecent mirth'.[38] The accounts of contemporary middle-class observer substantially match the IFC accounts. Although the social changes brought by the Great Famine might have contributed to the fading of some of the features of the Merry Wake, such as the keening of the dead, continuity of the custom is evident. 'The dead', wrote George Henry Kinahan in 1881, 'were honoured by the amount of drink and tobacco provided for the wake'.[39] Prominent features of the Merry Wake, such as the pivotal role of hospitality and the importance of the deceased's reputation were still clear in County Tyrone by the end of the twentieth century.[40] In the late nineteenth century a French traveller named Charles Legras described the 'far west' of the country as a place where ancient customs were still alive. In particular he described the ritual keening of the dead and also pointed out that 'whiskey helps warming up the hearts and meeting death face to face'. [41] Other observers were puzzled by how 'those who have loved and respected their friends while living, could treat their remains with such cold indifference as to suffer them to become a kind of public spectacle'.[42] 'I can conceive nothing so abhorrent', wrote a reader to the *Nenagh Guardian* in 1877, 'as all the surroundings of an Irish wake. What a contrast to the poor corpse [...] to the singing, laughing, jibing, and drinking, indulged by all, except by the immediate relatives of the dead'.[43]

By the end of the nineteenth century, as the attention of the middle-class observers focused on the excess of drink at wakes, contemporary reports are devoid of further details, such as the actual performance of wake-games or the keening of the dead. In 1885 Edward Cecil Guinness – who was a prominent shareholder of the Artizan's Dwelling Company; which provided houses where his employees were housed - was asked if he would have promoted the building of mortuaries in Dublin in order to prevent the holding of wakes for prolonged periods. He made clear that he was unwilling to oppose the lower classes' traditions unless supported by the clergy of all denominations. He also stated that he was

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[37] William Shaw Mason, 'Irish Folk-Lore. [Continued]' in *The Folk-Lore Journal*, v, no. 4 (1887), p. 332 (henceforth quoted as 'Irish Folk-Lore 1887').

[38] William Shaw Mason, 'Irish Folk-Lore [continued]' in *The Folk-Lore Journal,* vi, no. 1 (1888), p. 61.

[39] Kinahan, 'Notes on Irish Folk-Lore', p. 100.

[40] Ray Cashman, 'Dying the Good Death: Wake and Funeral Customs in County Tyrone' in *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua*, x, no. 2 (2006), pp. 9-25.

[41] Charles Legras, *Terre d'Irlande* (Paris, 1898), pp. 152-3.

[42] N.S., 'Observations on the Manner of Conducting Funerals', p. 429.

[43] *Nenagh Guardian*, 31 Mar. 1877.

aware of the 'great excesses that often attend the practice of waking the dead'.[44] The Roman Catholic parish priest of Saint Nicholas (Dublin) James Daniel had previously pointed out to the authorities that the inconvenience of wakes in Dublin arose 'from the large number of people in those houses [...] and then others gather[ed] into the room where a wake occurs, and so demoralisation and dissipation occur'.[45] The county court judge of King's County, Meath, Westmeath, and Longford expressed his view on 'the waking system' in Ireland as late as 1898: 'you all have heard of the waking system in Ireland. No sooner is the breath out of a man's body than one of the next-of-kin, or some friend, rushes off to the nearest grocer's, or publican's, and orders in three or four gallons of whisky. That is the very least – sometimes it is considerably more.'[46] Furthermore, manuscripts from the Irish Folklore Commission, along with printed sources, suggest a widespread popularity of the wake as a merry celebration.

Marked by a clear unfamiliarity with the Irish lower classes, contemporary accounts that divert from this representation indirectly confirm the popularity of this custom among the Irish poor. Irish traveller John Gamble acknowledged in 1831 that the Irish wake 'has often been described, often ridiculed'. He attended the wake of the 'son of a Catholic', which he found to be conducted in the most orderly manner. However, details of his own account suggest that the deceased was the son of a wealthy farmer. Firstly, the kitchen was filled with 'servants and labourers', who had probably been employed by the father of the deceased. Secondly, in the parlour there were 'neighbouring farmers' and, most importantly, 'shopkeepers'. Indicating that the corpse was not located in a rural cabin the labourers were served tea and tobacco in a separate room. Alcohol was reserved for farmers and shopkeepers in the parlour. Remarkably, there was no omnipresent whiskey common to the Irish lower classes wakes, but instead 'wine and punch', which were 'taken sparingly'. Lastly, although the corpse was shrouded, it was placed on a bed and not a table. Stories were then told and keeners present up to the burial in the local graveyard.[47]

Although contemporary middle-class observers as well as memorial sources stress the importance of the wake as a 'merry' celebration, both categories of sources present critical problems. On one hand, middle class observers lacked the necessary familiarity with the funeral customs of the lower classes. Their accounts are typically marked by a

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[44] *Third Report of her Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Housing of the Working Classes, Ireland*, p. 45 [C.4547-I], H.C. 1884-85, xxxi, 247.

[45] Ibid., pp. 28, 230.

[46] *Royal Commission on Liquor Licensing Laws. Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Royal Commission on Liquor Licensing Laws, with Appendices and Index. Vol. VII. [Ireland.]*, p. 194 [C.8980], H.C. 1898, xxxviii, 728. (Henceforth cited as *Commission on Liquor 1898*).

[47] John Gamble, *A View of Society and Manners, in the North of Ireland, in the Summer and Autumn of 1812* (London, 1813), pp. 326- 333.

lack of insight which meant describing wakes solely as occasions for unleashed 'debauchery' as also regularly reported by newspapers without providing details, or first hand accounts. The reports from the House of Commons also suffer from being often written from an English Protestant perspective, which focused only on excessive alcohol consumption: a perspective that 'implied that the custom held little or no meaning outside a culture of drinking'.[48] Moreover, the confidence with which different commentators throughout the nineteenth century considered wakes to be 'fading' or 'stamped out' was sharply contradicted by constant regulations and appeals against 'unruly behaviour' at wakes issued by the Roman Catholic clergy up to the early twentieth century. Antiquarian John Prim could not provide a direct testimony, as he acknowledged his debt towards people who were 'likely to be best informed as to popular customs'. He also overestimated the effectiveness of the Roman Catholic clergy in shaping the funeral customs of the lower classes. As early as 1853, he wrote that 'we must rejoice that customs so revolting to all [...] have been put down, and I trust eradicated'.[49] George Kinahan, writing in 1881, stated that the 'old wakes are now nearly altogether done away with'.[50]

As regards the Irish folklore commission, Michael Brody pointed out that once the witnesses' trust was gained by folklore collectors, they would feel part of a great national project, which in turn might have induced them to 'embellish' their accounts. Consequently, they might have conveyed an image of Irish tradition as they wanted it to be reported to a wider audience. Witnesses were not challenged by the interviewer, as they were let tell their stories freely.[51] Frederic Charles Bartlett pointed out that 'it often happens that a folk story which has been developed in a certain social group gets passed on to another which possess different habits of life and thought'[52]. Bartlett also attempted an analysis of variations in the transmission of popular memories. He identified different factors of transformation often endured by folk stories, observing the actual reproduction of stories in various experiments. Among these factors, the 'omission of the unpleasant' is very frequent. [53] 'Unpleasant' refers to anything that was opposed to the storyteller's social conventions. As a result, all the stories reproduced were subject to widespread 'conventionalisation of the narrative material'. Also, a 'pleasant mood of unquestioning

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[48] Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 88.

[49] John Prim, 'Olden Popular Pastimes in Kilkenny' in *Transactions of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society,* ii, no. 2 (1853), p. 333.

[50] Kinahan, 'Notes on Irish Folk-Lore', p. 101.

[51] Mìcheál Brody, *The Irish Folklore Commission, 1935-1970: History, Ideology, Methodology* (Helsinki, 2007), p. 256.

[52] Frederic C. Bartlett, 'Some Experiments on the Reproduction of Folk Stories', in *Folklore,* xxxi (1920), p. 31.

[53] Ibid., p. 34.

acceptance is evoked.' [54] Such a conventionalisation of the narrative material is evident when IFC manuscripts deal with the alleged merriment of wakes. One of the most popular themes is referred to a particular joke involving the corpse. The following account from County Cavan runs as follow:

> There were some strange happenings at wakes. There were cases in which a corpse had to be tied at the table because of the fact that he had a hump on his back and could not be 'laid out' in the usual way. During the night some 'funny fellow' cut the rope that was holding down the corpse, the result being that 'the corpse sat up' on the table, and people got such a fright that they knocked going out of the door, and some of them fainted.[55]

A different version, reported from County Cork, presents a more elaborate plot. According to the account, an old woman has died, but because of its hump the corpse has not been tied down to the table as when alive the woman was 'crippled with pain'. Then three 'lads' perform the joke: each of them completing his own assigned task. One of them has to sneak under the table with a knife. The second one will stand near the house door with a bagpipe concealed under his coat. The third one would tie a thread to the only lit candle. At the agreed signal, the first man is to cut the rope holding the corpse, while 'the fellow holding the thread [...] was to give it a pull, thereby knocking the candle'. The third man was to play the hidden bagpipe, making those present 'squeak and squeal'. According to the account everything 'worked out according to plan', and 'there was a wide scramble to get out of the door, some people fainted, they walked across each other going out'. [56] In a further version instead of the corpse being tied down to the table, the 'funny fellows' tie it on purpose, moving the rope in order to create a standing corpse.[57]

IFC manuscripts as well as newspaper accounts stress the importance of a 'decent' wake to be performed in honour of the deceased. The wake is the core custom through which the departed is given 'a good send off'. It is also a custom in which the Roman Catholic clergy is significantly absent. The Catholic clergy would only make its appearance on the morning of the funeral procession, when the last waking night was over. Only then the Church would take over, collecting offerings and celebrating the funeral mass for the deceased.[58] The social standing of the bereaved family was still at stake; the number of people attending the funeral procession was paramount in terms of respectability. However, the dearth of sources relating to funeral processions of the

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[54] Ibid., p. 47.
[55] I.F.C., MS 791 (County Cavan, 1941), pp. 391-92.
[56] I.F.C., MS 791 (County Cavan, 1941), pp. 488- 491.
[57] I.F.C., MS 128 (County Cork, 1935), p. 176.
[58] U.F.M., MS 63/q3/28.

Catholic poor might be ascribed to the fact that, unlikely boisterous Merry Wakes, processions simply did not attract the attention of contemporary observers. Travelling in Ireland in the early 1830s, John Barrow described the funeral of someone who he identified as 'probably a wealthy farmer'. The coffin was set on a cart, 'under a canopy' – an additional item that testified to the wealth of the deceased. Horsemen brought up the rear of the procession. It was, in Barrow's words, 'the most numerously attended [...] the most respectable of any I have seen in Ireland.'[59]

Customs related to the funeral procession focused on communal identity. Thus, the focus switched from the celebration of the deceased to their 'ancestors' and community. In this context, as a witness to the IFC stated, 'they always take an old road to the graveyard'.[60] Also, four people of the same surname of the deceased 'should carry the coffin'.[61] In Connaught as late as the 1920s, on reaching the graveyard the mourners would disperse, to pray at their relatives' graves. Tobacco and pipes would then be distributed.[62] Alcohol would be distributed also to those members of the community who took care of the corpse and its burial.[63] George Kinahan reported the custom of building small crosses out of pieces of board cut off from the base and lid of the coffin. Those crosses were subsequently planted at crossroads on the way to the graveyard. This custom had seemingly originated in the baronies of Forth and Bargy, in County Wexford. Crosses were also piled up in ditches near 'the principal graveyards'.[64]

4. Catholics and Protestants

The Irish 'Merry Wake' was, according to memorial sources, synonymous with 'Catholic' wakes. However, the custom of waking the dead was by no means a Catholic peculiarity. The absence of Protestant Merry Wakes in contemporary sources might be ascribed to a more sober, orderly fashion in which they were conducted. Memories from the Ulster Folk Museum questionnaire, distributed in 1964 through the six counties of Northern Ireland[65], stressed the 'solemn' character of Protestant wakes, as opposed to Roman Catholic ones.

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[59] John Barrow, Tim Bobbin, 'A Tour Round Ireland' in *The Dublin Penny Journal*, iv, no. 203 (1836), p. 376

[60] I.F.C., MS 1834 (County Roscommon, 1974), pp. 208-9.

[61] I.F.C., MS 433 (County Clare, 1937), p. 63.

[62] Westropp, 'Folklore on the Coasts of Connacht', p. 336.

[63] Sexton, 'Food and Drink', p. 137.

[64] Kinahan, 'Notes on Irish Folk-Lore', pp. 119-120.

[65] County Armagh, Antrim, Londonderry/Derry, Down, Fermanagh and Tyrone, together with Belfast and Rathlin Island.

'Wakes in Catholic houses' – wrote a witness – 'were more social occasions than the rather sombre Protestant ones, whiskey and tobacco were always in good supply at the R.C. houses'.[66] Other accounts follow the same pattern. In County Antrim the Roman Catholic Wakes were 'always well attended'.[67] In County Tyrone the Roman Catholic 'as a rule treated a wake in a lighter vein.[68] As regards to Presbyterians, in County Antrim ''drinking' and 'merry making' wakes were practically unknown among Presbyterians'.[69] However, members of the Presbyterian congregation of Magherafelt, County Derry, passed in 1831 a resolution condemning the consumption of alcohol at wakes and funerals.[70] As noted by Patricia Lysaght, the Ordnance Survey memoirs compiled in the 1830s also mentioned the provision of whiskey and tobacco at Presbyterian wakes, specifically in the parishes of Islandmagee and Dunagore in County Antrim.[71] In 1830, 'the consumption of liquor at wakes and funerals' was also a concern for the Presbyterian kirk session of Dunboe, County Londonderry.[72]

According to an IFC account from County Cavan, the laying out procedure for Protestant wakes had its own peculiarities. Protestant were laid out in 'pants and shirts', while women in a 'night dress' – an indication from the witness' perspective, of relative wealth. The body was covered with 'either a blanket or white quilt', leaving the head alone exposed. Most interesting, the hands were not placed on the breast 'but laid down at the sides, and a silver coin placed in the right hand, the fingers being closed around it.[73] Although the custom of placing coins in the hands or on the eyelids of the deceased is referred to be related to the Protestant religion, it had been widely observed in modern Europe.[74] Indeed, the custom of placing coins on the eyelids was reported in County Fermanagh by a witness to the UFM questionnaire.[75] in a passage of Selina Martin's 'Sketches of Irish History' a coin is placed in the hand of the deceased, though the religious persuasion of the people performing such practices is not stated. The fact that they are identified as 'poor' and living in the south of Ireland, which could identify them as Catholics. As with John Prim, Martin had heard the information provided in her study

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[66] U.F.M., MS 63/q3/18; see also U.F.M., MS 63/q3/28; U.F.M., MS 63/q3/36.
[67] U.F.M., MS 63/q3/132.
[68] U.F.M., MS 63/q3/182.
[69] U.F.M., MS 63/q3/148.
[70] Patricia Lysaght, 'Hospitality at Wakes and Funerals in Ireland from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century: Some Evidence from the Written Record' in *Folklore*, cxiv, no. 3 (2003), p. 412.
[71] Lysaght, 'Hospitality at wakes', p. 412.
[72] P.R.O.N.I., MIC1P/412/1.
[73] I.F.C., MS 971 (County Cork, 1944), p. 133.
[74] James M. Davidson, 'Keeping the Devil at Bay: the Shoe on the Coffin Lid and other Grave Charms in Nineteenth- and early Twentieth –Century America' in *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, xiv (2010), p. 616.
[75] U.F.M., MS 63/q3/171.

'from good authority'. She stated that in parts of the south of Ireland 'the ignorant people put shoes, a great coat, and candles into the coffin with the dead body'. They also placed a hammer 'to knock loudly at the gate of purgatory' as well as a letter addressed to Saint Peter enclosing money which would be put into the hand of the deceased before closing the coffin.[76]

According to IFC Catholic witnesses the image of Protestant wakes is one of wealth and an abundance of food and drink. 'Those wakes', stated a pensioner in County Cork, were 'always a feast'. He then pointed out that when a death occurred in a Protestant family, bread and meat were the first things to be brought to the house.[77] During the wake, the Protestants were 'feasting away for themselves', while their Catholic neighbours were all in the kitchen. However, the witness admits that he had to give 'fair play to the man of the house, he gave the whiskey all round'.[78] Conversely, the keening of the dead was seemingly a prominent Catholic feature. George Kinahan remarked in 1881 that Protestant miners in County Cork used to sing hymns on their way to the churchyard. 'But they were' – he pointed out – 'principally Cornish men'.[79] Also, although wakes were more prevalent among Roman Catholics than Protestants, 'some of the ancient Irish families of the latter faith keep them up'.[80]The latter account suggests that wakes, as social gatherings, would also allow the whole community – beyond the confessional divide – to partake at the celebration for the loss of a member of the community. A witness to the UFM described his great aunt as a 'great wake attendant', someone who 'attended them all Roman Catholic wakes and Protestant alike'.[81]

The narrative of wakes as conveyed by IFC manuscripts also hints at the presence of Protestants at Catholic wakes. An account on a game called 'hide the general' has a Protestant victim playing the main character. In the account, the Protestant is attending a wake, although 'the boys [...] didn't care too much about him'. However, they choose him as 'the general', the designated victim of the game. The witness stated that 'he was a prig of a Protestant, and the boys didn't like him, so that's how they managed him'.[82]

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[76] Selina Martin, *Sketches of Irish History. Antiquities, Religion, Customs, and Manners* (Dublin, 1844), p. 322.
[77] I.F.C., MS 971 (County Cork, 1944), p. 181.
[78] I.F.C., MS 971 (County Cork, 1944), p. 181.
[79] Kinahan, 'Notes on Irish Folk-Lore', p. 100.
[80] Kinahan, 'Notes on Irish Folk-Lore', p. 101.
[81] U.F.M., MS 63/q3/18.
[82] I.F.C., MS 631 (County Carlow, 1939) pp. 12-13.

5. Wake games

Novelist William Carleton described the character of one of his tales as 'a great person for attending wakes and funerals'. He is depicted as a kind of organizer, someone who does not only attend the wake, but also comforts the 'afflicted relatives' while taking care of the 'domestic concerns, paying attention to strangers, looking after the pipes and tobacco'.[83] He was also an improviser, as his 'invention was indeed remarkably fertile'. The character outlined by Carleton is what John Prim defined as the 'borekeen', the organizer of the wake as a public gathering.[84] According to Henry Morris, this 'master of ceremonies' was chosen in the immediate neighbourhood, as he would target 'those outside the district' as designated victims for the wake-games.[85] Wake games, however, had been described by the Roman Catholic clergy as a 'immoral' feature of the lower classes wakes. These games were played in the wake house or in a barn (deemed in IFC accounts as being a suitable place for the laying out of the corpse). Memorial sources also provide evidence regarding the separation between the 'old people' present at wakes and the younger, who would indulge themselves in wake-games. 'Whenever a person of any respectability dies' – stated an anonymous writer for the *Dublin Penny Journal* in 1834 – 'two wake houses are laid-out'. In one of them was placed the deceased, along with 'aged persons' and near relatives. In the second wake-house were 'the young people of the neighbourhood, who entertain themselves with every species of frolic and amusement'.[86]

While drink, dancing and what was generally labelled as 'abusive behaviour' by the Catholic clergy was by no means relegated solely to wakes, it was considered to be 'wrong, unlucky and dangerous' to play wake games at any other social occasion.[87] Seán Ó Súilleabháin has proposed a taxonomy of wake games on the basis of a survey of material from the Irish Folklore Commission's archive. His complete survey of games has been grouped under the headings 'imitative games', 'catch games' and 'games of hide, seek and guessing'. The first category includes all games which were 'imitations or by forms of everyday human activities'.[88] Those were the games more targeted by the Roman Catholic clergy, as included role-plays in which priests appeared among the characters as well as match-making games.

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[83] William Carleton, 'The Irish Shanahus' in *The Irish Penny Journal*, i, no. 48 (1841), p. 378.

[84] Quoted in Gearóid Ó Crualaoich, 'The 'Merry Wake'' in James S. Donnelly, Jr., Kerby A. Miller, *Irish Popular Culture, 1650-1850* (Dublin, 1998), p. 191.

[85] Henry Morris, 'Irish Wake Games' in *Bèaloideas*, viii, no. 2 (1938), p. 129.

[86] *Dublin Penny Journal*, iii, no. 116 (1834), p. 90.

[87] Morris, 'Wake Games', p. 140.

[88] Seán Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Wake Amusements* (Dublin, 1976), p. 75

Wake games as reported by memorial sources were in part devised as role-plays – or 'booby traps', according to Ó Súilleabháin - involving a victim supposedly unaware that the game was played on him. These 'traps' marked an important function of the wake, as the designated victim of the game was meant to be a person not strictly related to the bereaved family, nor to the 'neighbourhood'. Thus it reasserted, indirectly, the unity of the mourning community. A popular game called 'the nine daughters' was staged as a match making play between nine daughters of a wealthy farmer and young males present at the wake. According to the witness, the game had been performed 'at an independent famer's wake in Drumhalry [County Longford] in June, 1868'. A man acting as a wealthy farmer sits surrounded by nine women. Then 'nine boys go out, and come in one at a time; each one of the eight represents himself as a tradesman, the last coming as a farmer'. The farmer is selected as the victim. While all the tradesmen are rejected by the father of the nine daughters, the man acting as a young farmer gets accepted. A proper business transaction as regards to the dowry begins, ending with a 'squabbling about the fortune' – as the young farmer is deemed to be too poor and thus undeserving. When he is rejected by the nine daughters, 'cups of water are thrown on him [...] with many uncomplimentary names for a young man looking for a wife to put her in his pocket'.[89]

Folklorist Leland Duncan reported a different version of this wake-game in County Leitrim in 1894. Two masters are appointed, along with a man playing the father of the nine daughters. Nine men are 'sent out', each with a chosen trade. As opposed to the first version of the game, all the nine men reach an agreement with the father of the nine daughters. Afterwards, each of them is hoisted on the back of one of the masters and receives a prick with a pin 'to the amusement, doubtless, of the company'.[90] Wake games structured as 'the nine daughters' as well as matching games provided a structured channel for courting. An article published by the *Dublin University Magazine* supported the popular notion that 'most of the matches were made, and still are, at wakes'.[91] They were, also, a long-lived feature of Merry Wakes. According to Henry Morris, by the end of the nineteenth century in South Ulster, County Donegal, County Mayo 'and other places' wake games were still 'in full swing'.[92]

As regards jokes involving the corpse, a witness to the IFC pointed out that it 'wasn't done out of disrespect, only just for diversion',[93] which horrified contemporary middle-class observers as late as 1876. Ó Súilleabháin's detailed accounts of jokes and

[89] Patrick Duffy, 'A Longford Wake Game of the Sixties' in *Bèaloideas*, ii, no. 4 (1930), pp. 394-5.
[90] Leland L. Duncan, 'Further Notes from County Leitrim' in *Folklore*, v, no. 3 (1894), p. 191.
[91] *Dublin University Magazine,* lxxxviii, no. 525 (1876), p. 294.
[92] Morris, 'Wake Games', p. 124.
[93] I.F.C., MS 407 (County Limerick, 1937) p. 299.

pranks report that 'If it happened that the dead man was fond of card himself, his friends sat around the bed to play some game which was popular locally, and a 'hand' of cards was even given to the corpse.'[94] Furthermore, the ritualised participation of the deceased in the game marks their effective presence in the wake house as a guest and as the object of celebration.

6. A tenacious custom

The resilience of the Irish 'Merry Wake', as a funeral custom common throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth-century, was also acknowledged by contemporary observers.[95] The constant opposition from the Roman Catholic Church testified to the resilience of this custom among the poorer sections of the Irish population. Catholic institutions also warned its members about the dangers of Merry Wakes. In the 1870s, the Order of the Children of Mary[96] prescribed the expulsion for its members if found attending 'wakes, drinkings &c.'.[97]

Seán Ó Súilleabháin has highlighted the role of the Merry Wake as a means through which the community would protect itself against the anger of the deceased at dying, as well as healing the social fabric wounded by the departure of one of its members.[98] In Sean Connolly's view, Ó Súilleabháin's interpretation is a 'plausible' one. Moreover, he pointed out how the 'vigour' with which wakes were celebrated was partly due to the fact that they were 'an assertion of continued vitality in the face of a sudden reminder of universal mortality', as well as of 'continuity in the face of the abrupt removal from a close-knit community of one of its members'.[99]According to Connolly, the wake was a means for the community to recognise 'the fact of an individual death and its more general implication'[100]. Thus, the rituals 'encouraged and structured the appropriated responses [...] that they continued to do so for so long, and in the face of so much condemnation and disapproval, can only suggest that the wake continued to perform important psychological function for those who participated in it'.[101]

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[94] Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Wake Amusements*, p. 32.
[95] *FJ*, 25 Jan. 1877.
[96] Reserved for children attending the Roman Catholic convent schools in the diocese of Dromore.
[97] *Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education (Ireland). Vol. II. Containing the Reports of the Assistant Commissioners*, p. 227 [C.6-I], H.C. 1870, xxviii pt.ii, 621.
[98] Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Wake Amusements*, pp. 166-74.
[99] Sean J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland* (New York, 1982), p. 152.
[100] Ibid., p. 159.
[101] Ibid.

In his study on Newfoundland wakes, Peter Narváez suggested that the peculiar vitality of the traditional house wake was sustained by 'pleasure'. 'Collective pleasure' enjoyed at wakes could be interpreted as having features which were 'evasive' as well as 'subversive'.[102] Both of these features are recognisable in Irish traditional wakes. The 'evasive' character of Merry Wakes was framed within the social and cultural context as shared by the lower classes in nineteenth century Ireland. A context in which hospitality, alcohol and a tendency toward 'provocative ludic behaviour' played an important part.[103] As pointed out by Ilana Harlow, the basic purpose of the wake was to watch the body during the time between death and burial. Storytelling, as well as wake-games, can also be considered activities put into practice as simple pastimes.[104]

The wake was an occasion of a collective celebration - the source for collective pleasure which sustained the popularity of the Merry Wake throughout the nineteenth century. The attractiveness of wakes in terms of public entertainment is acknowledged in a variety of contemporary sources, as well as by the IFC manuscripts. In a fictional tale in the *Dublin Penny Journal* in 1833, the death of a member of a well off family is the occasion for 'crowds' to come to the wake, 'knowing it would be a plentiful one, and they were not disappointed'.[105] In 1881, landowner and agent in County Galway James Jackson described his labourers as being generally 'lazy'. According to him, they would not cultivate the land until spring, while during the rest of the year they would 'Go to fairs and markets, and attend wakes and weddings. That is half the winter. There is not a funeral in the country that every person near does not attend'. In addition he stated that he was from the north of Ireland, confirming that in his opinion people in the south of Ireland were not 'as industrious as in the north'. [106] As late as 1894 the resident medical superintendent in the Killarney asylum acknowledged that 'The peasant drinks to excess occasionally at fairs, weddings, wakes, &c., but he is not a habitual drinker'.[107] That the Irish poor would drink only on special occasions such as wakes was confirmed by Alexander Gambell, County Inspector of Cork, speaking before the Royal Commission on Liquor Licensing Laws in 1898.[108] Witnesses to the IFC also stated that people living in the area would

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[102] Peter Narváez, '"Tricks and Fun:" Subversive Pleasures at Newfoundland Wakes' in *Western Folklore*, liii, no. 4 (1994), p. 275.

[103] Ilana Harlow, 'Creating Situations: Practical Jokes and the Revival of the Dead in Irish Tradition' in *The Journal of American Folklore,* cx, no. 436 (1997), p. 140.

[104] Ibid., p. 141.

[105] W., 'The Garvarry', in *The Dublin Penny Journal,* ii, no. 55 (1833), p. 22.

[106] *Report of her Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into the Working of the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act, 1870, and the Acts Amending the Same,* p. 606 [C.2779-II], H.C. 1881, xix, 824.

[107] *Lunacy- - Ireland. The Forty-Third Report (with Appendices) of the Inspectors of Lunatics (Ireland),* p. 206 [C.7466], H.C. 1894, xlii, 520.

[108] *Commission on Liquor 1898,* H.C. 1898, xxxviii, p. 72.

usually stop working for the day.[109] They would also stop 'for some days afterwards, because men having spent two nights without sleep would not be able to do much work.'[110] In the words of William Shaw Mason, 'another source of idleness [...] is the constant attendance at wakes and funerals of their neighbours; the neglect of which would be considered a crime of the blackest dye'.[111]

From the 1830s, government pressure on drink at fairs and outdoor festivals started to increase. According to Elizabeth Malcom, by the 1860s and 1870s contemporaries acknowledged that the suppression of popular festivals 'had deprived the Irish of many traditional modes of recreation'.[112] Thus, wakes remained an important occasion for communal pleasure throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, the importance of communal ties stressed the need to attend wakes as a mark of respect for the deceased. For relatives and neighbours attendance at wakes was expected as a mark of respect. A tale reported by a witness to the IFC tells of a man reproached by a dead relative for never going to funerals. The reason added by the dead is clear: 'tis only God's mercy will save ye, for ye never buried the dead.'[113]

7. Untimely Deaths

According to John Prim, wake games were never performed in the event of tragic deaths. They were reserved for the elderly who had survived 'the ordinary span of life' or young children who were not considered 'an irreparable loss.'[114] As late as 1975, an 82 year-old witness to the IFC stated that 'if it was a young person, the people of the house would be nearly gone out of their wits roaring crying. And if it was an old person, natural thing, only just leave it down on two chairs [...] but if it was a young person that died you could pull them from the coffin. That was a funeral in my day now.' [115] Although tragic deaths were likely to provoke a sympathetic reaction in a locality, it is remarkable that according to popular memory such occasions provided not only 'small wakes', but also funerals 'larger than others'. Furthermore wake games would not be played, because 'everyone used to

[109] I.F.C., MS 1457 (County Longford), p. 348.
[110] I.F.C., MS 971 (County Cork, 1944), p. 148.
[111] Mason, 'Irish Folk-Lore 1887', p. 334.
[112] Elizabeth Malcolm, 'The Rise of the Pub: a Study in the Disciplining of Popular Culture' in James S. Donnelly Jr., Kerby A. Miller (eds), *Irish Popular Culture, 1650-1850* (Dublin, 1998), p. 70.
[113] I.F.C., MS 36 (County Laois, circa 1936), pp. 175-177.
[114] Prim, 'Olden Popular Pastimes', p. 334.
[115] I.F.C., MS 971 (County Cork, 1944), p. 131.

respect the dead'[116]A detailed account of a custom related to untimely deaths was published by The *Dublin University Magazine* in 1861:

> It was customary, in many parts of Ireland, on the death of unmarried persons, beloved and respected for their virtues, to decorate a long staff with bowed projections on the sides - the wood work being concealed by fringes of white calico, linen, or paper, overlaid in regular ranges. This was properly called the garland. A cross was prepared in like manner, together with twelve small and slender wands. The tips of the latter, and the projections of the former, were for the most part looped with knots of pink ribbon. The garland bearer went foremost in the funeral procession, and immediately preceding the coffin. Twelve young persons followed two and two, whilst the cross-bearer brought up the rear.[117]

The writer then underlines that if the dead person was a young unmarried woman, the procession was composed of young unmarried women; if a young man, by unmarried men. This custom was also reported by IFC manuscripts describing a 'Garland procession' of 'twelve youths with white hat-bands, walk[ing] two and two before the corpse, preceded by a thirteenth carrying a garland composed of a long handle covered with paper'.[118] The custom, defined as 'ancient', is not reported by further contemporary source under examination here. On the other hand, when dealing with untimely deaths, memorial sources stress the collective need to lessen grief caused by the loss of a child. Among the lower classes, high infant mortality was a constant throughout the nineteenth century.[119]In fact, the high rate of child mortality had the net effect of downplaying - in terms of communal reaction - the importance of the death of an infant. According to witnesses to the IFC, the death of baptised children was 'looked upon differently'. The funeral of a child was 'always small, being mostly made up of relatives and the immediate neighbours.'[120]The reason adduced by the witness for a quick funeral that 'the mother after the birth of her child would feel the loss so deeply, it was to be removed for burial almost as soon as it had died'.[121] The necessity to contain the mother's grief, as well as stressing the need for a positive outlook towards future offspring is conveyed remarkably by a story recorded by the Irish Folklore Commission. The story tells of the apparition of a dead child reproaching her mother for her excessive grief: an example of how Irish folklore borrowed

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[116] I.F.C., MS 227, pp. 103-4.
[117] *Dublin University Magazine,* lvii (1861), p. 502.
[118] A.S. Lovelock, *Connaught in 1798,* p. 27 (Description provided by an I.F.C. card).
[119] S.H. Cousens, 'The Restriction of Population Growth in Pre-Famine Ireland' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, lxiv (1965/1966), pp. 89 - 94.
[120] I.F.C. MS 971, p. 198.
[121] I.F.C. MS 550 (County Cork, 1938), p. 51.

elements from the Christian tradition.[122] Fearing the death of her next offspring there existed a prohibition on a mother to attend her first child's funeral - further memories also prescribe an identical prohibition for fathers.[123]As regards to burial, a quick procedure is considered to be a proper and sufficient one, such a 'hole dug in the family grave at a quiet time of the evening'.[124]

Gearóid Ó Crualaoich has proposed a structural and functional explanation of the meaning of the Merry Wake as a communal custom, based on the opposition between timely and untimely deaths. Disputing Connolly's view, he pointed out that in case of tragic and untimely death – thus when the psychological function of the wake is supposed to be most needed – the wake ceased to be a 'merry' celebration. He then outlined the Merry Wake as a custom performed only when a death, being natural, was considered not to be 'a serious challenge to the social order'. Also, a natural death was perceived as an event occurred according to God's will. Conversely, an untimely or tragic death would have been attributed in Irish traditional culture to fairy abduction. Being such an unnatural event - an intervention of the magical and dangerous world of the fairies - the communal response to grief would have been a restrained one. Ó Crualaoich summarises the lower classes' responses to death thus: in the case of untimely death, as caused by a 'fairy agency', the response is restrained whereas in the case of a natural death as caused by God's will the response is unrestrained.[125]

The distinction between timely and untimely deaths is of paramount importance for understanding the funeral customs of the poor. However, the interaction between the magical, fairy world and official Catholicism in Irish funeral customs was not as neatly separated as Ó Crualaoich's theory implies. Up to the second half of the nineteenth century, these two worlds were part of the religious experience of the Irish Catholic peasant.[126]As regards funeral customs, defensive strategies against the fairy world were also part of Merry Wakes. In County Galway it was considered to be wrong, for instance, to go or come from a wake alone. Moreover, people going to a wake should have 'put a pinch of salt in their mouths, in their pockets [...] as a way of protecting themselves from the fairy host'.[127] In a folklore tale from County Donegal, a man returning back home from

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[122] I.F.C., MS 104 (County Leitrim, 1935), p. 413. The reproach of the child bears a resemblance with the appearance of Jesus Christ to Mary Magdalene on the day of the resurrection.

[123] I.F.C., MS 42 (County Cork, 1929), p. 186.

[124] I.F.C., MS 2074 (County Kilkenny, 1936) p. 235.

[125] Ó Crualaoich, 'The Merry Wake', pp. 194-9.

[126] Cara Delay, '"The Gates were Shut": Catholics, Chapels, and Power in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland' in *New Hibernia Review*, xiv, no. 1 (2010), p. 20

[127] Ó Crualaoich, 'The Merry Wake', p. 179.

his neighbour's wake meets 'the fairies'.[128] In County Limerick, if a cat or dog 'cross a corpse when it's laid out, it must be killed'. Furthermore, the water used to wash the body cannot be reused and must be 'thrown at the foot of some bush'.[129] A dead person is also believed to be 'in the fairies', especially if he or she died 'without a priest.''[130]

On the other hand, the weight of the Roman Catholic clergy in shaping the attitude towards funeral customs should not be underestimated. Untimely deaths such as through suicide or in the case of stillborn babies were, in fact, treated within the cultural frame provided by the Roman Catholic Church. What Ó Crualaoich fails to acknowledge is the important role played by the cultural background in shaping responses to grief. Focusing on a neat separation between a magical and a Catholic world as 'agencies of death', thus triggering different responses to death, does not take into account that an untimely death represented a heavier grief for the family to cope with, leading the community to a more sober behaviour. This point of view of Ó Crualaoich's also suffers from a simplification of the Irish lower classes. although it 'horrified' contemporary middle-class observers, the lower class response to a timely death was consistent with a set of shared values centred on the idea that a timely death was 'no loss'. Moreover, even when the pressure of social customs is strong, individual reactions do not necessarily comply with the general image of the Merry Wake as provided by contemporary sources.[131] While considering the Merry Wake as a celebration of life against death is substantially correct, a more precise definition of a Merry Wake should be that of a celebration of a respectable, as well as timely, death.

8. Death by suicide, epidemics and the issue of respectability

Coroner's juries would often attribute suicide to temporary insanity in an attempt to clarify that the deceased deserved a proper burial, and so avoiding 'cruel punishment being inflicted upon the innocent relatives by the clergy.'[132] As stated by *The Nation* in 1865, the reason why coroner's juries 'invariably attribute suicide to temporary insanity' might have been due to their willingness to 'remove the opprobrium of a crime by relieving the suicide

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[128] Alfred C. Haddon, 'A Batch of Irish Folk-Lore' in *Folklore*, iv, no. 3 (1893), pp. 354-5.

[129] Leland L. Duncan, 'Fairy Beliefs and Other Folklore Notes from County Leitrim' in *Folklore*, vii, no. 2 (1896), p. 181.

[130] Ó Crualaoich, 'The Merry Wake', p. 179.

[131] Douglas J. Davies, *Death, Ritual and Belief. The Rethoric of Funerary Rites* (London, 1997), p. 42.

[132] Michelle McGoff-McCann, *Melancholy Madness, a Coroner's Casebook* (Dublin, 2003), p. 117.

of moral responsibility'.[133] Death by suicide was an unpleasant fact, 'looked on by a kind of fear.'[134] That is why there was no 'special provision' for them, which in turn meant no proper funeral.[135] This negative attitude is mirrored across nineteenth century Irish society. People 'meeting their death outside, by accident, suicide, drowning or any other way, were not laid out like people dying in their beds, no, far different.'[136] As one of the numerous friendly societies providing financial help for the members' bereaved families, the Saint Patrick's Burial Society would not be considered entitled to help any member 'bringing on his death by suicide.'[137] In cases such as suicide the corpse was not exposed to view. Instead, a coffin was procured as soon as possible, and the corpse was 'coffined and taken to the chapel for one night, and buried the following day.'[138]

Such contempt for people committing suicide is largely shared by the Irish Folklore Commission witnesses, as it reflects a shame that would inevitably be cast upon the family of the deceased: 'The other dead in a graveyard would turn in their graves and lie face-down in disgust if a deceased through suicide was buried in their consecrated ground.'[139] His place is somewhere else, he should be buried as a stranger outside of his or her own area.'[140] Suicide meant exclusion in broad terms: exclusion from the community of the living as well as the one of the dead. As noted by James Mooney, 'In accordance with the usages of the Catholic Church the bodies of unbaptized children, suicides and those who have died intoxicated or without fulfilling their religious obligations, are never buried in consecrated ground, but are deposited in unblessed earth adjoining the north wall of the cemetery, this part being known as 'the wrong side of the churchyard.'[141] As regards stillborn children, they too were denied burial in consecrated ground.

According to memorial sources, burying a stillborn child in a family grave would have brought bad luck and further deaths upon the entire family.[142] They were buried in ditches 'near a meadow where two or three men had hay plots in common.'[143] Graveyards expressly used for the burial of stillborn infants, as well as of people who committed

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[133] *The Nation,* 30 Dec. 1865.
[134] I.F.C., MS, 971 (County Cork, 1944), p. 133.
[135] I.F.C., MS 407 (County Limerick, 1937), p. 286.
[136] I.F.C., Ms 971 (County Cork, 1944), p. 131.
[137] Haliday Papers (R.I.A. Vol. 1671 *Rules of St .Patrick Burial Society, under the Patronage of the Rev. A. O'Connell, p.p., Founded Oct. 1835* (Dublin, 1836), p. 5).
[138] I.F.C., Ms 971 (County Cork, 1944), p. 132.
[139] Seán Spellissy, *Suicide, the Irish Experience* (Cork, 1996), p. 39.
[140] Ibid., p. 37.
[141] Mooney, 'The Funeral Customs of Ireland', p. 287.
[142] I.F.C., MS 782 (County Kerry, 1941), p. 242. See also I.F.C., MS 581 (County Longford, 1938), p. 312.
[143] I.F.C., MS 581 (County Longford, 1938), p. 312.

suicide and 'strangers' were indicated under the Irish name of Cilliní.[144] The 1837 Ordnance Survey letters contains various reference to 'Cilliní' still used in the provinces of Connaught, Leinster and Munster.[145]These separate burial grounds were still in use by the end of the nineteenth century and well into twentieth century.[146]

Wakes were also of interest to the press during the epidemics that ravaged the lower classes during the second half of the nineteenth century. According to the sanitary authorities, whose reports appeared in the press, Merry Wakes were held for these untimely deaths through illness – According to the *Freeman's Journal*, wakes in times of epidemics were simply 'revolting'. After having been informed of several cases of cholera in the neighbourhood of Grangegorman in 1853, a medical inspector in north Dublin traced the origin of the infection to a single wake, as only a week before the inquiry was made a four-year old child had died in his house in the neighbourhood. 'A wake, at which a considerable number of friends were assembled, was held on Saturday night; and I was informed by persons resident in the neighbourhood, that a large amount of whisky, of a very inferior quality, was consumed on the occasion.'[147]

Contemporary newspaper reports also confirm that wakes were held for the death of children. A sample of representative cases reported during the second half of the nineteenth century shows that, although the reports are devoid of details, features of the Merry Wake – such as the consumption of alcohol or a high number of people assembled – are reported. During the 1853 epidemic of cholera the press reported the case of the wake of a child at which 'cheap whiskey was circulated'.[148] In 1856, on the occasion of a wake held on the body of a son of a cooper in Cork, the floor where the wake was held collapsed causing the death of four people. The report of the inquest published by the *Freeman's Journal* mentioned the fact that the wake-room was overcrowded. However, no excessive consumption of alcohol or unruly behaviour was reported. [149] The *Nation* reported the same case adding that 'it is stated that the usual kind of entertainment which is provided on those occasions was being indulged in'[150]

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[144] Emer A. Dennehy, Linda G. Lynch, 'Unearthed Secrets: A Clandestine Burial-Ground' in *Archaeology Ireland*, xv, no. 4 (2001), p. 22.

[145] John O' Donovan, *Ordnance Survey letters* (R.I.A., Vol. Bray, p. 31); See also O'Donovan, *Letters*, Vol. Carlow, p. 422; O'Donovan, *Letters*, Vol. Clare (i)).

[146] Seamus Donnelly, Colm Donnelly, Eileen Murphy, 'The Forgotten Dead: The Cilliní and Disused Burial Grounds of Ballintoy, County Antrim' in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, lviii (1999), p. 112.

[147] *Cholera (Ireland). Abstract of Return of all Reports Addressed to the Commissioners of Poor Laws in Ireland, Relative to the Appearance and Spread of Cholera in that Country, and of all Correspondence Arising thereon; Together with a Return of all Cases of Cholera hitherto Reported to the Commissioners from each Poor Law Union in Ireland*, p. 3, H.C. 1854 (109), lvii, 487.

[148] *FJ*, 10 Nov. 1853.

[149] *FJ*, 2 Apr. 1856.

[150] *The Nation*, 5 Apr. 1856.

During the small-pox epidemic of 1871, wakes were described as normally being held 'in hot and crowded rooms [...] with the bacchanal revellings of drink and ribald song'.[151] In 1872, a row between parents holding their child's wake arose while the mother of the child was 'under the influence of drink' (according to the jury).[152] A fire broke out in a wake house in Dublin where 'a large number of persons in the neighbourhood' were present. The parents of the child were reported to have been 'under the influence of drink'.[153]In Dublin in 1873 'A number of young men were at a wake of the man who was scalded to death in a sugar factory. A quarrel arose during the performance of some tricks, and the prisoner drew a knife and stabbed [...]'[154] Again in the city in 1875 the corpse of a child was reported to have been burnt because of a candle held over his cradle during the wake.[155] Lastly in Dublin in 1877 a man purchased seven bottles of porter for the wake of a child. The mother of the child stated that she wanted 'to do it respectable'.[156]

Although the issue of abortion and infanticide is peripheral to the 'untimely deaths' under discussion in this chapter, statistical research has suggested that, at least during the pre-famine period, 'the Irish were least prone to infanticide'.[157] According to a medical officer of the city of Dublin 'infant life insurance [...] but the system tends to wakes – it provides the means by which wakes are held, and thus tends to spread the disease'. He also confirmed that wakes held for children were 'vastly decreased'.[158] His conclusions were shared by the secretary of the Philanthropic Reform Association, who told the commissioners that there was 'no doubt that children are deliberately done to death for the insurance money of £2 10*s.* or £3.'[159]As late as 1894, the *Anglo-Celt* reported a case of alleged infanticide in County Cavan. During the wake, the child was waked 'in the ordinary way'. The mother of the child stated that it was 'usual to have a wake on a child two days old' although 'the father was greatly annoyed about the child's death' as 'the child [was] borne surrounded by none of the circumstances that makes the child of shame'. Also, 'as is the custom all the neighbours came to sympathise with the family'[160] The reference to the lack of 'shame' hints at the importance of respectability of the bereaved

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[151] *FJ,* 18 Dec. 1871.
[152] *FJ,* 5 Nov. 1872.
[153] *FJ,* 4 Nov. 1872.
[154] *FJ,* 8 July 1873.
[155] *FJ,* 17 Sept. 1875.
[156] *FJ,* 19 Jan. 1877. See also *FJ,* 17 Oct. 1879; *Westmeath Examiner,* 1 Sept. 1883; *Westmeath Examiner*, 24 Oct. 1885;
[157] R. Sauer, 'Infanticide and Abortion in Nineteenth-Century Britain' in *Population Studies*, xxxii, no. 1 (1978), p. 89.
[158] *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Local Government Board for Ireland to Inquire into the Public Health of the City of Dublin*, p. 229 [Cd.244], H.C. 1900, xxxix, 943.
[159] Ibid., pp. 89, 803.
[160] *Anglo-Celt*, 10 Mar. 1894.

family when holding a wake. More than a separation between timely or untimely deaths, I suggest that the dichotomy between a respectable or non-respectable death should be taken into account for a social understanding of the Irish Merry Wake. Although deaths by infectious disease were by all means untimely, the community would gather at a wake to honour the deceased. Reference to consumption of alcohol on those occasions also suggests that the wake would be 'merry', at least for those present who were not directly related to the deceased.

9. Conclusions

A wide range of contemporary sources testify to the paramount social importance of the 'Merry Wake' as a funeral custom of the Irish lower classes. As a social gathering, the wake centred upon the social standing of the deceased, as well as hospitality provided by the bereaved family. Although a heavy consumption of alcohol was indeed a prominent feature of wakes, its role in defining a communal strategy in order to cope with grief contributed to the popularity of the traditional wake up to the early twentieth century. The wake provided, through the ritual keening of the dead, for a structured expression of grief, thus being of comfort to the bereaved relatives as well as for all the mourners. On the other hand, the wake functioned as an occasion of communal revelry as the celebration of the deceased provided the community with pure entertainment. The role of 'pleasure' as a feature of the Merry Wake involving people close to the bereaved family such as neighbours or even strangers – played a key part in maintaining this tradition despite the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, the distinction between timely and untimely deaths, advanced by Gearóid Ó Crualaoich, raises the issue of 'respectability' of the deceased as a cultural necessity for the wake to be performed. It also highlights the social pressure exerted by the Roman Catholic Church – as the notion of respectability was defined in Roman Catholic terms.

The encompassing functions of the traditional wake are the cause of its longevity throughout the nineteenth century. While the Famine, and constant dissuading efforts of the Roman Catholic church, may have contributed to a change in the key features of the wake, such as the keening of the dead or the performance of wake games, its paramount celebrative function of the deceased as well as of life itself made the custom particularly resilient. In a century of deep social changes, the story of the Merry Wake is one of substantial continuity. Only the Great Famine, with its appalling disruption of social ties

among the lower classes, put an end to the notorious 'revelling and singing beside the dead' that puzzled contemporary observers.[161] It was, nonetheless, a temporary end.

[161] C.M. O Keeffe, 'Query concerning the Irish Custom of Revelling and Singing Beside the Dead' in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, iv (1856), p. 273.

1.2 The Famine

1. Introduction

The Great Irish Famine is rightly regarded as a watershed in the history of nineteenth-century Ireland. With their toll of death and emigration the years 1846-1851 changed the structure of Irish society and left a permanent mark on the memory of those who survived. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the impact of the Famine on funeral customs both during the Famine as well as in the aftermath. Prominent attention has been given to the customs of the lower classes, as they bore the greatest weight of the tragedy.

2. The Famine and the disruption of funeral customs

Recent research has acknowledged that the Famine was a national crisis, even though it was a divisive and uneven catastrophe.[1] The famine did not impact on every social class, nor hit every region of the island with the same force. The distress caused by the potato blight and famine-related diseases was more acute in the west and south-west of Ireland, while some areas where only marginally affected.[2] As regards to social classes, the rural poor and the landless were the first to be hit by shortage of food.[3] Farm labourers and small farmers along with their dependants, who accounted for roughly one third of the population, represent the majority of the Famine's victims.[4] It is also true that the higher classes were also virtually untouched – if not economically – by the crisis. Those belonging to the middle – upper strata of the population who were counted among the casualties were only the people directly involved in the relief of the poor, such as medical practitioners, priests and Poor Law officials.[5]

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[1] Mary E. Daly, 'Something Old and something New. Recent Research on the Great Irish Famine' in Cormac Ò Gràda, Richard Paping, Eric Vanhaute (eds), *When the Potato Failed. Causes and effects of the Last European Subsistence Crisis, 1845 – 1850* (Turnhout, 2007), p. 68.

[2] Ibid., p. 72.

[3] Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Ireland's Great Famine. An Overview' in Cormac Ó Gráda, Richard Paping, Eric Vanhaute (eds), *When the Potato Failed. Causes and effects of the Last European Subsistence Crisis, 1845 – 1850* (Turnhout, 2007), p. 51.

[4] Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Famine, Trauma and Memory' in Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland's Great Famine. Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Dublin, 2006), p. 218.

[5] Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Ireland's Great Famine. An Overview' in Cormac Ó Gráda, Richard Paping, Eric Vanhaute (eds), *When the Potato Failed. Causes and effects of the Last European Subsistence Crisis, 1845 – 1850* (Turnhout, 2007), p. 52.

For those in the grip of starvation, the descriptive reports left by official documentation depict a scenario of gradual and complete disruption of social ties – i.e. of funeral customs. In the town of Skibbereen, where the situation had been notoriously appalling, the reports tell of the difficulty of providing proper burial for the increase in the number of deaths. On 21 December, an inspecting officer of the Board of Works wrote that

> [...] it has been recommended by the priests from the altar, that it is better to save for the living instead of being at the expense of coffins for the dead; and, I understand, bodies are taken in coffins to the burial-ground, taken out, and the coffins kept for conveying more for burial. A woman with a dead child in her arms was begging in the streets yesterday, and the guard of the mail told me, he saw a man and three dead children lying by the road-side a few miles from this place. To narrate the many sad stories I have heard would occupy sheets of paper[6]

The need for the priests to advise their flocks to 'save for the living' is an obvious indication that the lower classes did try to cope with the emergency providing Christian burial for the victims. The very same day an assistant commissary, assisted by the police, buried three persons without the attendance of a clergyman. 'The fact is, he remarked, they have come to a resolution to bury them without coffins or clergyman, and to appropriate these expenses to the support of the living.'[7] In January 1847, the head constable in Castleplunkett (County Roscommon) remarked the fact that 'countless' applications were made at the local police barracks by the poor asking for food and money to bury the dead.[8] As the crisis worsened the network of mutual support fundamental for the care of the dead started to crumble. 'The state of those poor creatures who are unable to bury their dead from want of means' – wrote an inspecting officer from County Roscommon – 'should be brought to the compassionate consideration of the Lord Lieutenant [...] *Many cases* of the above nature have come to my notice'.[9] In Kenmare, County Kerry, the people were 'buried without coffins, frequently in the next field; no noise or sign of grief for the dead; every thought is selfish and unfeeling.'[10] Relief commissioners also wrote of the dreadful state of destitution in County Cork, where the sick were neglected and the dead remained

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[6] *Correspondence from July, 1846, to January, 1847, Relating to the Measures Adopted for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland. Board of Work Series*, p. 430 [764], H.C. 1847, l, 458.

[7] *Correspondence from July, 1846, to January, 1847, Relating to the Measures Adopted for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland. Commissariat Series,* p. 420 [761], H.C. 1847, li, 442.

[8] *Correspondence from January to March, 1847, Relating to the Measures Adopted for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland. Commissariat Series. [Second Part.],* p. 45 [796], H.C. 1847, lii, 391.

[9] *Correspondence from July, 1846, to January, 1847, Relating to the Measures Adopted for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland. Board of Work Series*, p. 446 [764], H.C. 1847, l, 474.

[10] *Correspondence from January to March, 1847, Relating to the Measures Adopted for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland. Commissariat Series. [Second Part.],* p. 192 [796], H.C. 1847, lii, 538.

unburied.[11] This disruption, given the renowned care for the dead by the Irish peasant, struck contemporary observers such as John McMahon, parish priest of Miltown Malbay, who wrote in January 1847 that

> so great a change in the funeral ceremonial of the people requires little comment, for it is evident that nothing less than extreme poverty could suddenly produce such a revolution in the Irish peasant who has been at all times remarkable for celebrating the obsequies of his deceased relative [...][12]

The workhouses set up by the 1838 Irish Poor Law Act were too small to cope with the unprecedented demand for shelter. At the peak of the famine, about a quarter of all deaths took place in those institutions.[13] Given the emergency, solutions devised by the authorities did not provide what was considered a proper burial. In County Wicklow, a witness told of massive burials in graveyards where 'No one was allowed into [...] except the men hired to cover the graves. Two guards were always on to keep the people out and there were many rows with people trying to get in.'[14] The parish priest of Kilglass, in County Roscommon, wrote that they had 'about 800 sick of fever just now, without [...] a committee, to stay the progress of disease or provide coffins for the dead'.[15] The words of those who had to deal with the famine and the organization of relief were not confined to their reports. Newspapers gave ample coverage to dramatic accounts.[16] In County Mayo, an inspector was told that deaths were so common that the corpses had been buried in a sand hill near the local station.[17] The lack of care for the deceased is mirrored by the popular horror for the 'hinged coffin'.[18]

The approach of the authorities to dealing with the crisis might be well represented by the words of an un-identified gentleman in Skibbereen who was reported have said: 'I would rather give 1*s.* to a starving man than 4*s.* 6*d.* for a coffin'.[19] Reports show that at the beginning of the crisis the relief commissioners were constantly worried because of the impossibility of providing a 'Christian burial' for the victims. Nonetheless, when resources were lacking, priority was given to the living. In January 1847 in the parish of Skull,

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[11] Ibid., pp. 165, 511.

[12] Ignatius Murphy, *The Diocese of Killaloe 1800-1850* (Dublin, 1992), p. 213.

[13] Ó Gráda, 'Ireland's Great Famine', pp. 48-9.

[14] Cathal Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes* (Dublin, 1995), p. 182.

[15] *Weekly Freeman's Journal*, 17 Jul. 1847 (John Killen (ed.), *The Famine Decade. Contemporary Accounts 1841-1851*(Belfast, 1995), pp. 147-8).

[16] Ó Gráda, 'Ireland's Great Famine', p. 47.

[17] *Tuam Herald*, 20 Feb. 1847.

[18] Indeed, the memory of these re-usable coffins was still vivid well into the twentieth century. See I.F.C., MS 550 (County Cork, 1938), p. 54.

[19] *Illustrated London News*, 16 Jan. 1847 (John Killen (ed.), *The Famine Decade. Contemporary Accounts 1841-1851*(Belfast, 1995), pp. 95-6).

County Cork, 'the greater number were buried without coffins, to save expense'.[20] When workhouses financially broke down, so did their supplies. In Kilrush in November 1847 the contractor who supplied coffins was unpaid and 'threatening to stop the supplies'.[21] In Castlebar the master of the workhouse advanced money 'out of his own pocket' in order to purchase coffins. The contractor had previously stopped the supply of coffins, as money was due to him.[22]

The change of attitude towards burial customs in areas deeply affected by the Famine such as the Skibbereen was immediately witnessed by contemporary observers. The American philanthropist Elihu Burritt described two paupers' funerals in his journal in 1847, remarking that only the year before such an event would have attracted thousands of mourners from the surrounding area. 'Now', he wrote, 'the husband drove his uncoffined wife without a tear in his eye, without a word of sorrow'.[23] In March 1847, the workhouse in Skibbereen hired a 'party of men' for the burying of the dead in the workhouse churchyard, paid 'at so much per head'. The bodies were interred without coffins.[24] The Relief Commission office in Dublin was aware of section 16 of the Fever Act, which enabled relief committees to provide for the decent burial of the remains of destitute persons who may die of fever or 'while receiving relief'.[25] The matter as to whether the provision of coffins by the workhouse 'out of the poor rates' and outside its walls was legal or not was cleared by the Poor Law Commission office in November 1847. A circular letter to Union Poor Law Inspectors stated that such provision was to be considered illegal – the provision should have been provided by churchwardens.[26]

An example of the effects of this provision was the situation in Kilrush, where no rates 'could be collected for many years', the churchwardens being thus with no resources for the supply of coffins.[27] The Poor Law vice-guardians in Athlone Union wrote to the Relief Commissioners in March 1848 that they could not avoid expressing their

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[20] *Correspondence from July, 1846, to January, 1847, Relating to the Measures Adopted for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland. Commissariat Series,* p. 460 [761], H.C. 1847, li, 482.

[21] *Papers Relating to Proceedings for the Relief of the Distress, and State of the Unions and Workhouses, in Ireland. Fourth Series --1847*, p. 155 [896], H.C. 1847-48, liv, 187.

[22] *Copies of Extracts of Correspondence relating to the State of Union Workhouses in Ireland,* p. 49 [766], H.C. 1847, lv, 79.

[23] Elihu Burritt, *A Journal of a Visit of Three Days to Skibbereen, and its Neighbourhood* (London, 1847), p. 14.

[24] *Correspondence from January to March, 1847, Relating to the Measures Adopted for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland. Commissariat Series. [Second Part.],* p. 213 [796], H.C. 1847, lii, 559.

[25] *Distress (Ireland). Second Report of the Relief Commissioners, Constituted under the Act 10th Vic., cap. 7.*, p. 15 [819], H.C. 1847, xvii, 89.

[26] *Papers Relating to Proceedings for Relief of Distress, and State of Unions and Workhouses in Ireland, 1848,* p. 7 [919], H.C. 1847-48, liv, 35.

[27] Ibid., pp. 787, 825.

> Anxious wish that some provision should be legally made to defray the expense of coffins for out-door recipients of relief; our relieving officers have reported several cases of burial without coffins, after long exposure of the body. The decency of burial in a coffin is almost inseparable from Christian rites [...]

They pointed out to the Commissioners the necessity of 'some short enactment' on the subject, on behalf of public health, public decency and the rites of Christian burial. The commissioners replied that they were not prepared to make any recommendation in order to change the law on the subject. They trusted that the resources for the burial of the dead, until then sufficient, would still be made available. Additionally, they drew attention to the 15th section of the Fever Act, under which the estimates to be furnished by the relief committees may include the expense of providing coffins 'for persons who die of fever [...] in such Relief Committee's electoral division'[28] The worry about not being authorised to provide coffins for those who died outside the local workhouse was also expressed by the Vice-Guardians in Loughrea Union. Again, the suggestion that money for coffins could be defrayed out of poor law rates in case of death by fever was pointed out by the relief commissioners.[29]

However, as the commissioners wrote in their last report, in some places it was thought desirable not to expend the small funds in the purchase of coffins. Therefore the dead were buried wrapped in their clothes. Remarkably, they pointed that out that this 'was done with the good object of saving the life of others, and no complaint was therefore made by the clergy'.[30] In order to meet the rising demand of burials during the cholera epidemic of 1849, the Cork Union provided 1,000 yards of flannel and 150 deal planks for coffins – two figures that suggest that many bodies were buried with only a shroud.[31] The clergy – both Protestant and Catholic (as early as 1845 the nationalist newspaper the *Freeman's Journal* praised the concern showed by the Protestant clergy)[32] – made a constant effort in trying to ensure that if not a decent burial, the last rites be observed. The prospect of dying 'without a priest' was, in the minds of many belonging to the lower classes, an tragic one. The efforts of the priests in taking care of the dying is also

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[28] Ibid., pp. 857-8, 895-6.

[29] Ibid., pp. 877, 915.

[30] *Distress (Ireland). Supplementary Appendix to the Seventh, and Last, Report of the Relief Commissioners, Constituted under the 10th Vic., cap. 7.*, p. 8 [956], H.C. 1847-48, xxix, 128.

[31] Michelle O'Mahony, *Famine in Cork City. Famine Life at Cork Union Workhouse* (Dublin, 2005), p. 80.

[32] Brendan Ó Cathaoir, *Famine Diary* (Dublin, 1999), p. 14.

mirrored by the level of deaths among the lower clergy.[33] Concern for the many priests dying of fever was expressed to Paul Cullen in April 1847.[34]

It has been argued that the folklore surrounding the Famine becomes obscure when dealing with the horror of starvation. On the basis of a study of the IFC questionnaire on the Famine distributed during the 1940s Patricia Lysaght disputed this view demonstrating that the oral tradition 'tells of the incidence of death in the community and the large-scale erosion of traditional customs'. Lysaght also acknowledges that certain tradition bearers, as noticed by Cormac Ó Gráda, tended to downplay the level of deaths in their own communities. [35]Also, informants to the IFC often refer to accounts related to third parties, never indicating the source of the tales of horror as a person in their own family or locality. Ó Gráda went as far as to claim that psychiatric research suggests that the crisis could have caused a memory loss in its direct witnesses.[36] This tendency to minimise the effect of the tragedy is an important indicator of the lower classes' attitude towards death in the aftermath of the Great Famine. A suppression of these memories is functional to the actual continuity of Irish traditional funeral customs. The heavy burden of memory, when not clearly cancelled, is somehow 'defused' when referred to other communities and families – while keeping one's family memories at safe distance from the horrors of widespread starvation and fever. If this process of denial actually took place, in turn affecting tradition bearers' accounts, it must be seen in the context of renewed communal life. Memories needed to be reshaped in order to ensure continuity of social ties and, consequently, of funeral customs.

3. Fading customs: the keening of the dead

The immediate impact of the famine on funeral customs was one of complete disruption. In the long term, its effects are much more difficult to gauge. Post-Famine accounts of wakes bear a striking similarity to their pre-famine counterparts. The feature of the Merry Wake which had probably been affected the most by the crisis is the keening of the dead'.[37] The ritual lament performed by keeners had been a key feature of pre-Famine

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[33] Donal Kerr, *The Catholic Church and the Famine* (Dublin, 1996), pp. 23-4.

[34] James Browne to Paul Cullen, 20 Apr. 1847 (I.C.R., MS Cul/1375).

[35] Patricia Lysaght, 'Perspectives on Women During the Great Irish Famine from the Oral Tradition' in *Bèaloideas*, lxiv- lxv (1996-1997), p. 127.

[36] Ó Gráda, 'Famine, Trauma and Memory', p. 224.

[37] Patricia Lysaght, "'Caoineadh os Cionn Coirp": the Lament for the Dead in Ireland in *Folklore*, cviii (1997), p. 68.

wakes. At the end of the nineteenth century, this custom was disappearing, even though it persisted in some areas into the twentieth century. 'Before the bad times' – wrote the *Folk-Lore Record* in 1881 – 'keening at funerals was common in Leinster, Munster and Connaught'.[38]

The reasons why the famine might have contributed to the fading of this particular custom are various. Firstly, keeners belonged to the lower social class which had been wiped out. A keener named Harrington is described by Thomas Croker in his *Researches in the South of Ireland* as an old woman who 'led a wandering kind of life, travelling from cottage to cottage about the country'.[39] Keeners mainly relied on hospitality. An exception is recorded in County Longford, where a family of keeners – according to an IFC informant – was active in the second half of the nineteenth century. Their case seems to be peculiar. These 'Gormleys took part to the Land League, siding with the landlord. They gave up keening when they became respectable'. Besides, the informant (who was born in 1855) never witnessed the keening.[40] In 1874 an observer in the province of Munster remarked that the keening of the dead started to fade 'especially since the famine of 1848'. Blaming the numerous deaths that had taken place, he argued that 'the innumerable deaths which at that time had daily taken place, together with the hunger and destitution that prevailed throughout the country, deprived the people in fact of the natural feeling and regard which they were wont to have for the dead'. He also stated that he had occasionally seen keeners in the south and west of Ireland. [41]According to Seán Ó Súilleabháin, female keeners ceased to be employed throughout most of Ireland only towards the end of the nineteenth century.[42] A witness in 1938 recollected that 'the last of those caoiners' had died forty years before, at the closure of the nineteenth-century.[43] Another informant in County Carlow stated that he heard about 'a certain amount of caoining among the poorer classes' in Tipperary, County Limerick.[44] The keening was still present along the coasts of Connaught during the early twentieth century.[45]

However, according to the Roman Catholic Dean of Killaloe the custom was almost unknown in County Clare by 1856. The landed proprietor and antiquarian Denis H. Kelly stated that professional keening was extinct in Connaught, even though he admitted that it

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[38] G.H.Kinahan, 'Notes on Irish Folk-Lore in *The Folk-Lore Record*, iv (1881), p. 100.

[39] Seán Ó Coileán, 'The Irish Lament: An Oral Genre' in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 24 (1988), p. 98.

[40] I.F.C., MS 581 (County Longford, 1938) p. 298.

[41] Francis Keane, Report on the Present State of the Irish Language and Literature in the Province of Munster (R.I.A., MS 12 q 13, p. 10).

[42] Seán Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Wake Amusements* (Cork, 1967), p. 143.

[43] I.F.C., MS 550 (County Cork, 1938), p. 50.

[44] I.F.C., MS 462 (County Carlow and County Limerick, 1938), p. 369.

[45] Thomas J. Westropp, 'A Study of the Folklore on the Coasts of Connacht, Ireland' in *Folklore,* xxxiv, no. 4 (1923), p. 337.

was 'well remembered' in Athlone, and also in County Clare and County Mayo. Both witnesses' opinions should be treated carefully. The Dean of Killaloe assured that he 'almost' suppressed the abuses at wakes in his own parish.[46] Such confident statements should be tempered by the fact that provisions against abuses at wakes were a constant feature of diocesan synods up to the beginning of the twentieth century. On the other hand, Denis Kelly was a member of the gentry and by his own admission it was so many years 'since (in my youth) I witnessed the humours of an Irish wake'. He also had to 'refresh' his recollection by inquiring among 'the oldest of our people'. [47] Memory of professional keeners were still present in the questionnaire sent out by the Ulster Folk Museum in 1963. In north-west Donegal, keening was remembered as a custom that did not involve 'tears shed', and that was performed 'every night after the rosary and again at the filling of the grave'.[48] In Downpatrick, a witness stated that the keening of the dead had disappeared since 'the last seventy or eighty years', namely the last decade of the nineteenth century.[49] In Donegal another witness heard only of 'one instance of formal loud keening'[50]

It must be borne in mind that 'keening was one of a number of services performed by non-family members at a bereavement'.[51]Other features performed by neighbours, such as the laying out of the corpse, remained unchanged during the post-famine period. Hospitality remained a key feature of lower classes wakes, with their corollary of consumption of alcohol and merriment.[52] As early as 1849 in the neighbourhood of Roslea (County Fermanagh) the *Nenagh Guardian* reported an affray between the police and a number of young men who spent their night at a wake, and adjourned after the wake at a nearby 'still house' (a private house where alcohol was illegally distilled).[53] James Donnelly, parish priest of Roslea, would preach against wakes and their 'abominations' again in later years, during the 1860s.[54] In 1851 the Roman Catholic bishop of Elphin, George Browne, in his Lenten pastoral, called attention on the 'gross abuses prevailing at night wakes'.[55] Even though the effects of the famine were relatively mild in Dublin when compared to those in the south and west of Ireland, it is remarkable that a wake was

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[46] Evelyn Philip Shirley, John O' Donovan, 'Extracts from the Journal of Thomas Dineley, Esquire, Giving some Accounts of his Visit to Ireland in the Reign of Charles II' in *The Journal of the Kilkenny and South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society*, ii, no. 1 (1858), pp. 29-30.

[47] Ibid., p. 30.

[48] U.F.M., MS 63/q3/79.

[49] U.F.M., MS 63/q3/54.

[50] U.F.M., MS 63/q3/11.

[51] Lysaght, 'Caoineadh', p. 67.

[52] U.F.M., MS 63/q3/132.

[53] *Nenagh Guardian*, 14 Feb. 1849.

[54] Patrick Mulligan, 'Dr. James Donnelly Parish Priest of Roslea (1857-65) in *Clogher Record*, xi, no. 2 (1983), p. 230.

[55] *FJ*, 26 Feb. 1851.

mentioned in relation to an accident which occurred in Dublin in 1851, involving two young men who were likely to be under the influence of alcohol (they both drowned when the small boat they were trying to steal capsized 'by some awkwardness or giddiness on their part').[56] The need to stop unruly behaviour at wakes is again mentioned in the Statutes of the Synod of Armagh of 1860. As already pointed out by Seán Ó Súilleabháin, among the practices condemned there were the spilling of brandy on the ground when match-making, and music, singing or dancing at wakes'.[57] Similar condemnations were also present in the statues of the Synod of Maynooth in 1875 and of Ferns in 1898.[58]

Apart from the noted decline in keening and controversies over unruly behaviour at funerals, the question of the impact of emigration on funeral customs needs to be mentioned briefly. Firstly, it should be noted that 'one million people' had emigrated from Ireland in the thirty years before the Famine.[59] It is also true that considerable emigration started after the 1822 famine. However, the Great Famine saw the onset of mass emigration on a unprecedented scale for the country.[60] A peculiar custom related to massive emigration consisted in holding a 'wake' for the departing relative. In these terms, as a possible return from the hosting country was not a certainty, leaving Ireland was considered to be on a par with dying. These 'American wakes', stated a witness to the IFC in 1955, were 'almost part of the emigrating business'. These wakes did not differ from any other party 'but for the fact that it lasted all the night'. According to the same testimony, in the early hours of the morning friends and neighbours 'bade farewell' to the departing friend. While the emigrant would get ready for leaving the house the immediate friends would gather around the fire and keep 'the broken hearted father and mother in chat'. [61] This peculiar custom represents a further signal of the pervasive 'mortuary' culture in Irish society. It is also a testimony of the attitude towards grief and loss of Irish nineteenth century lower classes. In this sense, the celebration of a wake for the emigrants – in the wake of the Great Famine – is an important signal of the renewed importance of funeral customs (in their broadest meaning) in the post-Famine period.

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[56] *FJ*, 12 May 1851.

[57] Ó Súilleabháin, *Wake Amusements*, p. 153.

[58] Ibid., pp. 153-4.

[59] Trevor Parkhill, '"God Help Them, What is Going to Become of Them?" Famine Emigration from Ulster' in Patrick Fitzgerald, Steve Ickringill (eds), *Atlantic Crossroads. Historical Connections between Scotland, Ulster and North America* (Newtownards, 2001), p. 41.

[60] Maureen Langan-Egan, 'Some Aspects of the Great Famine in Galway' in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, li (1999), p. 126.

[61] I.F.C., MS 1403 (County Enniskillen, 1955), p. 101.

4. Conclusions

The disruption of funeral customs during the Famine left a permanent mark on the memory of those who survived. Whether this mark had been equally pronounced on the actual funeral customs, is questionable. The Great Famine had been without any doubt a watershed in Irish history. However, once the crisis was over, funeral customs were promptly resumed as life came back to normality. The continuity of paramount features such as hospitality, merriment and the consumption of alcohol is evident from memorial and contemporary sources.[62] In this context the Famine can be seen as a parenthesis that did not have heavy repercussions in the long term on the lower classes' attitudes towards death. Furthermore, the reluctance of witnesses to the IFC to link memories of the famine to their own families and parishes is a sign of the renewed importance of communal ties and thus of funeral customs. Memory must be somehow healed in order to provide suitable grounds for the renewal of the old habits. Only one feature of these customs seems to have been affected by the social effects of the crisis, namely the ritual of 'keening' for the dead. Professional keeners belonged to the social class that suffered the most from the impact of the shortage of food. The fading of the oral tradition of keening – a lament in Irish – and the impact of the Famine on the Irish language should be seen as two sides of the same coin. Nonetheless, the keening of the dead was still present (or remembered) at the end of the nineteenth century in some areas of the country. The emergence of a class of substantial farmers willing to gain a new respectability during the second half of the nineteenth century contributed to a change of behaviour. However, one of the most important agents of change in Irish society, such as the Roman Catholic Church, had probably more responsibility in the disappearance of the keeners than the Great Famine.

[62] See, as an example, I.F.C., MS 971 (County Tipperary, 1944), p. 47; *Westmeath Examiner*, 19 Jul. 1884.

1.3 Funeral expenses of the lower classes

1. Introduction

This chapter, based mainly on a range of primary sources such as the reports of the Irish poor law commissioners and the memories collected by the Irish Folklore Commission, will investigate the socio-economic implication of funeral expenses in nineteenth-century Ireland as a cross-class matter in order to understand the main reasons and social implications relating to such expenditure.

2. Begging for a coffin.

Under the definition of 'lower class' I include two thirds of the Irish population before the Famine. It is a section of society composed of poor farmers, labourers and - at the very bottom of the social ladder - the landless poor. Apart from the ownership of the land, which is the main factor of distinction between different levels of wealth, the conditions of these three categories were very close. It was a society within which class distinctions can be identified only with difficulty, as the 'majority of the populace belonged to a rural proletariat'.[1] According to the report of the census commissioners of 1841 'nearly half of the families of the rural population, and somewhat more than one third of the civic population[2], are living in the lowest state, being possessed of accommodation equivalent to the cabin, consisting but of a single room'.[3] They were counted under the headings of 'farmers', 'servants and labourers'. In County Sligo, these two groups included roughly 35,000 men out of 50,000,[4] 18,000 out of 35,000[5] in County Wicklow and 25,000 out of 60,000[6] in County Armagh. Such figures do not consider women. The majority of them were employed in jobs such as spinning (a home based occupation), which alone in County Sligo included nearly 5,000 women.[7]

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[1] Joel Mokyr. *Why Ireland starved. A quantitative and analytical history of the Irish economy 1800-1850* (London, 1983), p. 17.

[2] In towns with 2,000 or more inhabitants.

[3] *Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland for the year 1841,* p. xvii [504], H.C. 1843, xxiv, 17 (Henceforth cited as *1841 Census Report).*

[4] Ibid., pp. 422, 534.

[5] Ibid., pp. 144, 256.

[6] Ibid., pp. 284, 396.

[7] Ibid., pp. 422, 534.

While servants, labourers and spinners were clearly part of a rural proletariat, people grouped under the heading 'farmers' require further attention. Variations in the amount of property and wealth were not recorded according to the occupation. Rich farmers were, however, a minority. Families included in the 'first class' of wealth were only 1.8 per cent of the total rural families.[8] This would include families headed by farmers of more than 50 acres (along with any other head of family able to live without manual labour). The second class, which would include farmers from 5 to 50 acres, represented only the 28.3 per cent of the total rural families.[9] After the Great Famine the population saw a constant decline.[10] It declined by more than a third between 1841 and 1881.[11] In terms of class structure this decline affected labourers; as a result, the largest group in post-Famine Ireland was represented by tenant farmers.[12] The general trends in housing and literacy also imply an amelioration of living conditions after the Famine. As pointed out by Cormac Ó Gráda, the single-room cabins 'in which one third of rural families had lived in 1841 were unusual by 1911'.[13]

The range of lower class professions recorded by the 1841 census is broad. We can include in this category cloth manufacturers, leather workers and clothes makers (an occupation carried out at home, mainly by women such a spinners and wavers), which made up roughly 11 per cent of the Irish population. Also 'workers in stone', wood and metal such as locksmiths or carpenters made up 2 per cent of the population. These figures are only indicative as the commissioners who carried out the inquiry made clear in their report. Also, the difficulty of setting a clear classification mirrors the variety of occupations of the lower classes. The occupation indicated by the census tables is the chief job expressed by a worker, namely the work that one would carry for the majority of the year or also the occupation considered to be the 'leading one'. 'In some cases' - wrote the commissioners – 'there was a natural tendency on the part of the individual to dignify his calling. Thus 'Artists' would have been 'placed under Education, as ministering to the intellectual wants of the community, if their number and other circumstances had not sufficiently shown the term to contain many persons who were not entitled to that place'.[14]

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[8] Ibid., pp. xviii-xix, 18-9.

[9] Ibid., p. xviii-xix, 18-9.

[10] James H. Johnson, 'The Context of Migration: the Example of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century' in *Treansactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* xv, no. 3 (1990), p. 268.

[11] Samuel Clark, 'The Importance of Agrarian Classes: Agrarian Class Structure and Collective Action in Nineteenth-Century Ireland' in *The British Journal of Sociology*, xxix, no. 1 (1978), p. 29.

[12] Ibid., pp. 30-1.

[13] Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland, A New Economic History, 1780-1939,* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 240-1.

[14] *1841 Census Report,* H.C. 1843, xxiv, pp. xxi, 21.

An estimate of the incomes of the poorest in Ireland has been calculated by Joel Mokyr, who based his figures in part on the wage statistics provided by the witnesses interviewed by the 1836 poor law commissioners. Taking into account the different sources of income available to the Irish peasant from crops, potatoes and other marginal activities such as fishing, Mokyr estimated the average yearly income of this section of the country to be between £9 and £10 5*s* per capita, while the average income in England for the same period was £ 24 4*s*..[15] Wages (at least farming wages) did increase in the post-Famine period, although 'hard data on wages and consumption patterns are few', making a solid comparison with data on funeral expenses – similarly scarce –unfeasible.[16]

Cormac Ó Gráda, pointing out that 'comprehensive data on the most obvious measure of living standards – wages – are lacking'[17], eventually recognized that for the rural proletariat in pre-Famine Ireland 'immiseration is likely'. Although wages would reflect only partially the living standards of the poor, who were relatively well fed for the European standard of the time,[18] they are fundamental in our inquiry because the cost of funerals was paid in cash. With such low salaries, the savings available for affording the wake and the funeral expenses were often difficult to save for. Testifying before the Royal Commission on the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland in 1835 George Fitzgerald, a wealthy farmer, provided a good insight into the issue:

> It's not owing to improvidence they do not save; if they can, they will: a weaver, who was attacked with the cholera, told his wife to fetch a purse out of the thatch of his house; it contained 27 sovereigns, three of which he took out, and said 'there is one for the doctor, one for the priest, and one for Biddy, (an old beggarwoman, who had lived some time on his house, for God's sake). Though he possessed these riches, his children were naked, and had nothing to cover them; and this will prove to you, they would save if they could'.[19]

In the same inquiry, a priest corroborated this opinion saying that a 'labourer's wage [...] do not give him more than the worst and most unwholesome kind of potatoes; and therefore it is quite impossible for him to save'. The same opinion was expressed by Andrew Clancy, a rich County Clare farmer: 'What could a man do with 7*d*. a day for eight

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[15] Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: a Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800-1850,* (London, 1985) p. 11.

[16] Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland, a New Economic History, 1780-1939* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 248-9; see also Thomas E. Jordan, 'The Quality of Life in Victorian Ireland, 1831-1901' in *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua*, iv, no. 1 (2000), p. 109.

[17] Ó Gráda, *A New Economic History*, p. 82.

[18] Ibid., p. 85.

[19] *First report, from his Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland with Appendix (A.) and Supplement,* p. 316, H.C. 1835 (369), xxxii pt.I, 332 (Henceforth cited as *1835 Poor Inquiry*).

months in the year, who has a wife and children to feed, and house rent to pay besides? I never knew a labourer to save'.[20]

However, resources for a 'decent' celebration of funerals were available partly thanks to the welfare network provided by the rural community, which would not only take care of the bereaved family but also contribute to collect the money for the most expensive items required for the burial. As for beggars, public subscriptions were often made in order to cover their expenses. 'It is to pay for the wake - stated a witness in 1835 - and the mass for their souls, that the old beggars are in the habit of scraping a little together, and this they will do if possible in any circumstances'.[21] In the decades prior to the Famine, the conditions of the lowest classes of the Irish population worsened gradually, even though the economy as a whole improved.[22] A long lasting sickness or the death of a labourer would put the rest of his family in severe distress. As begging was in some cases the only viable solution to pay for the funeral, the neighbouring community would act on behalf of the bereaved family. Again, the 1835 report on the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland provides a good insight into the question.

> A shoemaker of good character, who earned five or six shillings a week, whose family on his death, were reduced to beggary. A woman of the name of Rice, who is now a beggar, from the sickness of her husband who is "bedridden"; he was a hair dresser, in good business, and of sober and industrious habits; a labourer in the employment of Captain Battersby, an industrious man, on his death his family were immediately obliged to beg, and collect the price of a coffin for him.[23]

These were episodes considered worth telling by the witnesses. It is notable that they stressed the good qualities of the heads of the households. The shoemaker was a man of 'good character'; the husband of the woman called Rice was a man of 'sober and industrious habits'. The dead and their family are the object of benevolent memory. Talking about the death of old people 'in the way of their miseries being ended', a 77-year-old man told the Commissioners in 1836 that 'whenever any of the old people are dying [...] sure the good neighbours have to go round and to collect the price of a coffin to bury them in'.[24] This habit is still remembered by the people interviewed by the Irish

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[20] Ibid., pp. 234, 250.

[21] *1835 Poor Inquiry,* H.C. 1836, xxxii.pt.I, pp. 637, 633.

[22] Joel Mokyr, Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Poor and Getting Poorer? Living Standards in Ireland before the Famine', in *Economic History Review,* ii.ser., xli, II(1988), p. 230.

[23] *1835 Poor Inquiry,* H.C. 1836, xxxii.pt.I, pp. 538, 534.

[24] *Poor Inquiry (Ireland). Appendix (C.) [....],* p. 16c [35], H.C. 1836, xxx, 574 (Henceforth cited as *1836 Poor Inquiry*).

Folklore Commission in the 1940s,[25] as mutual assistance was part of everyday life in rural Ireland throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.[26]

It is not possible to estimate the average cost as the money collected in such occasions was not registered. However, we can rely again on the observations of the Commission on the condition of poorer classes in Ireland. The report highlights how collections were 'sometimes made for cases of sickness, or for funeral expenses, but the sums collected rarely exceed 10*s.* or 12*s.*, and distress is so universal that it would be endless to form collections for each particular case'.[27]

Even though witnesses stated that 'even the poorest man is always found ready to give his halfpenny', the sum collected would not cover the expenses of a whole funeral. But if we rely on the commissioners' estimates, we can estimate that to collect a price for a coffin (if we set the average price around 6*s.* or 7*s.* as seen before) was probably not such a daunting task. It is important to add that charities, especially in cities such as Dublin, were active among the poor throughout the century. Charitable associations could assist the destitute poor in buying the necessary items for a burial:

> Sometimes the visitors of this institution have found the dying and the dead laid alongside each other; and instances have even occurred where bodies were lain dead for four days in presence of their relations for want of coffins, and were not buried until the Roomkeepers Society supplied the means.[28]

An extract from the report of the 'Irish poor law commissioners' published by *The Times* in 1836[29] gave a brief account of the expenses for the wake of a poor farmer. The list of goods purchased includes 'one pound and a half of tobacco, six or seven dozens of pipes, eight or nine pounds of fish, [...] snuff, seven yards of flannel, hatband, a quart of whisky'. The total price paid, including hearse, coffin and candles, was £1 15*s.*. It was a heavy price for the average farmer living in pre-Famine Ireland. As we will see in the course of this study, the expenses paid by the lower classes in order to have a good funeral were often disproportionate to their means, driving them, in some cases, to beg in order to collect the money needed. The amount of money paid for rites of passages such as wakes and funerals is an important marker of the importance that these rites had in nineteenth-

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[25] I.F.C., MS 815 (County Cavan, 1942), pp. 267-268.

[26] Taro Matsuo, 'Transformations of Rural Societies in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', in *Hosei University Economic Review,* lxiv, no. 3 (1996), p. 132.

[27] *1835 Poor Inquiry,* H.C. 1836, xxxii.pt.I, pp. 322, 338.

[28] Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society, *Statement of the Charitable Society for Relief of Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers of all Religious Persuasions, in the city of Dublin, for the Year 1826* (N.A.I., MS 1028, 1, p. 10).

[29] *The Times,* 30 Dec. 1836.

century Ireland. From the lower classes to the highest, the funeral ceremony is one of the crucial moments in life. Above all, it was the main occasion for affirming the status of the deceased and his family. The complete account runs as follows:[30]

Table 1. Funeral account of a poor farmer

Items	£	*s.*	*d.*
One pound and a half of tobacco, at 2*s.* 10*d.*		4	3
Six or seven dezens of pipes, about 2*d.* per dozens		1	2
Eight or nine pounds of fish (dried hake) for strangers, at 2*d.*		1	6
A hearse		3	
A coffin		16	6
Three pounds of mould candles, four in the pound, at 8*d.*		2	
Three pounds of small candles, at 6*d.*		1	6
Snuff			10
Seven yards of flannel, (shroud) at 4*d.*		2	4
Hat-band			9
A quart of whiskey		1	10
		Total	
	1	15	8 5

The account was provided by a hired labourer of the farmer who purchased these items for his deceased employer. It is notable that the most expensive were also the most necessary ones. The highest outlay is thus represented by the coffin, which is 16*s* 6*d.* This figure must be treated carefully, because the prices of coffins in contemporary sources vary considerably, depending on the quality of the coffins purchased. As an informant to the IFC stated, 'The coffin maker could supply coffins of two descriptions. A 'first class' coffin, and a 'plain coffin.''[31]

A good source for plain coffin prices, at least for the pre-Famine period, is the accounts of expenses of the vestries held by the Church of Ireland. Since the church would pay for the funeral expenses of the 'pauper', the costs are usually registered under the heading 'coffins for the poor', with no further indication regarding the number of coffins purchased or the price per item. Fortunately, in some few cases the clergymen would

[30] *1835 Poor Inquiry,* H.C. 1836, xxxii.pt.I, pp. 432, 448. See also *The Times*, 30 Dec. 1836.
[31] I.F.C., MS 971 (County Cork, 1944), p. 168.

record the cost of a single coffin. The prices for single coffins in 1827 range from 4s to £1[32]. However, the most frequent price is 6*s.* or 7*s.*. Another account written in 1837, just a year after our farmer's funeral, give even lower prices: a single coffin could be purchased for just 1*s.*6*d.*.[33]

Additional information, although patchy and scarce, can be provided by family accounts of the landed gentry, as landlords would defray funeral expenses of poor tenants as an act of charity. In 1837 the Bruen family spent 12*s.* 0*d.* (a cheap funeral indeed) to bury a widow living on their estate.[34] The same year they lent a sum of £2 to a woman named Cullen to bury her father.[35] More generous seemed to be the Earl of Gosford in 1846 when he paid for the coffin of a man – probably a pauper - called John Ingleby, providing also for clothes, hearse and candles.[36]

Although for a peasant funeral an open cart would be very common, for those who could afford it undertakers would provide a covered car. [37] While not containing detailed funeral charges or coffin prices a ledger book held by an undertaker in County Down[38] shows fares due for cars and transport. Figures are noted under the heading 'covered car' or 'car fare'. Taking into account 575 funerals paid between January 1849 and August 1852, the average figure is 3*s.* 4*d.* which is close to the price paid by the poor farmer whose funeral expenses were published by *The Times*. This could mean that the word 'hearse' could have been used in its broadest sense, meaning what an undertaker would call a covered car. Or, perhaps, our farmer was not among the poorest. Indeed:

> When the journey was long, a sidecar was used to take the coffin, a hired car, and the relatives sat on the seats at either side. Well to do farmers engaged a hearse for a long journey, and this was considered a luxury. The poor had their dead taken to the graveyard in common carts, as many as could get room in the cart took seats, women sitting on the coffin[39]

In the undertaker's ledger book, hearses are registered in a separate section. Prices varied with the distance run by the cart (covering the return also), but the most frequent fixed prices were 2*d.* 6*s.* or 3*d.*, still an affordable expense for part of the lower classes.

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[32] *Fourth Report of his Majesty's Commissioners on Ecclesiastical Revenue and Patronage in Ireland*, pp. 27 – 545, H.C. 1837 (500), xxi, 407 - 995.

[33] Ibid., pp. 457, 1045.

[34] Bruen of Oakpark papers (N.L.I., MS 29,773/20, p. 22).

[35] Ibid., p. 53.

[36] P.R.O.N.I., D 1606/2/31/1.

[37] 'Funeral ceremonies of the Irish', in *Weekly entertainer and west of England miscellany,* Feb. 1824, p. 76.

[38] P.R.O.N.I., D 1529/2/1

[39] I.F.C., MS 971 (County Cork, 1944), p. 196.

Needless to say, to use a proper hearse would cost much more. The average price was around 0*s*. 12*d*.. An idea of the importance of a proper hearse can be seen in some recorded figures. For example, for the year 1849 there are 29 rented hearses registered in the ledger book and in the same year 280 covered cars were rented.

The figures provided are too few to be statistically significant. But comparing the expenses paid for a 'pauper' and a 'poor farmer' who was able to hire a labourer, there is a clear gap which marks a social difference. A coffin provided by the church was very likely the cheapest one on the market. It is important to point out that, given the cost of the coffin purchased by the farmer and the fact that he had hired a labourer, the adjective 'poor' used by the poor law commissioner must be considered carefully. Irish lower class society was more stratified than a first look at the sources may suggest, and this stratification was evident in the provisions for the last journey of their lives.

The other items purchased in the account, apart from the candles and the shroud, are all connected with the need to provide hospitality for those who came to the wake. They were the actual reason why having a decent funeral was often difficult. Thus, the difference between a better-off farmer and a member of the landless poor would be seen in the amount of whiskey and tobacco available for the guests. Other accounts give some more details about these kind of expenses. In the same inquiry over the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland, more than one witness gave a rough account of the average expense for a wake. In County Galway a cottier[40] named John Ginnessy said that

> Now-a-day, [...] there is nothing given out but pipes and tobacco; those that are rich give whiskey and those who can't give any, are as much ashamed as if they had done something wrong; all any one gets is a pipe [...] the coffin will cost 7*s*., a few gross of pipes will be 10*s*. more, then there will be 6*s*. or 7*s*. worth of tobacco and lights, and the winding-sheet will be 8*s*. or 10*s*. more, and most frequently the priest gets nothing[41].

This brief account introduces a character that had been omitted by the list of expenses published by *The Times*: the priest. The clergy were paid for their services such as the celebration of the funeral mass, although there were no fixed fees for masses and burials. Farmers would pay 'according to their means'.[42] Thus, fees were reckoned

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[40] 'A labourer holding a cabin, either with or without land [...] from a farmer or other occupier, for whom he is bound to work'. See Caoimhín Ó Danachair, 'Cottier and Landlord in Pre-Famine Ireland' in *Béaloideas*, xlviii-xlix (1980-81), p. 154.

[41] *1836 Poor Inquiry*, H.C. 1836, xxxi, pp. 93, 95.

[42] *1836 Poor Inquiry*, H.C. 1836, xxxiii, pp. 333, 335.

depending on the status and respectability of the deceased's family.[43] In 1836, the range of burial fees reckoned by the witnesses in Queen's county run from 2*s.* to £1, plus another sum of money (from 10*s.* to £1) due to 'each priest (of whom there are six) for a month's mind, which rite, however, is only resorted to by the larger farmers'.[44]

As with coffins, funeral fees vary depending on the witness examined by the poor law commissioners. But they always provide a range of prices, making it clear that there was a kind of progressive 'taxation' for the poor. As we saw before, due to the poverty of the largest part of the population the clergy was often forced to provide a funeral service without payment.[45] In County Kerry, the commissioners were told by a priest that 'the fee to the priest at a labourer's funeral, for blessing the clay and saying a mass, is 5*s.*, but this is not demanded in above half the cases that occur.' Furthermore, additional charges could be added for saying mass. In the parish of Dunfeeny (County Mayo) the practice of paying the priest 'half a guinea for using his private influence to get the soul of the deceased out of purgatory' was reported by the parish priest, interviewed by the commissioners on Irish education in 1826. It was to be paid for every person who would die in the parish, with the exception of infants. By 'private influence', the priest meant that, while saying mass, he would give 'the intention of his mass to be applied on that purpose'. He underlined that this particular fee was 'a legacy chargeable upon the surviving relatives'.[46]

The zeal with which the Roman Catholic clergy would charge the population for its services (especially at stations) was curbed during the first half of the nineteenth century by the bishops.[47] However, during the whole century offerings were usually collected at the graveyard, at the end of the ceremony.[48] According to William Carleton's *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* the ritual way in which money was collected was fundamental for the standing of those present, as it was meant to be a 'mark of respect' towards the deceased and his family. The priest would first ask 'who will give offerings'? Then he would be 'among the multitude, accompanied by two or three of those who were best acquainted with the inhabitants of the parish. He thus continued putting the question distinctly, after each man had paid; and according as the money was laid down, those who accompanied the priest pronounced the name of the person who gave it, so that all present

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[43] Emmet Larkin, *The Pastoral Role of the Roman Catholic Church in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1750-1850* (Dublin, 2006), p. 216.

[44] *1836 Poor Inquiry*, H.C. 1836, xxxiii, pp. 333, 335.

[45] I.F.C., MS 971 (County Cork, 1944), p. 220.

[46] *Eight Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry,* pp. 339-40, H.C.1826-27 (509), xiii, 875-6.

[47] Larkin, *The Pastoral Role of the Roman Catholic Church*, p. 199.

[48] I.F.C., MS 462 (County Carlow and County Limerick, 1938), p. 369.

might hear it.'[49] Those who neglected the offer may be treated 'in the same manner in similar occasions'.[50]

In a century in which state intervention was rare, it is not surprising to see that there was no public assistance concerning funeral expenses for the poor. Even though it is clear that there would not be a contribution for the purchase of alcohol and tobacco, no help was given in order to buy a coffin or to arrange a funeral. The only area of public intervention was connected with charitable institutions, hospitals or prisons. In Kilmainham Gaol, County Dublin, expenses for 'coffin and interment' were included in the yearly budget.[51] Similarly, institutions such as orphanages or fever hospitals would provide coffins[52] or pay for funeral expenses.[53] Dying in a fever hospital was common only for the destitute poor, and the provision of a coffin was part of the hospital's duties. It is difficult to have a clear picture of what is registered under the heading 'funeral expenses' reported in the accounts. However, it is very likely that hospitals would pay for the basic services such as coffins, burial fees or fees due to the clergy for saying mass. The cost of a 'decent' funeral, with plenty of snuff, alcohol and tobacco, was the responsibility of the deceased's family and, in turn, the community.

As for hospitals and prisons, the workhouses built in Ireland after the 1832 Poor Law would provide the expenses for the burial. In her study on the poor law in nineteenth-century Ireland, Helen Burke quotes an account of a member of the poor law commission of inquiry who describes how in a workhouse 'the infants died in large numbers and their bodies were allowed to cumulate in a large coffin under the stairs before being buried'.[54] As for all the 'unclaimed' bodies,[55] expenses for the funeral were paid by the electoral division to which the deceased belonged. It was a 'pauper funeral, an ignominious end that is still remembered in Ireland and still dreaded by the poor'.[56] Indeed, the mere fact of having lived for a while in a workhouse would bring a 'stigma' upon the inmates.[57]

The shame of having a relative living and dying in a workhouse was still remembered after the close of such institutions, clearly stated in memories collected in the

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[49] William Carleton, *Traits and stories of the Irish peasantry* (Buckinghamshire, 1990), p. 228.
[50] Ibid., p. 228.
[51] *Convicts. A Return of the Names of the Officers Employed in the Convict Department, the Amount of Salaries and Duties, and under what Act of Parliament Appointed [...],* p. 3., H.C. 1833 (101), xviii, 653.

[52] *The Eleventh Report of the Commissioners for Auditing Public Accounts in Ireland,* p. 41, H.C. 1823 (199), x, 169 (Henceforth quoted as *Auditing Public Accounts*).
[53] *Auditing Public Accounts*, H.C. 1823, x, pp. 32, 160.
[54] Helen Burke, *The People and the Poor Law in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Littlehampton, 1987), p. 55.
[55] Ibid., p. 65.
[56] Ibid., p. 65.
[57] I.F.C., MS 1221 (County Tyrone, 1951), p. 73.

1950s.[58] If it was a 'disgrace' to have a relative in a workhouse, it was even 'more so if a relative died in there'.[59] For many 'paupers' dying in a workhouse meant ending their lives alone in an institution, without a wake or proper entertainment. After the 1832 Anatomy Act, also, fear of having their own body sent for dissection added to the shame of a pauper funeral.[60]An 83-year-old man interviewed in County Clare as late as 1955 remembered that many old men and old women 'who had no one to look after them went there and there the most of them stayed until they were buried in the workhouse coffin as they used to call the plain coffin used for burying.'[61]The 'workhouse coffin' was probably one of the clearest marks of the shame of being buried as a pauper, a 'stigma' that no one, neither the very destitute poor, would have wanted to bear.

3. Lower - middle class expenses

The middle class represented a variegated social group, though only a small part of the population throughout the nineteenth century. In the 1841 census heads of family 'ministering' to health, charity, justice, education and religion represented all together roughly 0.7 per cent of the working population. Part of the lower-middle and middle class was grouped under the heading 'trade', which would include not only merchants or shopkeepers, but also artisans, and formed 23 per cent of the population. Men classified as working in arts, trade and transport formed a further 1 per cent.[62] This classification is very loose, as the range of wealth and social status within a single heading could vary considerably. For instance, under the heading 'ministering to justice' the commissioners included members of the constabulary as well as members of the magistracy. The same can be observed for those administering health. Also, members of the clergy were all grouped together, with no classification between different confessions or lower and higher clergy. Although successive censuses provide more precise classification in terms of occupations, the prominence of the lower class was constantly marked by censuses figures. The returned 1891 census identified a 'professional class' - clerical, legal and those 'engaged in the national government' – consisting of 214,234 people, out of a total of 4,704,750.[63] In terms

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[58] I.F.C., MS 1436 (County Clare, 1955), p. 93.
[59] I.F.C., MS 1391 (County Clare, 1955), p. 279.
[60] Ruth Richardson, 'Why was Death so Big in Victorian Britain?' in Ralph Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual, and Bereavement* (London, 1989), p. 117.
[61] I.F.C., MS 1436 (County Clare, 1955), p. 93.
[62] *1841 Census Report,* H.C. 1843, xxiv, pp. xxii, 22.
[63] *Census of Ireland, 1891. Part II. General Report, with Illustrative Maps and Diagrams, Tables, Appendix*, p. 22 [C.6780], H.C. 1892, xc, 338.

of size, by the end of the nineteenth century the great majority of the Irish population was still clearly employed in the agricultural sector.[64]

Housing can provide additional data for social stratification. Of a total of 1,256,696 houses only 40,080 were classified as first class, while 264,184 belonged to the second class.[65] Criteria for this classification indicated a second-class house as 'a good farm house, or in towns, a house in a small street, having from 5 to 9 rooms and windows'. The first class grouped 'all houses of a better description than the preceding classes'.[66] Naturally, the middle class was far more numerous in the urban environment, chiefly in the city of Dublin, while the landed gentry, although often absent, belonged to the countryside. The latter is well represented by the archival sources, as estate account books provide a rich source for funeral prices for the gentry. Unfortunately there is no comparable source for the variety of the lower middle class characters such as shopkeepers and small merchants. Given the lack of sources we can only suggest that their funeral expenses were as high as their status or financial situation could permit.

Funeral expenses were understandably a matter of concern to the lower- middle class. While the landless poor were helped by relatives and neighbours, professionals or skilled workers would join friendly societies that would have provided financial aid to its members. By 1869, there were 285 active Sickness and Burial Societies, with a total of 42,703 members.[67] Five years later, these figures rose to '312 Societies giving benefit in Sickness and for Burial', with a total of 35,400 members.[68]As an example, the 'Amalgamated Society of Tailors', founded in 1866, had among its objectives the relief of members in 'distress, disease, old age and death'.[69] As the latter society shows, the greater number of them were dedicated only to specific sectors of Irish society,[70] such as the Benevolent Society of St. Andrew, founded in 1831 to 'relieve such Scotchmen, their wives, widows and children as, by sickness or other causes, may be unable to earn their subsistence' – the mention of widows hints at the assistance in case of death of the breadwinner.[71] Similarly, benefit society such as 'the Irish Musical Fund'[72] for musicians

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[64] Ibid., pp. 24, 340.

[65] *The Census for Ireland for the Year 1851. Part VI. General Report,* p. xxiii, [2134] H.C. 1856, xxxi, 23.

[66] *1841 Census Report,* H.C. 1843, xxiv, pp. xiv, 14.

[67] *Friendly Societies (Ireland). Report of the Registrar of Friendly societies in Ireland, for the Year Ending 31 December 1869,* p. 1 H.C. 1870 (471), lxi, 425.

[68] *Friendly Societies (Ireland). Report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies in Ireland for the Year Ending 31 December 1874,* p. 2, H.C. 1875 (378), lxxi, 354.

[69] Association of Charities, G.D.W. (eds), *Dublin Charities, being a Handbook of Dublin Philanthropic Organisations and Charities* (Dublin 1902), p. 277.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., pp. 36-37.

[72] Ibid, p. 284.

or the 'Literary Teacher's Mutual Benefit Friendly Society' would provide help for the bereaved. [73]

As early as 1836 in County Wexford there were three societies, the members of which were 'tradesmen and the most comfortable classes of labourers'.[74] These societies would defray the members' funeral expenses, together with a 'certain sum from each member to be given to the nearest surviving relative'. In County Kilkenny a society was dedicated to the burial of the dead of its subscribers, along with support for members in case of sickness[75], while a 'mortality society' also provided similar services. For the latter, members (tradesmen, farmers and labourers) would pay a subscription fee of 1*s.* per month.[76] According to the same source, 'it requires[ed] much exertion and economy on the part of the working classes to enable them to contribute 1*s.* a month to a friendly society'.[77]

Municipal corporations would also provide money for burials. The 1836 report on the inquiry into municipal corporations of Ireland reported the defraying of funeral expenses. Unfortunately, in these accounts headings are devoid of details, as there is no mention of the deceased's profession. While figures vary, there is a clear leap towards higher expenses compared with the data examined so far. For 'Farrell's funeral' the corporation of Londonderry paid £4 4*s.* 3.5*d.*.[78] The same corporation paid, for the burying of a 'drowned man', £1 13*s.* 11*d.*.[79] which is probably the minimum cost that the corporation would pay for a funeral: a better service than the one provided by the Church. Coffins provided also were more expensive. Prices ranged from 12*s.* to 16*s.*, while the price for 'five coffins' is £4 1*s.* 3*d.*.[80] Remarkably, funerals for public servants such as policemen were not more expensive than the poor farmer's funeral as reported by *The Times*. In 1808 in Dublin funeral expenses paid by the police for the burial of its officers was a fixed figure: £1 2*s.* 9*d.*.[81] Again, it is not likely that the sum would cover items such as whiskey or tobacco, but it is still not clear to what extent the typical lower class wake was celebrated in cities and among the labouring and worst off of the middle classes: a six month's wage earned by a Dublin policeman in 1808 was £10 8*s.*.[82]

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[73] Ibid., p. 287.

[74] *1836 Poor Inquiry*, H.C. 1836, xxx, pp. 28, 64.

[75] Ibid., pp. 73, 595.

[76] Ibid., pp. 73, 595.

[77] *1835 Poor Inquiry*, H.C. xxxii.pt.I, pp. 300, 316.

[78] *Municipal Corporations (Ireland). Appendix to the first Report of the Commissioners. Part III. Conclusion of the North Western Circuit,* p. 1214 [26], H.C. 1836, xxiv, 216.

[79] Ibid., pp. 1195, 197.

[80] Ibid., pp. 1195, 197.

[81] *Return to an Order for an Account of all Sums of Money Raised by Local Tax or Otherwise, for the Support of the Police of the City of Dublin, during the Years 1808 and 1809 [...],* p. 4, H.C. 1810 (231), xii, 408

[82] Ibid., pp. 4, 408.

4. Conclusions

For many contemporaries belonging to the higher classes, the peasants' expenditure on wakes and funerals was seen as a waste of money.[83] For the poor, however, saving money on a relative's funeral was cause of public shame. Patricia Lysaght suggests that even the 'complaint' about 'the wake and funeral costs could conversely be read as a boast about family means with an eye to its standing in the community'.[84] Hospitality was a key feature of Irish society in the nineteenth century, a characteristic that would impress more than one foreign visitor.[85] In this context, the popular feeling about such an important occasion as a wake becomes more comprehensible. The need to provide a lavish welcome is constantly highlighted in contemporary sources. A parish priest affirmed that the labourer 'becomes greatly embarrassed by defraying the expenses of a funeral for his aged parent, and many are thereby reduced to beggary'. Magistrate John H. Nagle, J.P., added in a more coloured way that 'such is the mistaken idea, that they will often spend £2 at a wake, when they have scarcely a potato to eat'.[86] Although the words of the latter are marked with a partial, middle class perspective, expenses for funerals were certainly (and frequently) disproportionate to the means of the poor. Such a prodigal attitude was rooted in the popular culture of nineteenth-century Ireland. Considering funerals in a broader context it is also interesting to examine the attitude with which marriage expenses were usually paid. A witness in County Galway told the commissioners in 1836 that it is not 'uncommon for a labourer to spend £3 or £4 in the purchase of bread, meat, tobacco and spirits, and lights to celebrate the marriage of his daughter, and thus to spend in one night the savings of many years.'[87]Although the custom of bearing excessive funeral expenses is not confined to the Irish context[88], the idea of the 'decent funeral' was of paramount importance for the nineteenth-century Irish peasant.[89] The need to provide a great provision of food and tobacco at wakes can be seen as a consequence of two main factors, such as the need to provide hospitality and the standing of the deceased and his family. The deceased himself was considered the host of the wake, the person by and for whom the feast was provided. It was his 'responsibility' to be as good a host as possible. Thus, the provision of alcohol and

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[83] Carleton, *Traits and stories,* p. 113.

[84] Patricia Lysaght, 'Hospitality at Wakes and Funerals in Ireland from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century: some Evidence from the Written Record', in *Folklore* cxiv (2003), p. 413.

[85] Louis M. Cullen, *The Emergence of Modern Ireland, 1600-1900* (London, 1981), p. 178.

[86] *1836 Poor Inquiry,* H.C. 1836, xxx, pp. 16c, 574.

[87] *1836 Poor Inquiry,* H.C. 1836 xxxi, pp. 93, 95.

[88] See Robert Hertz, 'A Contribution to the Study of Collective Representation of Death', in Antonius C.G.M. Robben (eds), *Death, Mourning and Burial, a Cross Cultural Reader,* (Oxford, 2004), p. 198.

[89] 'Irish Funerals', in *Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and instruction* (February 1824), p. 138.

tobacco was very important because of its social implications. It was also part of the actual celebration of the deceased:

> The tobacco used be brought in on a big tray. The pipes would be handed around to the men, (and women too, if they cared to smoke) all clay pipes. Then a person would come along with this tray of tobacco, and each man would fill his pipe out of that, and say "the lord have mercy on his soul", or something like that.[90]

As Patricia Lysaght has pointed out in her work on wakes from the seventeenth to the nineteenth-century Ireland, 'the type of hospitality offered on the occasion of death was apparently generally dependent on the economic and social standing of the deceased and his or her family, but every effort appears to have been made by all sections of society to be as generous as possible in its provision'.[91] In order to properly honour the deceased, every guest would accept what was offered.[92] In this context of mutual help, hospitality was given and expected to be returned.[93] In fact, attendants at wakes were supposed to contribute as well, as families of similar social standing to the deceased 'might contribute to the food and drink supplies'.[94] In later times, when alcohol had been replaced by tea and sugar, a contribution from the neighbours was still expected.[95]

Nonetheless, the bereaved family was supposed to provide the greater part of the provisions, even though the custom of offering part of the provisions is a signal of mutual exchange, another marker of the collective feeling is that a decent funeral must be performed. Although drinking and tobacco were perceived as useful in lessening sorrow[96], their importance for making the wakes' attendants a 'merry group' should not be overestimated when we analyze the reasons for such great expenditure. As a public gathering, a wake was often attended not only by the relatives or the actual mourners, but also by a larger part of the community:[97] a funeral attended by many people was a mark of the respectability of the deceased.[98] Also,

> the size of the funeral was looked upon as an indication of the popularity of the deceased and his family and was beside (betide?) the individual who could be there

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[90] I.F.C., MS 631 (County Wexford, 1939), p. 10.
[91] Lysaght, 'Hospitality at Wakes' and Funerals in Ireland from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century: some Evidence from the Written Record', in *Folklore* cxiv (2003), p. 418.
[92] *Daily News,* 22 Aug. 1888.
[93] Lysaght, 'Hospitality at Wakes', p. 410.
[94] Lysaght, 'Hospitality at Wakes', p. 407.
[95] I.F.C., MS 1838 (County Fermanagh and Cavan, 1974), p. 70.
[96] Lysaght, 'Hospitality at Wakes', p.413.
[97] *Morning Chronicle,* 23 Sept. 1834.
[98] Carleton, *Traits and Stories,* p. 225.

> and wasn't. Even at the present day the greatest insult [...] is to abstain from attending the funeral[...][99]

Alcohol was purchased because it was a core part of any feast, not primarily because of its 'healing' function. Furthermore, I would suggest that the pressure of shared tradition was a stronger factor in pushing the poor man to exceed his means. Providing a 'mean' wake would have clearly meant lowering the family's reputation, an attitude that has survived well beyond the nineteenth century. Writing about hospitality at wakes as late as the 1980s, Maurna Crozier argued that in contemporary wakes 'the focus of the occasion has become the bereaved rather than the dead'.[100] Crozier quotes an informant, who describing wakes that he witnessed in his youth said that they were meant to give to the dead 'a right good send off'. Similarly, in nineteenth-century Ireland wakes and funerals were expensive celebrations precisely because of the centrality of the deceased and his reputation, as the amount of alcohol and the number of attendants at a wake were all markers of high standing within a community.

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[99] I.F.C., MS 971 (County Carlow, 1941), p. 9.

[100] Maurna Crozier, 'Powerful Wakes: Perfect Hospitality', in Chris Curtin and Thomas M. Wilson (eds), *Ireland from Below. Social Change and Local Communities* (Galway, 1988), p. 87.

1.4 Opposition of the Roman Catholic Church to Wakes

1. Introduction

Clerical opposition to 'Merry Wakes' and unruly behaviour related to funeral customs was constant throughout the nineteenth century. The Irish wake, with its corollary of alcohol and merriment, was a custom peculiar to the lower classes – the bulk of the Irish population. Although it was observed among 'some of the lower classes Protestants' as well as among Presbyterians, alcohol and merriment were predominantly a Catholic indulgence.[1] This chapter investigates the strategies put in place by the Roman Catholic Church in order to curb 'abusive' and 'unchristian' behaviour at wakes and funerals, particularly during the post-Famine period. It also attempts to gauge to what extent its efforts were successful by the end of the nineteenth century.

2. The 'evils of drunkenness'

Regulations against the consumption of alcohol and the playing of games at wakes were issued by the synods of Tuam, Armagh, Meath, Waterford and Lismore as early as in the seventeenth century.[2] In the nineteenth century, before the Great Famine, similar regulations were issued by the archdiocese of Dublin in 1831, as well as by the diocese of Ardagh in 1834.[3] In 1829, the Roman Catholic bishop of Kildare, and Leighlin James Warren Doyle, issued a widely circulated letter on drunkenness, in which he expressed his support for the temperance movement, although he did not support total abstinence.[4] The main concern expressed by the Catholic hierarchy in these regulations was related to the unruly behaviour common at wakes, such as the playing of 'wake games', dancing, smoking of tobacco and heavy consumption of alcohol. The latter, in particular, is frequently mentioned in contemporary sources as a cause of 'disgrace' at the funerals of the lower classes.[5] In 1834, an inquiry into drunkenness was published by the House of Commons with attention paid to the social impact of the heavy consumption of alcohol

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[1] Patricia Lysaght, 'Hospitality at Wakes and Funerals in Ireland from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century: Some Evidence from the Written Record' in *Folklore*, cxiv, no. 3 (2003), p. 418; see also U.F.M., MS 63/q3/18.

[2] Seán Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Wake Amusements* (Cork, 1967), pp. 146-8.

[3] Ó Súilleabháin, *Wake Amusements*, p. 152.

[4] John F. Quinn, *Father Mathew's Crusade. Temperance in Nineteenth-Century Ireland and Irish America* (Boston, 2002), p. 55.

[5] *FJ*, 19 Dec. 1871. See also *Nenagh Guardian*, 31 Mar. 1877.

among the lower classes.[6] The testimonies collected by the commissioners highlight the impact of alcohol – more precisely whiskey – in virtually every social occasion. The bond between hospitality and alcohol, as well as between the social standing of the deceased's family and the surrounding community, was sanctioned by the offering of whiskey to people present at wakes.[7] Addressing the Hibernian Temperance Society in 1830, the Presbyterian minister and temperance advocate, John Edgar, pointed out how 'young people of the neighbourhood wait with impatience for the death of some old person', as they might enjoy 'the riot and debauch which a wake affords'.[8]

When the temperance movement found a leader in Father Theobald Mathew it became particularly popular during the early 1840s. By the onset of the Great Famine temperance was a mainstream Catholic concern. In 1843, after a two year campaign led by Father Mathew, the turnover of distilleries and breweries suffered a significant decrease.[9] The efforts of temperance societies along with the clergy of all denominations did produce an effect on the overall consumption of alcohol and also, indirectly, on the funeral customs of the lower classes. The *Irish Catholic Directory* described how the bishop of Clonfert Thomas Coen, who founded a purgatorial society, succeeded in putting an end to unruly behaviour at wakes in his diocese. 'Similarly', as Seán Ó Súilleabháin noted, 'the *Parliamentary Gazeteer of Ireland* announced in 1846 that shameful wakes were abolished in rural areas'.[10] However, the success of temperance promoters was a short-lived one. The movement was already in a state of dismay in the immediate post-Famine years. According to John F. Quinn, 'the evidence strongly suggests that the Irish people drank more in 1848-49 than in the early 1840s'.[11] The Famine has been regarded as one of the chief causes of the demise of the 1840s temperance movement. Besides, the Roman Catholic clergy did not fully support its staunch teetotalism. The archbishop of Tuam John MacHale and the bishop of Ardagh William Higgins never lent their support to it, due to the inter-confessional nature of the movement and Father Theobald Mathew's 'close association with various Quakers and Unitarians'.[12]

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[6] *Report from the Select Committee on Inquiry into Drunkenness, with Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix*, H.C. 1834 (559), viii.

[7] Patrick Mulligan, 'Dr. James Donnelly Parish Priest of Roslea (1857-65)' in *Clogher Record*, xi, no. 2 (1983), p. 230.

[8] *Hibernian Temperance Society. Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting Held at the Rotunda on the 7th of April, 1830* (R.I.A., Haliday papers, MS 1497, p. 39).

[9] 'From 1838 to 1844, the number of distilleries decreased 29 per cent from 87 to 62, the number of spirit dealers declined 30 per cent from 455 to 317, and the number of whiskey retailers dropped 38 per cent from 20,399 to 12,646'. See John F. Quinn, *Father Mathew's Crusade: Temperance in Nineteenth Century Ireland and Irish America* (Boston, 2002), p. 112.

[10] Ó Súilleabháin, *Wake Amusements,* p. 164.

[11] Quinn, *Father Mathew*, p. 153.

[12] Ibid., p. 84.

3. The post-Famine period

While the country was recovering from the Famine, the consumption of alcohol rose on a national level.[13] Regulations against 'abuses' at wakes and funerals were periodically issued by the Roman Catholic hierarchy, as in the years preceding the crisis. Nonetheless the clergy was exercising a tighter grip on Irish society. Furthermore, the 'devotional revolution' that took place – according to Emmet Larkin – in the second half of the nineteenth century had long standing consequences for Irish Catholicism as a whole.[14] However, his view has been disputed in recent research, which has stressed how the changes promoted by Catholic bishops faced a slow and difficult implementation in the rural context. According to Cara Delay, during the 1850s 'tradition and custom, in some cases, continued to guide daily life.'[15] The reality of post-Famine parish life required the lower clergy to compromise through a constant negotiation of social power. Notwithstanding the unyielding efforts of the higher clergy to discipline their flock, by the 1870s many Catholic parishes were still far from the model of orderly community promoted by the statues of the Synod of Thurles in 1850.[16]

A new temperance movement was on the rise during the 1870s, thanks to the efforts of the Jesuit James Cullen and his Pioneer Total Abstinence Association.[17] In 1877 'deep concern' was expressed by the Catholic hierarchy 'for the proper and respectful treatment of the dead'. They stated that 'in future' no one was to attend wakes except the immediate relatives of the deceased. Also, that no alcohol had to be consumed on those occasions, and that priests were forbidden to attend the burial and say mass for the deceased whenever those regulations were infringed.[18] A few months later, Cardinal Paul Cullen issued the 1878 Lent regulations for the diocese of Dublin, mentioning 'dances, singing, drinking accompanied with gross immorality at wakes'.[19] A similar attack on wakes was contained in the Dublin Lent regulation for 1880.[20] Later, the prohibition was repeated in similar terms in the Lent pastoral of 1882.[21] In his lent pastoral of 1878 the archbishop of Armagh, Daniel MacGettigan, recalled the 'decrees of 1871' by which the Catholic bishops had

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[13] Paul A. Townend, *Father Mathew, Temperance and Irish Identity* (Dublin, 2002), p. 251.

[14] Emmet Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75' in *The American Historical Review,* lxxvii, no. 3 (1972), pp. 625-52.

[15] Cara Delay, 'The Devotional Revolution on the Local Level: Parish Life in Post-Famine Ireland' in *U.S. Catholic Historian*, xxii, no. 3 (2004), p. 46.

[16] Ibid., p. 54.

[17] Townend, *Temperance and Irish Identity,* p. 260.

[18] *FJ*, 17 Dec. 1877.

[19] *FJ*, 5 Mar. 1878.

[20] *FJ*, 9 Feb. 1880.

[21] *Nenagh Guardian*, 22 Feb. 1882.

forbidden the distribution of whiskey at wakes. He also called upon the clergy and the laity to 'check the spread of intemperance'.[22] A rule that forbade the distribution of drink at wakes was also issued by the Roman Catholic bishop of Cloyne, John MacCarthy, in 1884.[23] As late as 1890, the archbishop of Dublin, William Joseph Walsh, issued a pastoral letter in which he condemned the practice of drinking at wakes and funerals as well as on other occasions.[24]

The enforcement of these regulations fell mainly upon the shoulders of the lower clergy. At parish level, the implementation of statutes of the synod of Thurles could be hindered by a lack of resources, as well as by the opposition of parish communities to changes in the local mourning custom.[25] Besides, the all-importance of alcohol in nineteenth century Irish society also encompassed the lower Roman Catholic clergy. According to Cardinal Cullen, intemperance among the lower clergy in the diocese of Tuam was widespread. He first wrote in 1876 that he had 'heard that drunkenness prevails in the diocese among the priests'.[26] One year later Cullen was informed by the Vicar General of Dun Laoghaire, Monkstown and Glasthule, Edward McCabe, that there was a 'great problem with drinking in [the] Tuam diocese'. Cullen was also informed that 'At least 26 priests have died suddenly from drunkenness'.[27] Although this last remark does not testify in favour of the truth of rumours reported by McCabe, concern about clerical intemperance had reached Cullen from various sources since the early 1850s. The need to reform the habits of the clergy was expressed by the bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise, John Kilduff, as early as 1854. He stated that some priests were addicted to drink.[28] A priest from Belfast complained in 1852 about a priest being 'very drunk' and striking another priest.[29]

Among the points to be discussed at a meeting of the diocesan chapter in the Roman Catholic diocese of Clogher in 1861 figured 'ecclesiastics drinking at station marriages, baptism etc.'. Other topics of discussion were 'collections for masses, Lenten or others' as well as 'the revival of funeral whiskey'.[30]A priest suspended for drinking is then mentioned in the correspondence between Cardinal Paul Cullen and Tobias Kirby (then

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[22] *FJ*, 14 Mar. 1878.
[23] *Nenagh Guardian*, 16 July 1884.
[24] Ó Súilleabháin, *Wake Amusements*, p. 22.
[25] Lysaght, 'Hospitality at wakes', p. 419.
[26] Cullen to Kirby, 21 Aug. 1876 (I.C.R., MS Kir/NC/1/1876/39).
[27] Cullen to Kirby, 23 Jan. 1877 (I.C.R., MS Kir/NC/1/1877/8).
[28] Kilduff to Cullen, 27 Jan. 1854 (D.D.A., Cullen papers, MS 332/1/97).
[29] Canning to Cullen, 8 Sep. 1852 (D.D.A., Cullen papers, MS 325/4/53).
[30] P.R.O.N.I, DIORC/1/12/1.

rector of the Irish College of Rome) in 1862.[31] In 1878 Peter Kelly, parish priest in Carrick, County Donegal, wrote to Kirby complaining that one of his curates would 'drink. Many priests,' he added, 'do'.[32] Also, in 1879 two letters of complaint reached the archbishop of Dublin from Rush, County Dublin, as well as from Athy, County Kildare, regarding respectively a priest who was charged with 'excessive drinking' and one who had been seen preaching under the influence of drink.[33] In 1892, two priests had to be removed on a charge of intemperance in Tullow, County Carlow.[34] Other cases of 'drunken priests' are mentioned in Cullen's correspondence in 1863, 1864 1867 and 1870.[35] In 1862 the archdeacon of Glendalough, James Redmond, went as far as to write regulations on the amount of alcohol (before and after dinner) that a priest should have been allowed to drink. 'If this rule had been followed [...] from this day' – he wrote – 'how many [priests] shall be saved from eternal perdition!'.[36]

In 1877, Edward McCabe pointed out that the custom of 'stations' was still kept up in his diocese. It was there, he complained to Cardinal Paul Cullen, that the priests 'learned to drink'.[37] Cullen had previously expressed the belief that priests were not willing to abandon the custom of stations because it benefited them financially.[38] 'Stations' consisted of masses celebrated by Roman Catholic priests in private houses (belonging to well-off parishioners) for all the inhabitants of the surrounding area.[39] Although disapproved by 'nearly all synods between 1830 and 1875', the practice was still alive by the end of the nineteenth century, especially in the south and the west of Ireland.[40] Stations were part of the system that permitted, along with masses for the dead in private houses, to take spiritual care of those members of the flock who could not reach the local chapel because of being too distant or non existent. Indeed, they were occasions in which hospitality – thus alcohol – played an important role. As the Church expanded in the aftermath of the Famine, the Catholic hierarchy struggled to maintain chapels as the focus of an orderly and disciplined religious community, where clerical control could be more effectively

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[31] Cullen to Kirby, circa 1862 (I.C.R., MS Kir/NC/1/1862/53).

[32] Kelly to Kirby, 15 Feb. 1879 (I.C.R., MS Kir/1879/48).

[33] O'Carroll to Cullen, 29 Mar. 1879 (D.D.A., McCabe papers, MS 337/4/27); Doyle to Cullen, 25 Aug. 1879 (D.D.A., McCabe papers, MS 337/4/61).

[34] Lynch to Kirby, 13 Jan. 1892 (I.C.R., MS Kir/1892/14).

[35] See Farrell to Cullen, 13 Feb. 1863 (D.D.A., Cullen papers, MS 340/8/25); Walmsley to Cullen, 23 Aug. 1864 (D.D.A., Cullen papers, MS 320/5/83); Redmond to Cullen, 19 Mar. 1867 (D.D.A., Cullen papers, MS 334/5/15); O' Rourke to Cullen, 1 Nov. 1870 (D.D.A., Cullen papers, MS 326/1/44).

[36] Redmond to Cullen, 3 Nov. 1863 (D.D.A., Cullen papers, MS 340/8/II/62).

[37] Cullen to Kirby, 23 Jan. 1877 (I.C.R., MS Kir/NC/1/1877/8).

[38] Cullen to Kirby, 12 Nov. 1876 (I.C.R., MS Kir/NC/1/1876/56).

[39] Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland', p. 635.

[40] Ibid., p. 637.

implemented. Strategies put in place in order to curb unruly behaviour at wakes were devised according to this main principle.

4. Strategies

The practice of bringing the corpse to the chapel the evening before the burial in order to celebrate the funeral mass 'in the church rather than in the wake-house' was an established custom, according to Patricia Lysaght, in parts of rural Wexford in 1822.[41] It was then required by the Dublin diocesan statutes from 1831, and it became a general requirement in the ecclesiastical province of Dublin in 1850.[42] However, the issue of similar regulations during the post – Famine years, as well as IFC manuscripts, indicates that this custom was more likely to be ignored by the end of the nineteenth century, as was clerical denunciation of wake 'abuses' from the altar.[43] A secondary strategy promoted by the higher clergy to curb unruly behaviour at wakes was the possible withholding of masses for the dead in houses where whiskey was consumed. Masses were usually held in wake-houses more than once during the mourning period.[44] In 1869 the archdeacon of Glendalough, James Redmond, commented favourably on 'the rule prescribing but one mass to be said in the house of the deceased', as it would have permitted to have the funeral office 'duly celebrated in parishes'.[45] The archbishop of Cashel, Thomas William Croke, who was also concerned about the excessive consumption of alcohol at wakes and funerals, included the prohibition of holding masses in wake-houses where alcohol was consumed in the 1878 diocesan statutes. Furthermore, he suggested that funerals should be held before noon, with the likely aim to prevent possible drink-related disturbances.[46] As late as 1890, in order to mark the centenary of the birth of Father Theobald Mathew, the coadjutor bishop of Killaloe, Thomas McRedmond, delivered a pastoral addressed to the clergy of his diocese, in which he prohibited them from celebrating masses in any house of the diocese where alcohol was distributed, on the occasion of a wake or funeral.[47]

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[41] Lysaght, 'Hospitality at Wakes', p. 417.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Cara Delay, '"The Gates Were Shut": Catholics, Chapels, and Power in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland' in *New Hibernia Review*, xiv, no. 1 (2010), p. 31.
[44] I.F.C., MS 107 (County Cork, 1935), p. 491.
[45] Redmond to Cullen, 5 May 1869 (D.D.A., Cullen papers, MS 334/5/III/25).
[46] James O'Shea, *Priest, Politics and Society in Post-Famine Ireland. A Study of County Tipperary 1850-1891* (Dublin, 1983), p. 31.
[47] *Nenagh Guardian*, 2 Apr. 1890.

The custom of funeral masses being celebrated in wake-houses was related to the collection of offerings by Roman Catholic priests. Masses would be celebrated on the morning of the burial, when people gathered at the wake-house were asked to give offerings.[48] Details of the contribution gathered at funerals were given by the archbishop of Dublin, James Warren Doyle, when testifying before the select committee on the state of Ireland in 1825. Doyle stated that 'It is on account of saying mass and assisting at the funeral that the priest receives this contribution.' A witness to the IFC in 1938 recalled a saying that ironically described the kind of funeral masses provided by the Catholic clergy according to the amount of offerings: 'high mass for high money, low mass for low money, no mass for no money'.[49] According to Doyle, the greater part of the contributions were collected on Easter and at Christmas, more than at baptisms or burials.[50] Given an income of £400 a year, he estimated the sum from fees at marriages, baptisms and burials to be about £100.[51] In his local study of post-Famine County Tipperary, James O'Shea outlined the various sources that, apart from gate collections or stations, provided revenue for the local Catholic clergy. Among them were marriage, baptism and funeral dues (although marriage dues were 'unquestionably' the most important ones).[52] The impact of funeral offerings on parish revenues might have varied regionally as well as chronologically. For instance, in the diocese of Clogher in April 1883 the average sum received for funerals represented the main part of the revenue at £3, as marriages would only return £1 13*s*. 6*d*. These figures had slightly changed from those recorded in 1865 – sums collected by funerals actually increased by £1.[53] In the parish of Roslea, County Fermanagh, offerings collected at funerals 'were ranging from a few shillings to £10 or £12 in exceptional cases'.[54] On the whole, offerings collected at funerals throughout the nineteenth century did represent an important source of income for parishes. In 1863, a document issued by the clergy of the diocese of Dublin expressed a negative opinion on any reform to be implemented as regards to stations and masses for the dead. In their opinion, the change would be

> injurious to the people in taking away the most powerful means of bringing them to the sacraments and causing the diminution of masses for the dead and very

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[48] I.F.C., MS 1429 (County Longford, 1955), p. 131.
[49] I.F.C., MS 462 (County Limerick and County Tipperary, 1938), p. 368.
[50] *Report from the Select Committee on the state of Ireland: 1825,* p. 185, H.C. 1825 (129), viii, 195.
[51] Ibid., pp. 187, 197.
[52] O'Shea, *A Study of County Tipperary,* p. 21.
[53] P.R.O.N.I, DIORC/1/11/D.
[54] Mulligan, 'Dr. James Donnelly', p. 234.

damaging to the support of the clergy whose finances will be gravously [sic] lessened[55]

Remarkably - as Emmet Larkin pointed out - avarice on the part of parishioners was seen by the Catholic clergy as the 'deadliest of the deadly sins', while drunkenness and lust were viewed with 'a more understanding, even if disapproving, eye'.[56] In a memoir on his period spent as superior of the Passionist house in Dublin between 1856 and 1863, Father Vincent Grotti, the procurator of the Passionist Order in Rome, described how offerings were exacted by the Roman Catholic priests. His memoir matches the pre-Famine custom described by William Carleton in his *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry.*[57] According to Grotti, the priest was paid 'solely for that only mass he celebrates that morning' - the morning of the burial. He noticed that if the relatives of the deceased were reluctant to agree on the pecuniary demand of the church, the priest would keep the corpse 'a long time in the house', or would send it directly to the grave without carrying it first to the church (i.e. without saying mass over it).[58]

The pressure of offerings on parishioners reached its peak between 1850 and 1870. The continual 'begging' for offerings was, in Emmet Larkin's words, 'institutionalized' during this period, when a large amount of financial resources had to be drawn for the expansion of the Church and its clerical population. In the aftermath of the Famine, the income of priests fell significantly while the number of priests rose as never before. Dues for clerical services rose accordingly, in particular those related to marriages.[59] Funeral dues, along with offerings at baptisms and contributions at Christmas and Easter, were still among the main sources of income.[60] Even though the problem of individual clerical avarice had been 'largely mitigated if not resolved by 1865' the Roman Catholic church still relied on offerings for its consolidation.[61] Furthermore, by the late 1870s the country entered an agricultural depression while the clerical population further increased between 1850 and 1900.[62]

The economic dependence of the Roman Catholic Church on offerings suggests that compromise would take place between parishioners and the lower clergy as regards

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[55] D.D.A., MS 340/8/I/121.

[56] Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland', p. 632.

[57] William Carleton, *Traits and stories of the Irish peasantry* (Buckinghamshire, 1990), p. 228.

[58] Emmet Larkin, 'The Problem of Irish Clerical Avarice in the Nineteenth Century' in *Éire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies*, iii (1989), p. 37.

[59] Larkin, 'Clerical Avarice', pp. 37-9.

[60] Emmet Larkin, 'Economic Growth, Capital Investment, and the Roman Catholic Church in Nineteenth – Century Ireland' in *The American Historical Review*, lxxii, no. 3 (1967), p. 858.

[61] Larkin, 'Clerical Avarice', p. 40.

[62] Larkin, 'Economic Growth', p. 865.

funeral customs. The prohibition on providing drinks at wakes was known – and ignored – by the wife of a wealthy farmer named Ellen Sampson in Limerick in 1881. She held a wake for her husband, at which, according to the *Freeman's Journal*, 'not less than twenty gallons of whiskey' were drunk. The case was reported as, during the wake, a litigation over promissory notes issued by the deceased arose between Ellen Sampson (the plaintiff) and the deceased's brothers. The plaintiff, asked why she provided whiskey, answered that 'whether I ordered it or not they would bring it there'. The Catholic parish priest was also present on the morning of the funeral, 'angry that the [promissory] notes should be produced'.[63]

5. A vain effort?

'None but the Catholic clergy can stop this abominable custom,' an anonymous reader wrote to the *Freeman's Journal* in 1877, outraged by the lower classes' wakes.[64] As the evidence from contemporary sources shows, the regulations promoted by the higher clergy were often ignored up to the end of the nineteenth century. The fact that regulation often remained a dead letter put a question mark over the effective action of the lower clergy, which was in practical terms responsible for the enforcing of the diocesan statutes. In 1875, in a meeting of the civil engineers of Dublin on the poor sanitary conditions of the city the assembly concluded that there was one custom which 'neither doctors nor engineers could do much to amend – the practice of holding wakes. Even the clergy were afraid to interfere with it'.[65] However, accounts from the IFC suggest that in the long run the action of the Roman Catholic Church proved to be quite effective. In County Roscommon, a 76 year-old farmer stated that

> some people began to bring the corpse to the church for one night, the night before the burial. [...] Most people at the time were reluctant to do so, and would not have complied with the custom if the clergy had not refused to attend the funeral and say the customary prayers [...] but when the bringing of the corpse for one night to the church became obligatory, mass ceased to be read in the corpse house and was read in the church, instead on the morning of the burial.[66]

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[63] *FJ*, 13 May, 1881.
[64] *FJ*, 31 Jan. 1877.
[65] *FJ*, 8 Apr. 1875.
[66] I.F.C., MS 1834 (County Roscommon, 1974), pp. 226-7.

The informant was interviewed as late as 1973. Further memories indicate that the custom of bringing the corpse to the chapel on the second night of the wake became more popular at the beginning of the twentieth century, in particular in the west and south of the country. In 1935 in County Wexford, an informant stated that she never saw a 'corpse being brought to the chapel here until a few years ago'.[67] Also, the role of the lower clergy is recognised as the main cause for the progressive disappearance of alcohol at wakes in the twentieth century – at least in the areas the informants refer to.[68] James Delaney, collector for the Irish Folklore Commission, referred to a 'law' introduced by the Roman Catholic higher clergy in '1928 or so', providing that the corpse be brought to the local chapel on the night before the burial.[69] A witness to the Ulster Folk Museum also pointed out the role of the Catholic Church in 'insisting on the corpse being left in the church on the second night'.[70] In County Monaghan an informant recalled that the rule was promoted by the Catholic clergy during the epidemic of 1918, to avoid the spread of infection. 'This custom – the witness added – has now become established practice'.[71]

6. Conclusions

Regulations against drinking and more generally against unruly behaviour at wakes and funerals were issued by the Roman Catholic clergy throughout the whole nineteenth century, though their efforts were not directed towards the custom of wakes per se. The renowned excessive drinking that took place on those occasions – as well as at other social gatherings such as marriages – was the primary clerical concern. The need to periodically speak out against this issue was testimony to the constant failure to enforce diocesan statutes. Although the post-Famine period saw a strengthening of the Catholic Church in terms of structural expansion, the 'devotional revolution' was an uneven and constantly re-negotiated process. In this context, funeral customs represented a crucial ground for the instances of the Roman Catholic Church on one hand, and the Catholic lower classes on the other.

'How small, how very small' – had remarked archbishop Doyle in his pamphlet *On Drunkenness,* written in 1829 – 'is the moral of those called the upper ranks over those

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[67] I.F.C., MS 54 (County Wexford, 1935), p. 276.
[68] I.F.C., MS 581 (County Longford, 1938), p. 306.
[69] I.F.C., MS 1834 (County Roscommon, 1974), p. 210; see also I.F.C., MS 107 (County Cork, 1935), p. 491.
[70] U.F.M, MS 63/q3/190; see also U.F.M., MS 63/27.
[71] U.F.M., MS 63/q3/168.

called the lower orders of the people'.[72] The relationship between the higher clergy and the 'lower orders of the people' had not drastically changed in the post-Famine period. Strategies devised by the Catholic hierarchy to put an end to unruly behaviour at wakes were generally unsuccessful, as they were inherently weak. These regulations were to be enforced by the lower clergy. Indeed, confidential correspondence between bishops in the crucial years of the devotional revolution shows that having a 'drink problem' was relatively common among parish priests and curates. The all-important value of alcohol in sanctioning any social transaction, as well as a lax attitude towards drinking, was fully acknowledged by those very clergymen who were in the most direct contact with rural communities. On the other hand, rules such as the forbidding of funeral masses in wake-houses would have deprived the lower clergy of a source of income in a period – especially between 1850 and 1870 – which was considered vital to sustaining the Church. Nonetheless, memories from the Irish Folklore Commission and the Ulster Folk Museum questionnaire on wakes collected during the 1960s and the 1970s indicate that the Roman Catholic clergy were the main agents in the change of attitude towards drink at funerals.

Although IFC memorial evidence is rather scarce, it does suggest that the efforts of priests started to gather strength during the early twentieth century. Particularly after the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922, the strengthening of the connection between religion and national identity saw the Roman Catholic Church gaining a more prominent position in strategic sectors such as education.[73] Changes in population, also, should be taken into account, as the constant depopulation of the rural landscape well into the twentieth century certainly contributed to the disappearing of traditional attitudes towards death and bereavement. Also, the rise of the strong farmer since the post-Famine period, which 'coincided with the growth of clerical power'[74], did imply a gradual change in the notion of respectability - in line with clerical opposition to 'abuses' at wakes.

As regards the nineteenth century, the constant failure of the Roman Catholic clergy to shape funeral customs according to the disciplined and well ordered model proposed by the 1850 synod of Thurles corroborates the image of a 'shaky' and difficult devotional revolution. On the battleground of funeral customs, so tenaciously defended by the Irish lower classes, the Roman Catholic hierarchy were certainly losing their war up to the end of the nineteenth century. Their late victory, whose merit has to be shared with

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[72] *The Right Rev. Dr. Doyle on Drunkenness* (R.I.A., Haliday Papers, Vol. 1596, pp. 4-5).

[73] Kevin Williams, 'Faith and the Nation: Education and Religious Identity in the Republic of Ireland' in *British Journal of Educational Studies,* xlvii, no. 4 (1999), p. 319.

[74] Rosemary Cullen Owens, *A Social History of Women in Ireland, 1870-1970* (Dublin, 2005), p. 167.

deep social changes out of their control, was to come only later, amid the secularizing forces of the twentieth century.

II

Conflicts

2.1 Public Order and Funeral Customs

1. Introduction

'We ought, perhaps, to inform our readers' – wrote William Carleton at the beginning of his tale 'The Party Fight and Funeral' – that the connection between a party fight and a funeral is sufficiently strong to justify the author in classing them under the title which is prefixed to this story. The one being usually the result of the other, is made to proceed from it, as is, unhappily, too often the custom in real life among the Irish'.[1] Although the folklore surrounding funeral customs, as along with writers such as Carleton, stress the relationship between funeral customs and unruly behaviour, wakes and funerals were a direct or indirect cause for outrages. This chapter investigates the actual prominence of funeral-related outrages, in the context of sectarian tension that characterized nineteenth century Ireland.

2. The pre-Famine period

Sectarian tension has been a constant feature of Irish society since the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, some political periods were obviously more tense than others. Given the abundance of issues, the *Freeman's Journal,* the foremost nationalist newspaper in nineteenth-century Ireland, is a precious tool for a year-by year investigation. The years examined are divided into two groups (the pre and post-Famine periods): the former runs up to Catholic Emancipation (1824-1829) with the while the latter deals with the years 1864 (Belfast riots), 1867 (Fenian Rising), 1869 (disestablishment of the Church of Ireland), 1872 (repeal of the Party Processions Act) and 1886 (defeat of the Home Rule Bill). Unfortunately the 1886 issues of the *Freeman's Journal* are not available, so that the nationalist weekly paper the *Nation* has been relied upon for this single year. The data collected is corroborated by a decade of Outrage Papers for the counties of Antrim and Dublin (1836-1846), along with thirty years of constabulary reports (1862-1892).

In examining the *Freeman's Journal* I have taken note of every funeral account published, although accounts of funerals abroad and death notices have not been included. Furthermore, the date and name of the deceased have been registered in order to avoid

[1] William Carleton, *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (New York, 1862), p. 181.

possible repetition, as two accounts of the same funeral, a shorter and a longer one, might be published on different issues. The results of the survey are shown in tables 1 and 2 with a comparison between tables showing that the number of funeral accounts published during the second half of the century was, on average, remarkably higher than in the pre-Famine period. In other words, when a funeral was deemed worthy of attention by the press during the pre-famine period it was only because it had been the background for - according to the contemporary definition- 'a disgraceful scene'. Nearly every issue of the *Freeman's Journal* during the years taken into examination presents a funeral account (whether a very short one or a full article, depending on the importance of the deceased). The pre-Famine period, also, seems to be richer in funeral-related affrays (the results of the inquiry are summarised in table 1).

Table 2. Pre-Famine disturbances (source: Freeman's Journal)

Year	Funerals	Wakes	Affrays
1824	18	0	4
1825	8	1	4
1826	15	0	5
1827	11	0	2
1828	9	0	6
1829	24	0	7

A closer look at the data collected reveals that in 1829 increasing political tensions resulted in a higher number of sectarian clashes related to funeral customs. While relations between Catholics and Protestants in the first two decades of the century were 'strangely mixed in character', after 1820 the situation started to change.[2] The rising sectarian tension reached its peak during the years 1828 (when Daniel O'Connell was elected M.P. for County Clare) and 1829, when Catholic Emancipation was finally granted.[3] Thus our six year survey begins in 1824 and ends in 1829. During the first year (1824), four affrays were reported. In the first case (20 February) a quarrel was sparked by the interference of the sexton of St. Johns churchyard in Limerick stemming from a dispute over the right to perform a Roman Catholic burial service in a protestant churchyard. According to the

[2] Sean Connolly, 'Mass, Politics and Sectarian Conflict, 1823-30', in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland. V, Ireland under the Union, I, 1801-1870* (Dublin, 2000), p. 74.

[3] Patrick M. Geoghegan, *King Dan. The Rise of Daniel O'Connell, 1775-1829* (Dublin, 2008), pp. 261-9.

Limerick Chronicle - reprinted by the *Freeman's Journal*- the sexton claimed 'a monopoly of prayers in that place'. The newspaper also claimed that the sexton was 'very drunk' and that the ceremony proceeded, until the vicar interfered in an attempt to interrupt the ceremony. Eventually a corporal's guard, which was stationed near the churchyard, was seen marching with 'fixed bayonets [...] the crowd stood peaceable and unmoved'. The soldiers, according to this dramatic account, then retreated. A letter from the Protestant bishop of limerick published by the *Limerick Chronicle* provides a soberer account. He stated that 'to speak of the manner in which I was myself treated [...] jostling and pushing, and the opprobrious epithets, 'heretic' &c. [...] I was induced to call on the military [...] but no sooner had they come, I ordered them away, determining with myself to withdraw'.[4] The second case (14 April) arose out of a drunken fight within the funeral party in Dunshaughlin, County Meath although no sectarian tension was involved.[5] The third was a dispute between two families over the burial place of their own relative, in Killeagh, County Cork. 'Numerous parties assembled on both sides' - we read in the report, but the intervention of the sheriff prevented a clash.[6] In the fourth, dated August 13th 1824 (County Clare), the deceased with his three brothers were 'laid by a banditti who knocked them down with stones' when returning from a funeral.[7]

The year 1825 saw a rise in tension. In January, a riot at a funeral in Rathcool resulted in a death, though there is no clear evidence that the assault was caused by sectarian feelings.[8] The second case is related to a wake of a young woman in Loughnavally, Mullingar, where a dispute arose between 'her friends and those of her husband, relative to her clothes'. It was when both parties were quarrelling in a pub after the interment that one of the men was killed.[9] The incident reported on the 17th of June appears to be of a more trifling nature. A party which had been at a funeral were returning home on a cart in Drumcondra. The driver of the cart was under the influence of alcohol and drove so fast that 'the traces broke, the car was upset, and the entire party stretched on the road'. Luckily no one died.[10] On the 10th of October, we read under the headline 'state of the country' that 'the unoffending inhabitants of Castledawson were insulted by an idle Orange parade attending a funeral (a common pretext for public outrage)'.[11] Although this last occurrence cannot be reported as 'outrage', it is nevertheless a sign of tension

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[4] *FJ*, 20 Feb. 1824.
[5] *FJ*, 14 Apr. 1824.
[6] *FJ*, 14 May 1824.
[7] *FJ*, 13 Aug. 1824.
[8] *FJ*, 7 Jan. 1825.
[9] *FJ*, 7 May 1825.
[10] *FJ*, 17 June 1825.
[11] *FJ* 10 Oct. 1825.

involving funeral parades that should be taken into account.

This trend continued during 1826. The paper reports that on the 3rd of July in Donnybrook, during the afternoon divine service of the Church of Ireland, a Catholic funeral reached the churchyard. They were informed that they had to wait until the service was over, according to the Burial Act. The people in the funeral party became 'exasperated at the delay'. They broke the gate of the graveyard open and assaulted a clergyman who was reading the burial service over the body of a Protestant, tearing 'his gown off'. The police arrested two men.[12] The report of the examination at the petty sessions provides, of course, contradictory evidence from the Catholic and the Protestant parties. However, 'It was further stated - we read in the report - that several of the party [the Catholic one, author's note] were intoxicated'.[13] On the 25th of July another sectarian affray took place in the Cabbage Garden burial ground in Dublin. The deceased was a Protestant man married to a Catholic woman. His wife was 'unwilling that he should be interred according to the rites of the established church'. Two men started throwing clay on the coffin in order to interrupt the ceremony. The clergyman performing the service was then hustled by the mob. It is important to notice that the deceased had been a Catholic but converted years before his own death.[14] Again, on the 26th of July, in entering the graveyard of Glasnevin, a group of people belonging to the funeral party and shouting 'bulky, and war-hawk' attacked the police, who managed to contain the riot.[15] Finally, on the 9th of November three people were 'severely beaten' while attending a funeral procession connected to two factions of the parish of Birr.[16]

Given the history of the preceding years, 1827 was remarkably quiet. On the 26th of September Thomas Hartford was killed by a 'party of shoemakers' when returning from a funeral, in Dublin.[17] On 20 October a man was committed to jail for having used 'loud and violent threats' in an attempt to prevent a Protestant clergyman performing the funeral service at the burial of a parishioner in County Carlow. No further details were given.[18] It is also worth noticing that in the month of August, in Enniskillen, a party of Orangemen erected an arch in the main street of the town - a common Orange display of strength - when 'a most respectable Catholic was interred' and an application to the police to remove the arch was made. Given their refusal, only the interference of the parish priest prevented

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[12] *FJ*, 3 July 1826.
[13] *FJ*, 4 July 1826.
[14] *FJ*, 25 July 1826.
[15] *FJ*, 26 July 1826.
[16] *FJ*, 9 Nov. 1826.
[17] *FJ*, 26 Sept. 1827.
[18] *FJ*, 20 Oct. 1827.

the Catholic party from removing the arch. No further disturbance was reported.[19]

1828 was, however, to be another year of high sectarian tension, marked by the increasing political pressure of O'Connell's Catholic Association. It ought to be noted that not all the disturbances caused by funerals or wakes were of a sectarian nature. On the 21st of March, a casual quarrel after a funeral was reported in Limerick.[20] In April a case of rape after a funeral occurred in Clonmel.[21] However, the sectarian tension of the year is chiefly mirrored by two episodes related to burials. At the Baltinglass quarter sessions, in July, the burial of a convert provoked a row between the son of the deceased and 'the persons carrying the corpse'. When the Protestant clergymen arrived a fight broke out and the clergyman was struck by a stone.[22] On the 27th of December a riot after an Orange funeral occurred in Mulabrack. It seems that the riot was the result of an excess of drink. The Orangemen fought 'among themselves' and then attacked several houses of Roman Catholics.[23]

The year of the Catholic Emancipation saw a rise in sectarian affrays at funerals. In January, in the town of Lisnaskea, the funeral of a young man was the pretext for a riot. Some of the people forming the procession were wearing white hat bands, 'in token of the youth of the deceased'. These bands were taken for 'emblems of party and a crowd of persons of an opposite persuasion assembled to chastise those who wore them'.[24] On 4 May the trial of an assault at a funeral held on the 12th of March in County Dublin - the reasons were not disclosed by the newspaper - was reported.[25] On the 30th of May a party of Orangemen in Ballibay, on their way back from a funeral, attacked Protestant and Catholic shops indifferently.[26] On the 9th of May another riot connected with the reading of the Protestant burial service occurred in Crumlin. While the clergyman was reading the service, a group of men interrupted him, attacked the people present and had a 'severe scuffle' with the police. As was reported by the *Freeman's Journal*, 'they would not suffer any clergyman to read prayers there'.[27] A similar affray occurred in August in Irishtown (now the Ringsend quarter in Dublin). The Protestant clergyman felt obliged to perform the burial service of the Church of Ireland, even though the deceased - a boy who died at the

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[19] *FJ*, 22 Aug. 1827.
[20] *FJ*, 25 Mar. 1828.
[21] *FJ*, 8 Apr. 1828.
[22] *FJ*, 9 July 1828.
[23] *FJ*, 27 Dec. 1828.
[24] *FJ*, 17 Jan. 1829.
[25] *FJ*, 4 May 1829.
[26] *FJ*, 30 May 1829.
[27] *FJ*, 9 May 1829.

Hibernian Marine School - was a Catholic. The resulting quarrel was followed by a riot.[28] In the same month a man in Wexford was reported for having quarrelled with the police after having been at a funeral, probably under the influence of drink.[29] A similar incident, this time concerning two men, is reported on the 10th of August in County Wexford.[30]

Other occasions of conflict were reported even though they did not spark any serious clash. For example, in October, as a funeral service would not be allowed within the precincts of the churchyard of St. Thomas in Dublin, the body was set down in the street and the service performed.[31] The evidence for these politically tense period shows a peak in riots connected to funerals in 1829. However, their total number is small. Additionally, alcohol and personal disputes were often contributing factors in these affrays. An examination of ten years of outrage papers reported in counties Dublin and Antrim confirms the scarcity of funeral-related outrages and the analysis of the outrage papers for the years 1836-1846 shows that the number of outrages related to funerals or wakes is relatively small.

This does not apply for Belfast. In 1832 and 1835 contested elections caused substantial party riots.[32] Funerals, consequently, were targeted by both parties as occasions for further attacks. The Inspector General of the police of the province of Leinster who, talking before the committee on Orange Lodges set up in 1835, stated that outrages arising out of Orange processions or Orange funerals 'constantly' happened. Furthermore, he remarked that in the few months before (namely the first months of 1835) there had been 'some horrible outrages upon both sides, not at all confined to one or the other'.[33] Unfortunately, there is no mention of funerals in the 1835 outrage papers left for county Antrim.[34] Also, there are no records left for County Dublin in 1835.

In the following table the outrages committed at public events (such as fairs or marriages), are listed along with outrages related to funerals. Such distinction provides a glimpse of the actual weight of funerals as 'dangerous' public assemblages. A note on the records must be made: during the 1840s, the majority of outrage reports consisted in one page with virtually no details about the circumstances surrounding the outrage. Moreover, for some years (such as 1843 for County Dublin and 1845 for County Antrim) the

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[28] *FJ*, 7 Aug. 1829.
[29] *FJ*, 6 Aug. 1829.
[30] *FJ*, 10 Aug. 1829.
[31] *FJ*, 10 Oct. 1829.
[32] Sean Farrell, *Rituals and Riots. Sectarian Violence and Political Culture in Ulster*, 1784-1886 (Kentucky, 2000), p. 139
[33] *Report from the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Nature, Character, Extent and Tendency of Orange Lodges, Associations or Societies in Ireland; with the Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix*, p. 317, H.C. 1835 (377), xv, 321.
[34] Outrage papers (N.A.I., Antrim 1835, 1/1 - 1/41).

documentation is particularly thin. Finally, the reports for county Dublin from 1844 to 1846 are chiefly -if not entirely- concerned with the monitoring of meetings of the Repeal Association.

Table 3. Pre-Famine disturbances (Outrage Papers)

	Dublin		Antrim	
Year	Public events	Funerals	Public events	Funerals
1835	n/a	n/a	3	0
1836	9	1	7	0
1837	8	1	3	0
1838	6	1	4	0
1839	2	0	2	0
1840	2	0	1	0
1841	2	0	6	0
1842	0	0	4	0
1843	0	0	0	1
1844	0	0	1	0
1845	0	0	1	0
1846	0	0	0	1

As it is clear from a cursory look at the above table, the number of outrages reported at funerals is considerably scarce. Fortunately, for the ones reported some details were disclosed. The first case is reported in 1836 in County Dublin: a party of men armed with bludgeons attacked a funeral party; it is not stated whether it was a 'faction fight' or a clash between Catholics and Protestants.[35] The next year a riot took place at a funeral in a churchyard in Howth, resulting in the arrest of five of the rioters by the local police.[36] In June 1838 a man was assaulted in Clontarf by some people returning from a wake. Remarkably, the report underlines the fact that the man assaulted (and not the party returning from the wake) was drunk.[37] The next affray is reported in County Antrim in 1843. A 'very serious riot' took place in Belfast at the funeral of a Roman Catholic. The deceased was a victim of riots related to the Twelfth of July. According to the report, the riot started when the procession reached a 'neighbourhood' which was a Protestant

[35] Outrage papers, 16 Aug. 1836 (N.A.I., Dublin 1836, 9/32).
[36] Outrage papers, 19 Jan. 1837 (N.A.I., Dublin 1837, 9/24 - 9/32).
[37] Outrage papers, 28 June 1838 (N.A.I., Dublin 1838, 9/75 - 9/95).

stronghold (not mentioned).[38] Again, in 1846 in County Antrim a riot was sparked by a number of Roman Catholics who attacked a party of Protestants proceeding in procession to the funeral of an Orangeman. The orange party 'was beaten' at first but on their way back from the funeral attacked and damaged several houses.[39]

To conclude, it is clear that the heavy consumption of alcohol played an important role in the clashes related to funerals. Fights between opposite parties or generally speaking 'drunken fights' occurred when returning from a funeral procession or a wake. Also, tensions caused by disputes over the right to perform the burial service are worth noting in the years preceding Catholic Emancipation. The number and frequency of incidents related to funerals and wakes, however, appears to be scarcely significant.

3. The post-Famine period

The results of the post-Famine inquiry are summarised in table 3. The first year of the post-Famine period analysed in the *Freeman's Journal* is 1864; a year marked by riots in Belfast caused by the laying of the foundation-stone of a monument dedicated to Daniel O'Connell in Dublin. The riots, given their characteristics, deserve a separate section in the present chapter.

Table 4. Post-Famine disturbances (source: *Freeman's Journal*)

Year	Funerals	Wakes	Affrays
1864	50	0	7
1867	75	1	0
1872	81	0	0
1869	58	0	3
1886	14	0	1

Remarkably, apart from funerals held in Belfast only one case reported by the *Freeman's Journal* is clearly connected with sectarian feelings. In July a Catholic funeral procession in Limerick was subjected to the throwing of 'cleds [sic] and cabbage'.[40] The

[38] Outrage papers, 24 July 1843 (N.A.I., Antrim 1843, 1/19001 - 1/25777).
[39] Outrage papers, 17 Dec. 1846 (N.A.I., Antrim 1846, 1/7485 - 1/8453).
[40] *FJ*, 1 July 1864.

episode was followed by a serious riot between the people attending the funeral and the constabulary. The other cases reported are, conversely, related to alcohol consumption: a 'disgraceful' scene in May in County Tipperary at the funeral of Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, and two affrays involving parties returning from a funeral, both on the 9th of March (a fight in Kilkenny and a manslaughter in County Wicklow). The case of the burial of Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, in County Tipperary, is worth mentioning as he had committed suicide. Outside the gates of the cemetery the cortège was met by 'country people, who at once said they would not allow the remains to be buried'. They actually succeeded in delaying the burial, until the family got the aid of the constabulary.[41]

Finally in July there was an assault in County Louth, committed when the party was returning from a funeral.[42] The year 1867, with its Fenian insurrection, was also characterized by a tense sectarian atmosphere. During the whole year, the only clash reported is related to a dispute over the burial service of a soldier in Mullingar in February.[43] According to the *Freeman's Journal* that year funerals - as well as Fenian funerals - were remarkably quiet. There is no mention of any particular affray related to the funerals of the people who were killed in the insurrection of March.[44] Also later in the year the funerals of the Fenians William Harbinson and William Kerry were followed by a considerable number of people, with no affrays reported.[45] An interesting paragraph regarding funerals related to the disturbances in County Tipperary was published on the 14th of March:

> within the last few days no less than seventeen funerals have passed through the town of Tipperary, the majority of them consisting of those who had lost their lives in the recent disturbances at Ballyhrust, Corrogue etc.[46]

The next year to be taken into account is 1869. Relations between Catholics and Protestants were embittered by the debate over the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, which contributed to a rise in the political temperature.[47] However, this volatile political climate did not provoke a substantial increase in the number of funeral or burial disputes. In May the newspaper reported an incident related to a funeral in Castlebar where a man fell from his horse at full speed when the mourners, returning from the graveyard,

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[41] *FJ,* 6 May 1864.
[42] *FJ,* 20 July 1864.
[43] *FJ,* 22 Feb. 1867.
[44] See also *The Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator,* 8-12 Mar. 1867.
[45] W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland. V, Ireland under the Union, I, 1801-1870* (Dublin, 2000), p. 440.
[46] *FJ* 14 Mar. 1867.
[47] George Boyce, *Nineteenth-Century Ireland. The Search for Stability* (Dublin, 2005), p. 163.

stopped at a local pub.[48] The issue of the 5th of October published an article on the funeral of a man who murdered a woman and then committed suicide (the place where it occurred is not mentioned). The burial was disturbed by 'several hundred persons bearing lanterns, torch lights, &c., who expressed their indignation'. An attempt to kick the coffin into the grave was prevented by the police. When the coffin was lowered 'many of the crowd ran forward, and dashed down upon the coffin clods of earth, stones &c. The greatest excitement prevailed in the neighbourhood until midnight'.[49]

In the same month, there were tensions between Catholics and Protestants at the funeral of Susan Nixon in County Mayo. The deceased was a Catholic teacher at the national school in Newport who had married a Protestant man by the name of William Nixon. When she died she was to be interred in the Nixon's family burial place. 'According to the wish' of those present, the Catholic parish priest Richard Prendergast attended to perform the funeral service. Then the majority of the people in the funeral procession reached the churchyard, which 'was taken possession of by the rural dean and rector who insisted that the priest had no right to perform the funeral service'. 'Matters were becoming very serious', until the quarrel was finally settled by the Presbyterian minister of the parish who acted as a peace maker.[50] It could be worth noticing that in November, in County Cavan, the funeral of a murdered man named Edward Morton (a son of a protestant raised a Catholic by his mother) did not lead to any disturbance - a large body of the Royal Irish Constabulary and a troop of hussars were positioned near the scene of the outrage, by which the funeral procession was intended to pass. However, the 'nearest road to the burial place' was taken.[51] Similarly In July, the funeral of a victim of the Portadown riots proceeded quietly.[52]

During 1872, the year in which William Johnston succeeded in repealing the party procession act and the new Home Rule Association was taking its first steps in the political arena, the situation regarding quarrels at funerals seems surprisingly quiet (excluding the situation in Belfast) as there are no disturbances reported. As the year 1886 is not covered by the *Freeman's Journal,* I analysed the issues of the *Nation,* which being a weekly paper would not, unfortunately, publish a high number of funeral accounts, even though funerals worth mentioning were regularly reported. The *Nation* reported only the case of John McConnell, shot dead during the riots in Belfast (the case is treated in a separate section of this chapter).

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[48] *FJ,* 13 May 1869.
[49] *FJ,* 5 Oct. 1869.
[50] *FJ,* 15 Oct. 1869.
[51] *FJ,*4 Nov. 1869.
[52] *FJ,* 5 July 1869.

In light of the above, it is clear that apart from the peculiar case of Belfast, the excessive consumption of alcohol played an important part in all the cases reported by the *Freeman's Journal*. Similar to the pre-Famine period, disputes over burials did not represent an important cause of disturbances. Further data can be provided by the constabulary statistics and summaries published on a yearly basis since 1848. An analysis of the reports for the years 1862 - 1892 shows that the number of homicides related to funerals was constantly negligible. The results of the inquiry, grouped by region, are summarized in table 5 (see appendix).

Out of the twenty-six murders related to funerals reported in the period examined, the majority of them (20) occurred when the victim was returning from the burial. This is to say that the affray did not have any connection with the mourning of the deceased, as could be the case of funeral riots related to sectarian struggles. One of the leading causes behind these homicides was the heavy drinking among the people present at a funeral or a wake. Even though reports usually describe the context of the murder with a laconic 'after returning from a funeral', in twelve cases during our period it is clearly stated that the murder arose out of a 'drunken quarrel', or that the party was under 'the influence of drink'.[53] Other deserve to be mentioned. One occurred in 1875, in a period of economic slump in which 'the menace of factional struggle was revived'.[54] In 1875 in King's County (now County Offaly) Michael Rigney, a farmer aged 37, was shot dead through a window while he was sitting at a wake. He had returned from America and was blamed for the eviction of another farmer.[55] The only clearly sectarian homicide is related to the 1886 Belfast riots.[56] In September 1886, a man was killed in a drunken quarrel 'about money' arising between the deceased and a party of men when returning from a wake.[57] A sectarian affray, though not fatal, was also reported in Ulster in 1885, in County Londonderry. A 25 year-old shoemaker was shot and wounded after a quarrel between Catholics and Protestants at a wake.[58]

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[53] Constabulary reports (N.A.I, CSO/ICR/2 1884, p. 11) .

[54] David Fitzpatrick, 'Class, Family and Rural Unrest in Nineteenth-Century Ireland' in P.J.Drudy (ed.), *Ireland: Land, Politics and People* (Bath, 1982), p. 48.

[55] Constabulary reports (N.A.I, CSO/ICR/1 1875, p. 5).

[56] Constabulary reports (N.A.I, CSO/ICR/2 1886, p. 3).

[57] Constabulary reports (N.A.I, CSO/ICR/2 1886, p. 4).

[58] Constabulary reports (N.A.I, CSO/ICR/2 1885, p. 11).

4. Funerals in Belfast: 1864 and 1872

As noted by Catherine Hirst in her study on nineteenth century Belfast, funerals in time of sectarian tension would become a fertile pretext for riots. As early as 1832 (during the riots caused by a contested election) disturbances relating to funeral processions provoked such concern that a document to the Lord Lieutenant requesting a judicial inquiry was sent by a number of 'respectable' citizens 'of all religious persuasions'.[59] In their document they outlined two major cases: the murder of an Orangeman and of a Roman Catholic. The funeral of the Orangeman 'was attended by a large body of men adorned with party emblems', while at the Catholic funeral many of the people present wore white scarfs. No riot occurred during these processions, 'yet after that solemn ceremony had been performed considerable disturbances took place'.[60]

In 1864 Belfast witnessed severe riots, sparked by a nationalist procession held in Dublin. On the 8th of August, the city was draped in green for the foundation stone for a new monument to Daniel O'Connell. When the nationalist contingent from Belfast, which attended the demonstration, arrived by train back to the city, it was attacked by an hostile crowd from the Protestant district of Sandy-Row.[61] The following day

> [...] a crowd, variously estimated as to numbers, but probably not consisting of fewer than from 1,500 to 2,000 persons, left Sandy-row, and proceeded, having amongst them a pipe and a couple of drums, which tunes were played, in the direction of Friar's Bush Roman Catholic burial-ground, about a mile distant. They carried with them an ordinary coffin, black in colour, with a cross on the top, and said they were 'going to bury Dan O'Connell'; and as they went along they uttered party cries and imprecations well understood in Belfast.[62]

As they were successfully stopped by an armed ground keeper at the cemetery, they resolved to set the coffin on fire and fling in into the Blackstaff river.[63] The *Irish Times* reports that during the proceedings the music of pipe and drum was to be heard, and there was considerable 'alarm of a collision between opposing mobs'. On that occasion a fight was prevented 'with difficulty'.[64] The riots went on for several days. In an article in the

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[59] Catherine Hirst, 'Politics, Sectarianism and the Working Class in Nineteenth-century Belfast' in Fintan Lane, Donal Ó Drisceoil (eds), *Politics and the Irish Working Class, 1830 - 1954* (New York, 2005), p. 64.

[60] Memorial to Lord Lieutenant, 28 Apr. 1832 (N.A.I., CSORP/1832/Private index/859).

[61] Farrell, *Rituals and Riots*, pp. 159 - 160.

[62] *Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry, 1864, Respecting the Magisterial and Police Jurisdiction Arrangements of the Borough of Belfast,* p. 9 [3466], H.C. 1865, xxviii, 9 (henceforth cited as *Belfast Riots Commission, 1864).*

[63] Farrell, *Rituals and Riots*, pp. 159 - 160.

[64] *Irish Times,* 27 Aug. 1874.

conservative daily newspaper *Belfast Newsletter* on the August 19th (when the riots were at their peak) it was surmised that many funerals went unnoticed for pure partisan reasons. 'it is said - we read - that several times since the rows commenced cars have been seen to go in the direction of Friar's Bush with coffins on them containing the bodies of men who had been fatally wounded in the disturbances'. The reason given by the paper was that each party was doing its best in order to hide casualties on its side, therefore 'making their reverses appear less serious than they really are'.[65] The only serious clash at a funeral occurred at the procession for John McConnell, a Protestant man who had been shot by the constabulary. According to the commissioners, the funeral was 'clearly organized as a display of sympathy on their part'.[66]

News of the intention of forming a large funeral procession reached the authorities before the funeral. They believed that, as party emblems would not be carried, therefore the procession would not be illegal according to the party processions act. It was arranged that the assistant inspector general Major Esmonde, in charge of the forces of police concentrated in Belfast to quell the riots, should stay at the Albert Crescent Barracks - which were positioned between the Protestant Sandy-Row and the Catholic Pond - and be ready to send reinforcements of constabulary in 'any direction'. The Mayor, also, was to be present at the procession.[67]

When the funeral reached Donegall Place, it clashed with a group of Catholics. Gunshots were exchanged while a troop of dragoons and a party of constabulary escorting the funeral intervened.[68] Not only were the Catholics carrying firearms, but also the funeral party .[69] On this occasion, as in future riots, the role of the Protestant clergyman who officiated the funeral in trying to avoid a collision with the opposite party was mentioned.[70] The Roman Catholic clergy generally acted in similar ways. On the August 22nd the main local Catholic newspaper, the *Belfast Morning News,* published a letter signed by the Roman Catholic priest Jeremiah Ryan McCauley who stated that a Catholic priest refused to officiate at the funeral of victims of the riots unless only the immediate relatives of the deceased were present.[71] It was the funeral of the Roman Catholic Francis Heyburn. According to the *Belfast Newsletter* there had been 'an attempt to get up some sort of a demonstration' at his funeral.[72] In the end there were no disturbances as a military escort

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[65] *Belfast Newsletter,* 19 Aug. 1864.
[66] *Belfast Riots Commission, 1864,* H.C. 1865, xxviii, pp. 27, 15.
[67] Thomas Esmonde to Inspector General, 31 Aug. 1864 (N.L.I., Esmonde Papers, MS 5931, p. 25).
[68] see *The Belfast Newsletter*, 19 Aug. 1864, and *The Belfast Morning News*, 19 Aug. 1864.
[69] Thomas Esmonde to Inspector General, 31 Aug. 1864 (N.L.I., Esmonde Papers, MS 5931, p. 25).
[70] *Belfast Newsletter*, 20 Aug. 1864.
[71] *Belfast Morning News*, 22 Aug. 1864.
[72] *Belfast Newsletter,* 20 Aug. 1864.

was sent to attend the funeral 'for precaution sake'.[73] The liberal daily newspaper the *Northern Whig* reported that the actual followers of the hearse were reduced to five.[74] The same policy was adopted for the funeral of James Halliday, another victim of the riots. The action of the Roman Catholic clergymen was coordinated with the magistrates, who made sure that the procession would be protected on the way to the graveyard. Only 'some ten or twelve' men then accompanied Halliday's coffin.[75] This policy was enacted by the authorities along with the clergy of both denominations. Major Thomas Esmonde mentioned in his telegrams to Dublin castle that 'the priests assisted in every way.'[76] His correspondence shows a quick change of attitude towards funerals during the worst days of the disturbances. In a telegram dated August18th, he confidently adopted a *laissez faire* attitude when stating that 'funerals on both to take place - during which no effort or precaution to preserve order shall be offered.'[77]

The very same day gunshots were exchanged at the funeral of the Protestant John McConnell. The affray forced authorities to keep a closer eye on funeral processions. 'I am of the opinion, wrote Esmonde on the 21st of August, that if the Orange party decide on mustering in large numbers as at former funeral the procession ought to be stopped at any price'.[78] A telegram sent to him by sir Thomas Larcom on the August 22nd was also bluntly clear on the matter: 'Funeral processions must be stopped. You need not come to Dublin at present.'[79] According to Esmonde, the Mayor of Belfast 'promised' to him that he would stop any funeral procession by local influence.[80] Also 'respectable' inhabitants were active to calm all the parties involved.[81] The change of policy seemed to have been effective. Apart from a small disturbance only reported by the *Belfast Morning News,* all the other funerals were celebrated quietly.[82] They were all conducted in the same manner: only friends and relatives were allowed to follow the procession, which was duly escorted by the constabulary.[83]

The 1872 riots were ignited by a procession promoted by the Home Rule Association in Belfast. William Johnston had succeeded in having the Party Processions Act repealed, and the nationalists in Belfast were eager to organise an impressive parade on

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[73] *Belfast Newsletter,* 20 Aug. 1864.
[74] *Northern Whig,* 20 Aug. 1864.
[75] *Northern Whig,* 22 Aug. 1864.
[76] Esmonde Papers, 21 Aug. 1864 (N.L.I., MS 5931, n.10).
[77] Esmonde Papers, 18 Aug. 1864 (N.L.I., MS 5931, n. 2).
[78] Esmonde Papers, 21 Aug. 1864 (N.L.I., MS 5931, n.10).
[79] Larcom Papers (N.L.I., MS 7626).
[80] Esmonde Papers, 21 Aug. 1864 (N.L.I., MS 5931, n.10).
[81] Esmonde Papers, 19 Aug. 1864 (N.L.I., MS 5931, n. 6).
[82] *Belfast Morning News*, 20 Aug. 1864.
[83] See *Belfast Morning News,* 25 Aug. 1864; *Belfast Newsletter,* 22 Aug.; ibid., 25 Aug. 1864.

the 15th of August[84] - as impressive as the Orange procession of the Twelfth of July.[85] The result was one of the worst riots on the nineteenth century. A 'trial of strength' - in Hirst's words - between nationalist and the loyalist lower classes.[86] As regards the resulting funerals during the disturbances, they passed over in a relatively quiet way. However, two funeral processions were attacked. The funeral of a man accidentally shot at Hannahstown was held two hours earlier than had been announced in order to prevent a possible clash. [87] According to the *Belfast Morning News*, when the procession still had to reach the graveyard a shot was fired from one of the houses on the route. Then 'some of the persons following the hearse at once proceeded to smash in the house, but were prevented by the arrival of the police'.[88]

The *Belfast Newsletter* reported of the funeral of a man 'who died of consumption', highlighting that the procession was followed by a large number of Catholics wearing green scarves and other ill-defined emblems. This funeral went unhindered but on their return the mourners clashed with a group of Protestants.[89] Finally a small affray also occurred on the occasion of a funeral of another victim of the riots. The cortège was stoned when it reached Northumberland street. The two parties were separated by the police.[90] However, the funeral of the Roman Catholic constable Morton, shot during the riots, did not cause disturbances.[91] As regard the quietness of funeral processions it is important to notice that, as in 1864, rumours that the bodies of the casualties were concealed appeared in the local press. The conservative daily *Belfast Evening Telegraph* reported a story of 'concealment of dead bodies' - underlying the fact that they did not 'vouch for the truth of the statement' - on the 23rd of August.[92]

5. The 1886 Riots.

The 1886 riots 'erupted in the excitement due to the general election and the first home rule bill'.[93] The well known episode was sparked by a clash between a Protestant and a Catholic dock labourer: the Catholic telling the Protestant that 'non of his sort' would find

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[84] 'The feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin'. See Boyce, *The Search for Stability*, p. 150.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence*, p. 170.
[87] Ibid., p. 171.
[88] *Belfast Morning News*, 19 Aug. 1872.
[89] *Belfast Newsletter,* 19 Aug. 1872.
[90] *see Belfast Morning News*, 19 Aug. 1872, and *Belfast Newsletter,* 19 Aug. 1872.
[91] see *Belfast Morning News*, 23 Aug. 1872, and *Belfast Newsletter,* 24 Aug. 1872.
[92] *Belfast Evening Telegraph,* 23 Aug. 1872.
[93] Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence*, p. 174.

a job once the bill had passed. The first clash following this episode led to the death of a Catholic boy named Curran.[94] His funeral was to be the occasion for the nationalists in Belfast to perform a public demonstration against Home Rule. An estimated 'seven thousand men, women and children walked in procession through the city'. There were no clashes thanks to the efforts of the police.[95] His funeral had been

> [...] described as a procession. On the one hand, it does not seem that any bands, banners, or insignia appeared at the funeral; but on the other hand, the exceedingly large attendance, which is said to have amounted to several thousand persons, showed that the fate of the unfortunate lad had excited deep emotions amongst the Catholics of Belfast [...] as the funeral passed there were shouts and defiant cries and a pistol was fired by some one in the funeral procession [...] immediately after the shot a number of people from the procession rushed at the Protestant crowd assembled at the Brickfields, but the police, who were present in force, succeeded in preventing the collision.[96]

The House of Commons report quotes only a few funerals that actually caused disturbances. On the 5th of September the funeral of an Orangeman proceeded along the Falls-Road. 'Stones were thrown, and a serious attack made upon the protestant party, but they appear to have acted with great forbearance, and not to have in any way retaliated'.[97] Remarkably, the Revd Hugh Hanna believed that the funerals of the people who had been shot during the riots were conducted without any display 'calculated to provoke disturbance'. To his knowledge only one funeral party was attacked.[98] Given the role of Hanna as a protestant preacher, whose Sunday school excursions and preaching had been a cause of disturbances since the 1857 riots, his testimony should be treated carefully.[99] However, his efforts - along with other Protestant clergymen - were acknowledged by two resident magistrates before the commissioners.[100] When questioned if funerals had been made use of for party processions in Belfast, the Inspector General of Constabulary Andrew Reed answered with a clear 'no doubt'. But he also stated that to interfere with funerals would be very difficult, adding that 'those cases have in Belfast been very few'.[101] This was due precisely to the interference of the clergy, but also of the local magistrates who were willing to stifle the riotous potential of the funeral of the people shot by the

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[94] Ibid.

[95] Farrell, *Rituals and Riots*, p. 181.

[96] *Belfast Riots Commission, 1886. Report of the Belfast Riots Commissioners,* p. 6 [C.4925], H.C. 1887, xviii, 9 (henceforth cited as *Belfast Riots Commission, 1886*).

[97] Ibid., pp. 15, 49.

[98] Ibid., pp. 355, 389.

[99] Janice Holmes, 'The Role of Open-Air Preaching in the Belfast Riots of 1857' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature,* cii C (2002), p. 59.

[100] *Belfast Riots Commission, 1886,* H.C. 1887, xviii, pp. 340, 368; ibid., pp. 335, 363.

[101] Ibid., pp. 255, 289.

police. Samuel Lawther, justice of the peace for Belfast, was active in recommending that there should be no processions at the funerals.[102]

During the tense days of rioting further deaths, and thus further funerals, took place. None of them seems to have sparked any kind of disturbance. On the fourth of August the funeral of a boy named William Knox, aged 12 years, passed off quietly.[103] A funeral of another boy named 'Black', which also passed off quietly, is reported by the *Belfast Morning News.*[104] Later, on August 10th, other victims were buried, and as reported by the *Belfast Newsletter*, none of the funerals was made the occasion for a demonstration.[105] None of them, but one. The funeral procession of Owen Devlin, a Roman Catholic shot by the police, caused further riots in which another man was killed.[106] The are two different versions of what happened at the funeral, the one reported in the *Belfast Newsletter* and the one by the *Belfast Morning News.* According to the first, the riot was sparked by some of the men present at the funeral, who went into the tramway company stables (opposite the graveyard in Milltown, where the body of Devlin was to be interred) asking for water. In this version the riot has no clear relation with the funeral.[107] According to the second version it was the funeral which was attacked first. When the funeral service had already begun

> a dastardly attack was made by the Orangemen of the neighbouring orange lodge of Andersonstown. Several shots were fired from behind the edges in the neighbourhood at the Catholics, and almost immediately a serious riot began, the men in the employment of the tramway company sallying out of the stables, which are situated opposite the cemetery gates, and attacking the Catholics with pitchforks.[108]

The manager of the tramway company complained of the late arrival of the Irish constabulary on the scene. He stated that the party attacking the tramway depot had firearms. Before the commission of inquiry he stated that it was not those who attended the procession who made the attack, but 'the roughs who accompanied the procession'.[109] There are no other disturbances related to funerals reported by these two newspapers, apart from a mention in the *Belfast Newsletter* of the August 16th regarding a man arrested for

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[102] Ibid., pp. 280.
[103] *Belfast Newsletter,* 5 Aug. 1886.
[104] *Belfast Morning News*, 6 Aug. 1886.
[105] *Belfast Newsletter,* 11 Aug. 1886.
[106] *Belfast Riots Commission, 1886,* pp. 521, 549.
[107] *Belfast Newsletter,* 11 Aug. 1886.
[108] *Belfast Morning News,* 11 Aug. 1886.
[109] *Belfast Riots Commission, 1886,* pp. 521, 549.

having attacked a member of a Protestant funeral party.[110] The *Northern Standard* reported that regarding the casualties 'the precise statistics will never be made publicly known, since both parties evince a desire to conceal the facts'.[111] Furthermore, the efforts of the Roman Catholic clergy in dissuading people from attending funeral processions are documented by nationalist as well as Protestant commentators. [112] It is also true that the main Catholic funeral (John Curran) celebrated during the riots was organised as a national demonstration. There is no evidence that the clergy were active in these early stages of the disturbances in avoiding such a political parade. The Revd John Tohill (who represented the Roman Catholic clergy of Belfast before the commission of inquiry) stated that the funeral of Curran was 'a most orderly procession'. When asked if he knew anything 'about the conduct of these processionists at the Brickfields', where gunshots were exchanged, he answered abruptly that he knew 'nothing personally. I saw the procession only at one point. There is really no use in asking me these irrelevant and silly questions'.[113]

6. Conclusions

Overall, the number of homicides related to funerals is not statistically significant. These results are consistent with the general picture outlined by Richard McMahon in his study of sectarian homicides in pre-famine Ireland, suggesting a continuity in the relative rarity of sectarian homicide in post-famine Ireland.[114] While it is true - writes McMahon that incidents of communal violence 'demonstrate the ability of sectarian feeling to mobilize large numbers of people [...] such animosity rarely gave rise to serious or lethal conflict'.[115] Acts of lethal violence were more the result of the peculiar circumstances than 'premeditated decisions'.[116] In these contingencies we might also include the abundant consumption of alcohol at funerals. Moreover, in this context, the influence of the political climate should not be overestimated; Caroline Conley has already pointed out the 'recreational' aspects of violence in late nineteenth century Ireland, along with the

[110] *Belfast Newsletter*, 16 of Aug. 1886.

[111] *Northern Standard,* 14 Aug. 1886. Similar attitudes were reported in the *Belfast Newsletter* during the 1864 riots and the *Belfast Evening Telegraph* in 1872.

[112] See *Belfast Newsletter,* 4 Aug. 1886; *Belfast Morning News*, 12 Aug. 1886.

[113] *Belfast Riots Commission, 1886,* p. 516.

[114] Richard McMahon, '"The Madness of Party": Sectarian Tension and Homicide in Ireland, 1801 – 1850' in *Crime, History and Societies*, xi (2007).

[115] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

[116] Ibid., p. 17.

importance of alcohol as a triggering factor for violent confrontation.[117]

As regards the case of Belfast, one of the common aspects of the 1864, 1872 and 1886 riots is the centrality of funerals as occasions for sectarian confrontations. The reason why funerals were suitable backgrounds for sectarian fights is the fact that those fights generally emerged out of set-piece confrontations. While most public demonstrations 'did not produce violent conflict [...] exhibition of partisan strength triggered most of the largest sectarian riots of the nineteenth century'.[118] Also, the segregated urban environment of the city of Belfast provided a perfect 'arena' for these confrontations, as party processions - as well as funeral processions - would be forced to follow certain routes, 'invading' the opponent party's public space.[119] The efforts of the authorities and the clergy of different confessions in curbing the riotous potential of funerals highlights the relationship between different classes during the riots. It demonstrates that in a tense political climate the clergy and the middle and higher classes were exercising forms of social control in order to quell the violence of the lower orders. Funeral processions were one of their main targets.

[117] Caroline Conley, *Melancholy Accidents. The Meaning of Violence in Post-Famine Ireland* (Lanham, 1999) pp.17-42.

[118] Farrell, *Rituals and Riots*, p. 52.

[119] Ibid., p. 137.

2.2 The burial acts

1. Introduction

The following chapter focuses on the 'burial question' which led to the 1824 Burial Act; it also attempts to investigate how this act was implemented, until the passing of the new Burial Act promoted by the Catholic M.P. William Monsell in 1868.

2. The 1824 burial act

On 9 September 1823 Arthur D'Arcy, a prominent Dublin citizen, was to be buried in Saint Kevin's cemetery. The Catholic archdeacon of the Dublin archdiocese, Dr. Michael Blake, was to offer graveside prayers when the sexton interrupted. Eventually Blake advised the mourners to pray silently. He subsequently sent a letter of complaint to the *Freeman's Journal*, expressing his dissatisfaction about the occurrence. His grievance was that he had not broken the law. 'Did I attend in my official capacity?' he wrote, later adding, 'I did nothing which any layman might not lawfully do'. The letter was to initiate a controversy which brought the burial question to the fore. The issue at stake was not the right to be interred. It was, more precisely, the right to perform the burial service at the grave in the churchyard according to the rites of a dissenting church or congregation (such as the Roman Catholic Church).[1]

The sexton in St. Kevin's churchyard acted following Archbishop's Magee's orders. Magee gained popularity as a Protestant champion for his 1822 inaugural sermon, perceived as a declaration of religious war in Ireland. His intransigency must be seen in context, at a time of rising sectarian tension and growing power of the Catholic Association. Since the early 1820s, Catholic burials in Protestant churchyards became a matter of dispute. While legally only the Protestant minister had the right to perform the funeral service at the grave, in practice it was a widespread customary acceptance before the 1820s for the Catholic clergymen to perform a 'brief grave service'.[2] This tolerance was put to the test by the bitter sectarian tension of the 1820s. The funeral of Arthur D'Arcy, followed by a large crowd, was the first of these disputes to obtain resonance among the Catholic public opinion.[3] The Roman Catholic clergy of Dublin published a

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[1] John Finlay, *The Office and Duty of Church Warden and Parish Officer in Ireland* (Dublin, 1824), p. 202.

[2] John A. Murphy, Clíona Murphy, 'Burials and Bigotry in Early Nineteenth-Century Ireland' in *Studia Hibernica,* xxxiii (2004/2005), p. 126.

[3] *Southern Reporter*, 11 Sept. 1823; *FJ*, 24 Apr. 1824; *Remarks on the present conduct of several of*

resolution expressing the main argument set forth by the Catholics in the debate. They stated that at the funeral nothing was attempted 'by any Catholic clergyman which was either in substance or in form different from our usual practice on similar occasions.'[4]

Daniel O'Connell did not miss the opportunity to intervene, adding the burial question to the list of Catholic grievances.[5] The burial question was used as 'an issue to galvanise support for his Catholic Association'.[6] O'Connell proposed the erection of cemeteries where Catholics could be interred without any sectarian interference. The Catholic Association also presented a report denouncing the 'persecution' suffered by the Roman Catholics with respect to burials.[7] However, the opening of new graveyards would not immediately resolve the issue. The attachment to old cemeteries - where the remains of their direct ancestors lay - had been a characteristic feature of the Roman Catholic lower classes throughout the entire nineteenth century. In addition, this attachment experienced by the Irish lower classes towards their family graves is mentioned by the IFC manuscripts. 'People' - said a witness interviewed in the 1950s – 'would resent bitterly any interference with a grave that anyone belonging to them was buried in'. Similarly, from different witnesses: 'a big lot of people reckoned a shocking thing for the remains on any stranger to be mingled with the dust and bones of their fathers and mothers'.[8]

In February 1824 the issue was brought to parliament, where Sir Robert Peel defined the burials saga as 'embarrassing'. Eventually the Easement of Burials Bills was read in the House of Commons during the spring of 1824. William Plunket, the Irish Attorney General, introduced the bill in the Commons. He was renowned not only for having supported the 1821 catholic emancipation bill, but also for his personal acquaintance with Archbishop Magee.[9] In his opinion it was true that no existing law forbade the performance of dissenting rites in Protestant churchyards 'however ostentatiously celebrated'. The bill was rushed through the House of Commons in the 'record time of four days'. A week before its passing James Edward Devereux, a Catholic landowner, expressed his concern to Archbishop Murray over the 'obnoxious clause' that required the Roman Catholic clergy to obtain the parson's permission before officiating at

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the Roman Catholic clergy in Ireland: being a reply to the late seditious letter of rev. M.Blake, PP, by a friend of Liberty (Dublin, 1823), quoted by Murphy, 'Burials and Bigotry', p. 127.

[4] *Dublin Evening Post,* 13 Apr. 1824.

[5] Murphy, 'Burials and Bigotry', p. 131.

[6] Patrick Travers, "Our Fenian Dead': Glasnevin Cemetery and the Genesis of the Republican Funeral', in James Kelly, Uáitéar Mac Gerailt, *Dublin and Dubliners: Essays in the History and Literature of Dublin City* (Dublin, 1990), p. 53.

[7] Murphy, 'Burials and Bigotry', p. 129.

[8] I.F.C., MS 1403 (County Wicklow, 1955), pp. 272-3.

[9] William J. Fitzpatrick, *History of the Dublin Catholic Cemeteries* (Dublin, 1900), pp. 13-4.

a burial.[10] This clause, even though it was seen as an act of submission by the Catholic clergy, was considered by other commentators as an actual proof that permission should have been practically granted on a compulsory basis. The Earl of Harrowby pointed out that because a clergyman refusing the right was bound to state his reasons, 'this must be considered a nearly synonymous with his being compelled to grant it'.[11] On the second reading of the bill, Devereux and another Catholic M.P. had presented a petition against the provisions of the bill that would introduce 'enactments more intolerant and obnoxious [...] to test and excite the clergy of the established church to the exercise of an odious jurisdiction.'[12] Their petition did not lead to any amendment of the bill, which was finally passed in April 1824.[13]

However, a glimpse of what could have happened after the introduction of the new law was provided by the Earl of Caernarvon. He pointed out that the bill was difficult to implement due to the fact that in many parishes there was no church, and in even more no resident minister. Therefore, on a practical level it was difficult to provide notice and obtain permission in due time.[14] While the bill was passing through parliament, Daniel O'Connell sent a letter to be read at a Catholic Association meeting, which was then published in the national press.[15] He challenged any lawyer to prove the existence of any previous law which destroyed the Catholic clergy's common law right to officiate at burials. The challenge was never accepted, because there was no actual statute prohibiting the Roman Catholics performing the burial service in parish graveyards.[16] In the same days, writing to his wife, he defined Plunket's bill as a 'rascally' measure.[17]

As the Roman Catholic Bishop James Doyle explained bluntly, 'the priest does conceive this to be an act of submission upon his part, from which his feelings recoil'.[18] Doyle also failed to recollect any particular obstacle posed by the Protestant clergy in order to hinder Catholics burials before the passing of the bill. He admitted that they never perform rites within the churchyard. Also he did not think that, in case of need, given 'the general temper of the Protestant clergy in that diocese' that they would have met any problem. He stated in conciliatory words that Catholics had always received kind treatment

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[10] James Devereux to Murray, 6 Apr. 1824 (D.D.A., Murray papers, 30/38). The file is currently missing.

[11] *Hansard* 2, xi (1824), 177-8.

[12] *Dublin Evening Post*, 3 Apr. 1824.

13 5 Geo IV, c. 25 [Ire] (15 Apr. 1824).

[14] *Dublin Evening Post*, 6 Apr. 1824.

[15] *Southern Reporter*, 23 Sept. 1823; *Dublin Evening Post,* 20 Sept. 1823.

[16] *Dublin Evening Post*, 13 Apr. 1824.

[17] Maurice O'Connell (ed.), *The Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell* (6 vols, Dublin, 1977), iii, 63.

[18] *Report from the Select Committee on the State of Ireland: 1825,* p.181-2, H.C. 1825 (129), viii, 191-2.

from their Protestant counterparts. He never heard of 'any one case where the Catholic clergy were not satisfied with performing the burial service in their own chapel, or in the house of the deceased; and wherever impediments were thrown in their way, or confusion created, it was upon their reciting the prayers that I mentioned before, at the time of the interment, and not upon their attempting to perform the burial service, which I believe truly they do not attempt to perform in any part of Ireland'. They did not wear any particular dress, but only 'short clothes'. He also had never heard that the time of a Protestant divine service celebration had been 'chosen as the time also for a celebration of a Catholic funeral in the churchyard'.[19]

After the enactment of the Burial Bill, the emancipation campaign intensified and the sense of outrage over the new law was 'keenly felt'. In 1827 another case of burial dispute was brought to the attention of Daniel O'Connell. The funeral of a Catholic, a former member of the Catholic Association, was interrupted in Howth by the Protestant minister, who was acting on behalf of the rector (Revd Charles Smith, son-in-law of Archbishop Magee). He ordered the Catholic priest to desist from reciting the *De Profundis*. A fisherman present stepped forward to recite the whole prayer and the Hail Mary, undisturbed. While no riot developed, the son of the deceased wrote to Daniel O'Connell expressing his indignation.[20] The incident was also reported by the *Dublin Evening Post.*[21]

Following Catholic Emancipation the burial question was brought to the fore again by Thomas Wyse, M.P. for County Tipperary, who thought it was opportune to promote the repeal of the act. However, the bill was to remain unchanged until 1868, although occasional disputes over burials were to occur at times of renewed sectarian tension during the entire nineteenth century. The attempts of Protestant rectors to enforce the bill, in the years immediately following Catholic Emancipation, were usually met by a strong hostility, and rarely succeeded in their objective.[22] This *modus vivendi* was already clear in 1825 from the testimony of the Protestant Archbishop of Armagh. He did not believe that in the two years following the approval of Plunket's burial bill there had been any application to any clergyman on the part of the Roman Catholics. Asked if the Roman Catholics had continued to bury as they did before, 'performing the ceremony in a house, and then carrying the body to the grave', he answered affirmatively. He subsequently added that he 'did hear that in one parish the priest had performed the funeral service in the

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[19] Ibid., p. 183, 193.
[20] O' Connell, *Correspondence*, iii, p. 339.
[21] *Dublin Evening Post,* 7 Aug. 1827.
[22] Thomas McGrath, *Politics, Interdenominational Relations and Education in the Public Ministry of James Doyle of Kildare and Leighlin, 1786-1834* (Dublin, 1999), p. 121.

churchyard, and I was written to upon the subject by the clergyman, to know what he was to do. I advised him to pass it over'.[23]

3. The burial act 'set apart': 1824-1868

Following the implementation of the burial bill, it is of interest to ascertain exactly how many cases of refusal were officially registered. In 1868, prior to the approval of the new burial bill, the number of cases that had been communicated to the Lord Lieutenant since 1824 was remarkably small. The report provided only three cases: one recorded in the diocese of Armagh and Clogher, one in the diocese of Dublin and one in the diocese of Cork. Due to the fact that the report was commissioned more than forty years after the passing of Plunket's bill it is likely that the commissioners had to face a lack of documentation. Nonetheless, such a low number of officially reported cases over a period of four decades confirms the theory that permission was rarely withheld; or more probable, that a written permission was rarely asked for. In the three cases aforementioned the reasons adduced by the Church of Ireland clergymen vary. In 1868 Armagh, the curate of the Diocese refused to grant permission to perform a Wesleyan Methodist burial service in the parish of Kilmore. He explained that he considered 'the mode of performing such service to be objectionable [...] as a rule, I do not desire my churchyard to be made use of for the display of religious practices of which, at the same time, I, in my conscience, disapprove.' [24]

The second case, concerned the burial of a member of a 'Protestant dissenting congregation' was reported in 1856, in the parish of Monkstown. The incumbent explained his reasons in subtle terms, stating that, 'in giving permission to a person not authorised by the Church to officiate in my churchyard, I make myself more or less responsible for what he may say or do in consequence of that permission'.[25] With remarkable rhetorical wit he stated that, as the dissenting ministers had 'no fixed liturgy', he should have had to rely on the personal qualifications of each minister requesting permission and if so granted on this

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[23] *Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into the State of Ireland, more Particularly with Reference to the Circumstances which may have led to Disturbances in that part of the United Kingdom. 24 March--22 June, 1825,* p. 361, H.C. 1825 (521), ix, 610.

[24] *Burials in Churchyards (Ireland). Return of all Written Statements of the Causes of Refusing Permission to any Clergyman or Minister of any Church or Congregation, not being of the Established Church of Ireland, to Officiate in any Churchyard at a Funeral, under the Provisions of Geo.4, c.25, together with Copies of all such Documents Transmitted to the Lords Lieutenant since the Passing of the said Act*, 1, H.C. 1867-68 (370), liii.

[25] Ibid., pp. 3, 60.

'personal' basis, was bound to be offensive. In the third case - which occurred in County Cork in 1860 the incumbent simply claimed - whether in *bona fide* or not is hard to tell - that his main concern was due to a lack of knowledge of the law. The permission to a Presbyterian minister to officiate at the parish churchyard was withheld simply because the incumbent did not know that he could grant a burial permission in his churchyard for people professing different religions. Moreover, his letter of justification is interesting because he hints at the *status quo* regarding burials, which confirms that a silent tolerance was customary:

> My position as junior curate of St. Anne, Shandon, may perhaps considered sufficient reason for my never having received such an application before. However that may be, as I had not, and as I was aware that the Roman Catholic Clergy and Wesleyan Methodist ministers had buried their dead there without asking anyone's leave, I may be excused for following that course which, at the moment, appeared the best.

He finally explained that he did not strictly 'interdict' the Presbyterian minister from officiating: more precisely, he did not think he had the authority for granting any permission.[26] The customary procedure - namely not asking for written permission from the curate - would have been probably welcomed. Also noteworthy is that the Church of Ireland bishop of Cork had sent a letter directly to the Lord Lieutenant outlining the main points of the quarrel. According to his letter the curate did not send him any written declaration stating the causes of withholding the permission, as required by the 1824 Burial Act - an occurrence that might confirm the actual ignorance of the law on the part of the curate. Other cases reported by the press in the few years preceding are not quoted in the commissioners' report. In 1865 the *Dublin Evening Mail* reported a case of refusal in the graveyard of Derriaghy, Belfast, where the sexton met the funeral party at the gates of the cemetery. He intimated that he had instruction from the minister not to allow 'any religious service' to be conducted at the grave or within the grounds of the churchyard. The service was conducted outside the cemetery prior to the burial.[27]

In 1863 a clergyman of the parish of Clonoulty sent a letter to the *Freeman's Journal* complaining that the Protestant rector of the parish 'took into his head' that the Catholic priest should have asked his permission to officiate at the burial of Catholics in the old Catholic burial ground, threatening to take legal action if the Catholic clergy proceeded regardless. The parish churchyard was, of course, in control of the Church of Ireland. The clergyman admitted 'that the obsolete letter of the law gives a certain

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[26] Ibid., pp. 5, 62.
[27] *Dublin Evening Mail*, 11 May 1865 (Larcom Papers, N.L.I., MS 7582).

dominion over the graveyard to the Protestant rector is [...] too true'. He claimed that the right to perform the burial service was due to the Catholic clergy, using the most common argument since the 1824 controversial burial bill. Namely, that for a long time ('nearly sixty years') the Catholic priests of the parish had been attending and officiating at the interment of their parishioners 'without hindrance of any kind'. The Protestant rector answered that he could not find evidence for the Catholic priest's statements. Furthermore, he added that in the past the Protestant rector stood by at the grave, thus giving his sanction to the act.[28] The Roman Catholic priest then quoted diligently eleven different cases, reported in the period spanning from 1839 to 1859, when he or other clergyman officiated at the interment of Roman Catholics with no permission from or presence of the Protestant rector.[29]

Interestingly, Protestant clergymen attempting to thoroughly enforce the 1824 Burial Act seemed to represent fairly isolated cases. However, a Presbyterian priest, Revd Thomas Lyttle - who was forbidden to officiate over the remains of a Presbyterian in the parish of Donnybrook - stated that refusal in granting the permission to officiate were 'becoming the usage and the rule'. The same Thomas Lyttle publicly rejected the insinuation that he was acting in collusion with 'Those who seek the disendowment of the Established Church'.[30] The case in Donnybrook was the subject of tense debate in the press. In a letter to the *Irish Times* a man from Naas reported a similar case, stating that Donnybrook was not the only place where such a 'feeling' existed. The letter subsequently appeared in the *Daily Express*[31] and claimed that 'during the last three or four years', many members of the Church of Ireland in Dublin and throughout the south of Ireland had been constantly excluding Presbyterians from parish graveyards 'in all directions'. Since the Presbyterian minister was writing in 1867, the 'last three or four years' were a period of increased sectarian tension after the relative political tranquillity of the 1850s. In those years the 'Catholic grievances', the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland and the educational question were among the main political issues of the day. The Church of Ireland clergy felt, in the Presbyterian minister's words, the need to 'assert their dignity and rights in this miserable and odious way' signalling that sectarian tension was reaching a pitch similar to that witnessed during the 1820s.

A survey of the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Northern Whig* during the five years preceding the passage of the new burial bill demonstrated a small number of cases reported

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[28] *FJ*, 4 Mar. 1863.
[29] *FJ*, 4 Mar. 1863.
[30] *Daily Express*, 13 Nov. 1867 (Larcom Papers, N.L.I., MS 7582).
[31] *Daily Express*, 13 Nov. 1867 (Larcom Papers, N.L.I., MS 7582).

by the press. During the years 1863-7 the Catholic newspaper reported four cases of dispute over the reading of Catholic burial services in parish churchyards. In 1863, only the aforementioned case in Clonoulty was reported. In September 1864 a Catholic burial service was forbidden in the town of Fethard (County Tipperary), an occurrence which led to a resolution published by the town commissioners, in which they resolved 'never to be silent when our sacred rights are invaded by prejudice or intolerance from any quarter'.[32] In 1867 a controversy was reported in Enniskillen, where the rector forbade Catholics to read their burial service in the parish churchyard. Remarkably, the *Freeman's Journal* commented on the occurrence underlying the relative rareness of such cases. 'By law the Protestant rector has charge of the graveyards, where, from time immemorial, Catholics had been buried. In most cases, however, 'the right' is rarely enforced in an obnoxious sense. Few of those unseemly conflicts which take place in England, on the burial of dissenters, occur in Ireland'.[33] Nonetheless, the case was fully reported before the House of Commons by the Catholic M.P. William Monsell as an example of grievance suffered by dissenters.[34] In February 1867 another case was reported from Mullingar (County Meath) regarding a Protestant who converted to Catholicism a short period before his death. At the graveyard, the Protestant clergyman read the Church of Ireland service over the remains of the soldier, as he was asked to so 'by the commanding officer'. Disturbances were avoided by the Catholic priest, who 'remained to pray for the deceased, to calm the crowd, and to advise them to go away in quiet to their homes.'

The cases reported by the *Northern Whig* are even less numerous. A letter published in May 1867, relating to the new burial bill was signed 'A Methodist', we read that 'for a very long time the dissenter of Ireland have been subject to a serious amount of annoyance in connection with the interment of members of their churches in parish graveyards'.[35] In November of the same year the newspaper reported the Donnybrook case, stating that cases of refusals 'though not unprecedented, had been exceedingly rare until lately'.[36] The case in Mullingar quoted by the *Freeman's Journal* was the last main dispute before the first draft of a bill concerning burials in Ireland was moved in the House of Commons in November 1867.[37]

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[32] *FJ*, 23 Sept. 1864.
[33] *FJ*, 31 Jan. 1867.
[34] *Hansard* 3, cxci (1868), 1454.
[35] *Northern Whig*, 22 May 1867.
[36] *Northern Whig*, 7 Nov. 1867.
[37] *Dublin Evening Freeman*, 27 Nov. 1867.

4. The new burial bill

William Monsell, in moving the second reading of this bill, contended that the 1824 burial act had 'practically been set aside',[38] clearly indicating the causes of its practical uselessness. Firstly, the Roman Catholic clergy would not ask for permission, for the reasons already given by Bishop Doyle in his testimony before the 1825 Commission on the State of Ireland. Secondly, when they had actually asked, they had not been granted permission 'in many instances' by the Protestant curate. He then quoted various recent cases of burial refused in both Enniskillen and Dublin. The main point made by Monsell was that the power of refusal was intended to be used only in special cases, leaving implied that for the majority of burials, permission should have been granted as a rule.[39]

The *Irish Times* downplayed the importance of the burial bill, writing that there was no real need for it. 'The bill is almost unnecessary, they wrote, for in very rare cases indeed does a rector prohibit the performance of funeral service over one not of his own communion'.[40] This affirmation was typical of the conservative press of the time. The anti-Catholic *Dublin Evening Mail* wrote that 'the very few instances in which an objection has been made prove that the grievance is not a great one'.[41] Frequent or not, it is clear that cases of refusal were becoming a sore point for Catholic and Presbyterian public opinion. On the other hand the Protestant minority saw the burial question as part of a wider attack on the rights of the Church of Ireland. In a bitter sectarian political climate, the *Daily Express* gave voice to its sense of besiegement. Monsell's bill was described as a law that formed 'a part of an organized and systematic attack on the Established Church in Ireland. [...] but no person who has watched the movements of Cardinal Paul Cullen and Archbishop Manning can doubt that they aim at complete supremacy in these islands.'[42] Before the House of Commons John Vance, M.P. for Armagh, defined the measures proposed by the Catholic M.P.s as 'papal aggression bills'. The first of these measures to be quoted was the burial bill, 'which would seriously interfere with the rights of the clergy'.[43]

A prominent position in the debate was taken by the Presbyterian Church. Writing to Lord Mayo, Chief Secretary of Ireland, the Catholic Archbishop of Armagh Michael Kieran stated that dissenters in Ireland were 'much more interested in the matter (so far as I

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[38] Larcom Papers (T.C.D., MS 1710/54).
[39] Larcom Papers (T.C.D., MS 1710/54).
[40] *Irish Times*, 10 Apr. 1869.
[41] *Dublin Evening Mail*, 4 Jan. 1868.
[42] *Daily Express*, 8 June 1867 (Larcom Papers, N.L.I., MS 7582).
[43] *FJ*, 31 Oct. 1867.

can judge) than the Roman Catholics, and more anxious to invade our burial grounds'.[44] In a previous letter he stated that in the years he spent as a parish priest, the Roman Catholics were 'indifferent about the matter'.[45] Furthermore, the fact that 'hardship' had been inflicted especially on the Presbyterians was underlined by Monsell himself when reading the burial bill for the second time in 1868.[46] Following the occurrence in Donnybrook, the presbytery of Dublin met in November 1867, in order to discuss the issue. Among the causes of conflict with the authorities there was a 'good deal of misapprehension' as to the power which 'the law of the land' gave to the established church. After 'considerable conversation' a committee of inquiry was finally formed.[47]

At the beginning of the following year the committee sent a letter to the Lord Lieutenant, with the purpose of drawing the attention of the government on the dissenters' burial issue. In their opinion, refusals and occasions of conflict were actually 'increasing, rather that diminishing'. They quoted two recent cases of refusal, concluding their argument stating that the liberty to celebrate divine service at the burial of the dead was not 'a favour to be sought, but a right to be enjoyed'.[48] Afterwards they met the Lord Lieutenant in the presence of Lord Mayo, who was bluntly clear in stating that, given the 'questions of property put forward' he could not give his positive pledge on the issue.[49] His attitude was criticized by the *Dublin Evening Mail*, which attacked his lack of knowledge on the subject and his 'vaguely talking of property'. When pressed by the moderator, Lord Mayo explained that the burial bill was not about the rights of property, but vaguely enough about 'the right of prevention, which is one of the rights of property'.[50]

The same argument was stated by conservative M.P. Charles Newdegate before the House of Commons, making clear that 'under the plea of grievance' the Catholic Church was actually committing constant aggression upon the right of property of the Church of Ireland.[51] In the *Dublin Evening Mail* the new burial bill was described as the first step towards a world in which 'all religion, loyalty, and law [would be] scandalised by processions to bury Fenian 'martyrs''.[52] The feeling of being under siege was also expressed by letters sent by clergymen such as the Archdeacon of Kilmore, who was favourable to a law that would give increased facilities of burial to any protestant

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[44] Michael Kieran to Lord Mayo, 27 May 1867 (Mayo Papers, N.L.I., MS 11,231).
[45] Michael Kieran to Lord Mayo, 21 May 1867 (Mayo Papers, N.L.I., MS 11,231).
[46] *Hansard* 3, cxcii (1868), 1380.
[47] *Northern Whig*, 7 Nov. 1867.
[48] W. Fitzpatrick to Lord Lieutenant, 3 Jan. 1868 (Mayo Papers, N.L.I., MS 11,231).
[49] *FJ*, 4 Jan. 1868.
[50] *Belfast Newsletter*, 4 Jan. 1868.
[51] *Dublin Evening Mail*, 12 June 1868.
[52] *Dublin Evening Mail*, 4 Jan. 1868.

denomination. However, when it came to Roman Catholics the perspective was dramatic, as the approval of Monsell's bill may have resulted in 'wholesale breaches of the peace' in many parts of Ireland.[53]

5. Conclusions

The new burial bill was finally passed in 1868 categorically stating that no written permission was required.[54] However, the text of this bill went through different stages, during which the general permission became more and more elaborate. The most striking observation from the Church of Ireland point of view was that prayers were permitted to be read at the burial 'provided always, that such prayers shall not be read nor such burial service performed during the time of the celebration of Divine Service in said Church or Chapel'.[55] It was the only concession made to a Church which was on the road to disestablishment.

[53] *Dublin Evening Mail,* 7 Jan. 1868.
[54] *Burials (Ireland). A Bill to Amend the Law which Regulates the Burials of Persons in Ireland not Belonging to the Established Church,* p. 1, H.C. 1867 (109), i, 503.
[55] *Burials (Ireland). A Bill to Amend the Law which Regulates the Burials of Persons in Ireland not Belonging to the Established Church,* p. 1, H.C. 1867-68 (5), i, 239.

2.3 Body snatchers and the 1832 Anatomy Act

1. Introduction

The 1832 Anatomy Act, although contributed to the demise of the body snatching trade, had a deep and lasting influence on popular attitudes towards death. This chapter attempts to shed light on the peculiarities of the Irish case, from the heyday of body snatching to the late nineteenth century.

2. Body Snatchers and the 1832 Anatomy Act

IFC manuscripts related to body-snatching refer to the occurrence of 'battles' between body snatchers and bereaved relatives[1] as well as the fear of body-snatchers, who were thought to be strangers coming from distant places.[2] Given the presence of the major hospitals, Dublin , was a centre of the illegal trading of bodies for medical dissection and several graveyards were regular targets. The Bully's Acre cemetery was renowned to be the favourite target of the resurrection-men, whose trade extended beyond Dublin – medical schools in Edinburgh and Glasgow were also occasional destination for bodies collected in Ireland.[3] Bully's Acre was the only place in Dublin where bodies could be buried without paying a fee: as such it was also a common destination for the burial of the poor.

The destitute state in which the graveyard was in during the 1820s had been recalled by Walter Thomas Meyler, who visited the cemetery as a child. He well remembered the desecrated graves, 'strewn over in several places by shreds of winding sheets'.[4] A state confirmed by anatomist James Richard Bennett, who highlighted how 'resurrection-men' took so little precaution in opening the graves in Bully's Acre that 'they never took the trouble of filling the graves after they extracted the bodies. It was universally known in Dublin, that all the bodies, buried in that particular burial ground, were taken up a few hours after they were interred'.[5] Similarly in 1830 the *Lancet* bluntly stated that it was possible to obtain bodies from Bully's Acre 'with great facility' as there was no watch held[6].

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[1] I.F.C., MS 1403 (County Wicklow, 1955), p. 261.
[2] I.F.C., MS 1403 (County Cavan, 1955), p. 257.
[3] James Bartlett, 'Friar's Bush Cemetery' in *History Ireland*, xii, no. 4 (2004), p. 10.
[4] Sean Murphy (ed.), *Bully's Acre and Royal Hospital Kilmainham graveyards: History and Inscriptions* (Dublin 1989), p. 11.
[5] *Report from the Select Committee on Anatomy,* p. 54, H.C. 1828 (568), vii, 54.
[6] Vivien Igoe, *Dublin Burial Grounds and Graveyards* (Dublin, 2001), p. 34.

However, before the select committee on anatomy surgeon and anatomist James Macartney explained that during the first months of 1828 indignation started to arise among the lower classes. A rumour about children being kidnapped for dissection also was spread in Dublin. The result of this fearful atmosphere was that resurrection-men were 'frequently' assaulted. 'I may add' - concluded Macartney – 'that lately also, even medical men and medical students were assailed by the people, and that at present the resurrection men go to a great number of graveyards, some distance from Dublin, provided with firearms, and are accompanied frequently by several students armed in the same manner'.[7]

Dublin was the easiest place where medical schools could quench their thirst for bodies, a fact recognised by more than one medic testifying to the House of Commons report on anatomy.[8] According to John Fleetwood, the Bully's Acre cemetery was a rich source of anatomical material and the background for, 'several well documented accounts of raids, reprisals, pitched battles and even humorous incidents'.[9] The contemporary press did report on body snatching (as well as 'burking') well beyond the passing of the Anatomy Act.[10] Rumours, also, played a part in fostering fear as in 1836, when the family of a young woman who had been buried in Dublin 'received information, whose accuracy [they]could not doubt, that a party of surgeons were even then setting out to disinter the body of [their] beloved girl'. They mounted a guard, disinterring the body and filling the grave with quick lime.[11]As regards to material from the Irish Folklore Commission, the majority of accounts come from the city of Dublin or from close districts such as Leixlip.[12] A detailed account of a gun fight was recorded in County Louth:

> There was a story told about a boy that died and he was buried in some graveyard of one side of Ardee. The body-snatchers were raiding graves at the time, and the boy's father sat up at night to watch his grave. He had a loaded pistol, and he hid somewhere in the graveyard. About the middle of the night a man came and started to open the dead boy's grave. The boy's brother fired in his direction - I wouldn't say that he actually meant to kill him - but the bullet hit him, and he was shot dead.[13]

A further account tells of a fight in a non-identified graveyard close to the village of Drumcondra (Dublin), where a man watching a grave shot a body-snatcher as he sneaked

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[7] *Report from the Select Committee on Anatomy,* p. 107, H.C. 1828 (568), vii, 107.
[8] Ibid., p. 109, 109.
[9] John Fleetwood, *The Irish Body Snatchers. A History of Body Snatching in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1988), pp. 40-3. See also James Moores Ball, *The Sack-Em – Up Men. An Account of the Rise and Fall of the Modern Resurrectionists* (Edinburgh, 1928), p. 148.
[10] *Tuam Herald*, 28 Dec. 1839; see also *Tuam Herald*, 18 Feb. 1843; *FJ*, 23 June 1837.
[11] P.R.O.N.I., D1125/2/1
[12] I.F.C., MS 1834 (County Kildare, 1973), p. 31.
[13] I.F.C., MS 1403 (County Louth, 1955), p. 268.

into the graveyard. According to the same informant, body-snatchers were 'a shocking pest in the country', compelling relatives and friends to be in a 'state of panic' for three or four days after the burial.[14] Fear of body-snatching did not abruptly end after the introduction of the 1832 Anatomy Act. However, popular fear of dissection subsequently focused on the workhouse and its related institution, such as the workhouse hospital.[15]Hostility towards dissection, well documented in Ireland as well as England,[16]was understandably minimized by medical men: as early as 1835 William Stoker, employed at the Cork fever hospital, stated that dissections were carried out in the majority of the hospitals provided that the friends of the deceased did not object. 'I do not believe', he stated, 'that such allowance has deterred the working classes from availing themselves of the benefits of these institutions'[17] Nonetheless, fear of dissection carried out in sanitary institutions was evident when hospitalization was needed the most, such as in times of epidemics.[18] According to Ruth Richardson, the poor's anxiety – at least in Britain - was well founded. Illicit appropriation of deceased paupers from hospitals was widely adopted, 'with or without the knowledge of hospital authorities'.[19] Evidence also suggests that a similar pattern might have been the rule in Ireland too.

3. The Galway workhouse case

In 1878, the Galway workhouse was at the centre of a scandal related to the sale of paupers' bodies to medical schools for dissection. The news broke when at Bushy Park cemetery a Catholic chaplain 'found he was performing the burial service over the debris of the corpse' of a woman 'named Gannon'.[20] The master of the workhouse stated that there were two corpses in the workhouse, one of which was unclaimed, and that the 'snatcher' from the college took the wrong one. However, 'the general opinion' – wrote the *Nation* – 'is that it was not a mistake, but a discovery, and that very often the clergyman has performed the rites of the Church to an empty coffin'.[21] The Galway Board of

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[14] I.F.C., MS 1403 (County Louth, 1955), p. 269.

[15] John Knott, 'Popular Attitudes to Death and Dissection in Early Nineteenth Century Britain: the Anatomy Act and the Poor' in *Labour History*, no. 49 (1985), p. 18.

[16] *Nenagh Guardian*, 3 Nov. 1852.

[17] *First Report from his Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland, with Appendix (A.) and Supplement,* p. 449, H.C. 1835 (369), xxxii pt.i, 462.

[18] Hugh Fenning, The Cholera Epidemic in Ireland, 1832-3: Priests, Ministers, Doctors' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, lvii (2003), p. 84.

[19] Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (London, 1988), p. 104.

[20] *FJ,* 3 Apr. 1878.

[21] *The Nation*, 6 Apr. 1878.

Guardians had passed a resolution twelve years before the occurrence in which it was indicated that the unclaimed remains of paupers who died in the workhouse hospital should have been handed over to the Queen's College dissection school, and 'the interments should take place with due Christian rites'.[22]

The board of Guardians set up a committee to investigate the occurrence and according to their findings, the provisions of the Anatomy Act had indeed been 'violated', as the Board had not been informed of the removing of unclaimed bodies to the Queen's College for dissection. Only three guardians were aware of the procedure, while the Local Government Board Inspector 'directed the master [of the workhouse] to hand over the unclaimed remains of paupers dying in the workhouse to the dissecting school'. According to the *Galway Vindicator*, the master of the workhouse acted with the tacit knowledge of the board inspector as well as under 'the intimidation of the medical officer of the workhouse'. As a professor of anatomy at the Queen's College in Galway Joseph Pye, the medical officer, was also the direct beneficiary of the delivery of bodies for dissection.[23] However, when examined, the master did not blame Joseph Pye. Instead he referred to Pye's predecessor, Dr. John Cleland, who allegedly exerted pressure on the master a decade before. 'I was throwing difficulties in the way of the doctor' – stated the master- 'and the doctor complained [that I] was trying to upset the medical school of the college'. Also, Dr. John Cleland had told him that he had 'written to Dublin or elsewhere on the subject, and that if he (the master) valued his situation, he should offer no further opposition'.[24] As for Dr. Joseph Pye, he wrote a letter in which he stated that the master of the workhouse acted under instructions from the local government board. When the board held a public meeting in April 1878 to discuss the finding of the committee of inquiry, the members of the committee stated that they had 'nothing to do' with Dr. Pye's statements.

The committee's report , which finally called for stringent regulations to prevent similar 'irregularities' from happening again also suggested that unclaimed bodies be given to the Queen's College for dissection after which they were to be buried with Christian rites, was not adopted. The real issue in the heated debate was the state of the body of Mrs Gannon after dissection (a 'bundle of disgusting matter', in the chaplain's words).[25] Medical dissection, as a practice that would mutilate the body, was viewed as a gross assault upon the integrity and identity of the body *and* upon the repose of the soul.[26]

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[22] *FJ*, 1 Apr. 1878. See also *The Nation*, 6 Apr. 1878.
[23] See 'Medical Schools and Hospitals in Ireland' in *The British Medical Journal*, ii, no. 1186 (1883), p. 596.
[24] *Galway Vindicator*, 3 Apr. 1878.
[25] *FJ*, 1 Apr. 1878.
[26] Richardson, *Dissection and the Destitute*, p. 76.

Instead of adopting the resolution of the committee of inquiry, the Board of Guardians issued a resolution forbidding the provision of bodies from the dead house to the Hospital altogether.[27] The chaplain who witnessed the occurrence welcomed the new regulations as a means to restore confidence in the local hospital and prevent religion 'being made a mockery of'.[28] Finally, the majority of the Board of Guardians did not 'place a record of censure' on the books of the Union against 'either party'.[29]

According to the chaplain of the workhouse John Carolan, after the news had broken people refused to go into the hospital. 'Public feeling', reported the *Freeman's Journal*, 'is very strong'.[30] The *Galway Vindicator* also reported that 'a sort of feeling had been amongst the people that bodies were removed from the hospital, but they never knew what was the actual practice'.[31] Pressure from the Roman Catholic Church came from John McEvilly, bishop of Galway, who forbade the celebration of mass in the workhouse 'until reparation was made for the outrage'.[32] Remarkably, the *Freeman's Journal* pointed out that the Anatomy Act was not binding 'on any board', and that it was 'quite an optional matter to comply with it'.[33]As a matter of fact the Anatomy Act did not enforce the provision of bodies for dissection, it only allowed so.[34] Regulation of such provision, however, did fall on the boards of guardians, under the supervision (after 1872) of the local government board.[35]

That the workings of the Anatomy Act were kept out of the public eye is also suggested by further cases in 1854, as well as during the 1880s, when the supply of subjects for dissection was still a problem for medical schools in Ireland.[36]In 1854, a member of the south Dublin Union Board of Guardians reported the case of a dead pauper whose body was 'sold for dissection'. The chairman stated that the 'giving up of the bodies had been for a long time sanctioned by the board'. As a matter of fact, as a member of the board was to underline, it had been 'tacitly sanctioned'.[37] Suspicion was raised about the Cork district lunatic asylum in 1884 by M.P. Timothy Michael Healy, who claimed that

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[27] *The Nation*, 13 Apr. 1878.
[28] *FJ*, 6 Apr. 1878.
[29] *Galway Vindicator*, 6 Apr. 1878.
[30] *FJ*, 5 Apr. 1878.
[31] *Galway Vindicator*, 3 Apr. 1878.
[32] *Galway Vindicator*, 3 Apr. 1878.
[33] *FJ*, 4 Apr. 1878.
[34] Anatomy Act, 1832.
[35] Robins, *The Miasma*, p. 231.
[36] *Queen's Colleges (Ireland) Commission. Reports of the Commissioners Appointed by His Excellency John Poyntz, Earl Spencer, K.G., Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, to Inquiry into Certain Matters Affecting the Well-Being and Efficiency of the Queen's Colleges in Ireland [...]*, p.59 [C.4313], H.C. 1884-5, xxv, 67. See also John F. Fleetwood, 'Dublin Private Medical Schools in the Nineteenth Century' in *Dublin Historical Record*, xlvi, no. 1 (1993), p. 39.
[37] *FJ*, 3 Mar. 1854.

bodies for dissection were allegedly supplied from the asylum 'to an extent which suggests something more than a just discrimination'. The Chief Secretary's answer was dismissive, and no further inquiry was held.[38] One year later in Dublin a resolution against the cession of bodies of deceased paupers for dissection 'without application to the board' was defeated by fourteen votes to eight .[39] Finally, in 1889 the case of the body of a woman sent for dissection 'against the knowledge and wishes of her relatives' was brought to the attention of the public.[40]

4. Conclusions

Fear of body snatching weighed heavily on the popular mind, as IFC manuscripts testify. However, in Ireland the trade in bodies was concentrated in Dublin and in the surrounding areas, where medical schools were based,. The introduction of the anatomy act focused popular fears on the medical class and the poor law machinery, in turn adding to the stigma of a death in a workhouse the prospect of having one's body dissected. Even though the Anatomy Act gave permission to dissect only 'unclaimed' bodies – thus providing apparent protection for those paupers who had friends and relatives - Ruth Richardson has pointed out the prevalent financial meaning of the word 'unclaimed' bodies as intended by the Act. To claim a body from a workhouse meant to provide for its burial, 'assuming responsibility for funeral costs – something many people in the poorest realm of life self-evidently could not afford to do'.[41] Whether or not a high a number of 'claimed' bodies was sent for dissection in Ireland is impossible to ascertain. It is true, however, that public opinion, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, did not conceal a profound distaste for dissection. In a hostile cultural climate, the medical establishment exerted pressure in order to maintain the supply of anatomical subjects. Thus, provision of bodies for dissection was to be often kept out of the public's eye, with the tacit knowledge of many of the authorities involved.

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[38] *FJ*, 26 Mar. 1884.
[39] *FJ*, 11 June 1885.
[40] *FJ*, 4 Apr. 1889.
[41] Richardson, *Dissection and the Destitute*, pp. 123-4.

2.4 Wakes in times of epidemics

1. Introduction

This chapter investigates the relationship between the lower classes and the sanitary authorities during the recurrent epidemics of the pre-Famine period. Moreover, it analyzes the impact of the 1878 Public Health Act, particularly its effectiveness against the holding of wakes in times of epidemics.

2. Wakes in times of epidemics and the 1878 Public Health Act

Epidemics of typhus and cholera ravaged the lower classes at intervals during the pre-Famine period. A major wave of typhus made its appearance in the period 1818-19, spreading quickly through the slums of Dublin. As in other parts of Europe, the crisis and the consequent reaction of the authorities was met with disbelief by the most affected social groups. Indeed, the Roman Catholic clergy was asked to stop wakes for victims of the disease, although their exhortations would not be welcomed by their flock[1] who held wakes over the bodies of victims until widespread illness gave way to panic and in turn disruption of social ties.[2]

At the time, strategies put in place for the prevention of the spread of the disease did not go beyond general advice on cleanliness and proper ventilation of buildings. Similar guidelines were published by the sanitary authorities during the 1832-4 cholera epidemic;[3] in addition, on the advice of the Central Board of Health the chief secretary's office asked to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin Daniel Murray's support in curbing the custom of waking the victims. Daniel Murray's pastoral letter – devoted for its greater part to the condemnation of intemperance – admonished his flock to abstain altogether from waking the dead. It also cautioned the relatives of deceased people 'not to admit any stranger to enter unnecessarily under their roof'. The transgressor of such an admonition would 'expose himself to go prematurely before his Judge, charged of the guilt of self-murder, and perhaps, too, with the blood of his neighbour, to whom he might be the guilty means of communicating the malady'.[4] At the onset of the epidemic, in the

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[1] Joseph Robins, *The Miasma. Epidemic and Panic in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Dublin, 1995), pp. 51-2.

[2] Ibid., p. 76.

[3] Cholera Papers (N.A.I., MS 2/440/10/1).

[4] William Meagher, *Notices of the Life and Character of his Grace Most Rev. Daniel Murray, late Archbishop of Dublin* (Dublin, 1853), p. 155.

neighbourhood on Summerhill the local officer of health took the precaution of preventing the wake of a woman who allegedly died of the infectious disease.[5] Apart from the general difficulty in a country rife with agrarian unrest in the early 1830s) the action of sanitary authorities in the pre-Famine period was hindered by a lack of resources at a parish level, such as the difficulty of setting up local health boards.[6] It was also limited to general advice published by the Central Board of Health. Wakes were mentioned in the parliamentary report on Famine fever, which stressed the importance of 'a short printed notice' that 'should be freely circulated impressing on the people the necessity of avoiding sick rooms, wakes, and crowded meetings'.[7]

After the Famine the frequency and intensity of epidemics actually decreased. However, cholera hit Dublin from 1853 to 1855, as well as in 1866; typhus and smallpox appeared from 1871-2 and in 1877-8. It was precisely during the 1870s that wakes came under closer scrutiny by the sanitary authorities.[8] As during the pre-Famine period, the constant need for pointing out the danger of wakes suggests the unawareness – or sheer distrust – of the lower classes as regards sanitary regulations. According to the *Nenagh Guardian*, in 1871 smallpox in Belfast was spreading 'in many cases through sheer ignorance'.[9] The *Freeman's Journal* reported a case of a worker whose body was waked for two nights – ten among those who attended the wake caught the disease, five 'fatally'.[10] As with Daniel Murray in the early 1830s, the Archbishop of Dublin Paul Cullen issued a circular letter addressed to the clergy of the diocese of Dublin condemning the practice of wakes as possible vehicles of contagion. 'You will therefore be pleased to point out' – wrote Paul Cullen – 'to your flocks the dangers of holding wakes at present, and the great responsibility they incur by exposing themselves, their families, and friends to the risk of contracting terrible diseases and losing their lives'.[11] He subsequently added general advice on good cleanliness. The letter, however, was mainly dedicated to the 'vice of drunkenness' common to the lower class. In the Dublin North Union 'good results have certainly followed the stop put to the holding of wakes by the poorer classes of the Catholic community, which has resulted from the instructions delivered by his eminence

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[5] Robins, *The Miasma*, p. 70.

[6] Cholera Papers (N.A.I., MS 2/440/10/1).

[7] *Report of the Commissioners of Health, Ireland, on the Epidemics of 1846 to 1850*, p. 46 [1562], H.C. 1852-53, xli, 296.

[8] 'Following the recommendations of a royal sanitary commission the local government board for Ireland was established in 1872 [...], the boards of guardians, remained responsible for sanitary matters in rural areas and small towns. They, and the municipal authorities, were designated as sanitary authorities under the Public Health (Ireland) Act 1874'. See Robins, *The Miasma,* p. 231.

[9] *Nenagh Guardian*, 8 July 1871.

[10] *FJ*, 6 July 1871.

[11] *FJ*, 18 Dec. 1871.

cardinal Cullen'.[12] It was, according to Dr. William Malachi Burke, medical superintendent at the General Registration Office, the only concrete action taken against the spread of the disease in the midst of the smallpox epidemic that between 1871 and 1873 claimed the lives of 1,847 people in the Dublin area.[13] At a special meeting of the Municipal Council – at which Archbishop Paul Cullen was present – Burke stated that the assembly at the medical society of the college of physicians had 'no idea of how the disease had been spread by wakes'. Burke also suggested that 'temporary convalescent hospitals' should have been established in various parts of the city.[14] At a meeting of the Medical Society of the College of Physicians held in February 1872, he had stressed that the waking of the dead was indeed among the most fertile causes of the spread of the disease.[15] Later, in August 1872, the *Lancet* invoked 'the aid of the higher power' in order to suppress 'the present murderous state of things', referring precisely to the lower classes' wakes.[16]

The attention of the sanitary authorities was focused particularly on wakes in urban environments such as Dublin, where overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions, coupled with the custom of waking the dead, created a fertile environment for the spread of infectious diseases.[17] It was the former mayor of Dublin, Maurice Brooks, who first made reference to wakes during the parliamentary debate on the new Irish Public Health bill. The clause provided for local government boards to issue a notice 'upon the occupier of the house or room in which is anticipated such wake is about to be held'. The same occupier was also liable to a penalty not exceeding 'twenty shillings'.[18] Eventually the maximum fine was fixed as £5.[19] The Brooks clause was saluted favourably by Edmund Dwyer Gray, chairman of the Public Health Committee and proprietor of the *Freeman's Journal,* which repeatedly published articles against the danger of wakes during the epidemic.[20] Leading a deputation of the Public Health Committee at a meeting with the chief secretary, he praised

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[12] *FJ,* 14 Mar. 1872.

[13] Robins, *The Miasma*, p. 203.

[14] *FJ*, 9 Apr. 1872.

[15] *British Medical Journal*, i, no. 580 (1872).

[16] Quoted in *FJ*, 2 Aug. 1872.

[17] Richard Dowden, 'On the Connexion between the Origin and Localization of Disease, whether Usual or Epidemical, and the Over-Crowding of Buildings in our Cities' in *Journal of the Dublin Statistical Society* (July, 1855), p. 121.

[18] *Report from the Select Committee on Public Health (Ireland) Bill; with the Proceedings of the Committee*, p. xvii, H.C. 1877 (384), xv, 293.

[19] Public Health Act (Ireland), 1878.

[20] See, as an example, *FJ*, 18 Dec. 1871; *FJ*, 15 Sept. 1873; *FJ*, 16 may 1878. Edmund Gray succeeded his father Sir John Gray as proprietor of the *Freeman's Journal* in 1875.

the new clause, stating that there was 'no doubt that wakes were often dangerous to health, beside being offensive to decency and morality'.[21]

Following the coming into effect of the Public Health Act, the authorities did arrest and fine those who held wakes over victims of infectious diseases. The first cases to be recorded in Cork involved two men who were fined 10*s.* for having held a wake for their children. The children had died from "scarlatina" (scarlet fever), a disease which was 'prevalent in the city'. The sanitary authorities stated that 'the full penalty of £5 would be inflicted in all cases of the same nature arising in future'.[22] They kept their word, as two months later the *Nenagh Guardian* published an article titled 'heavy fine for holding a wake'. It appeared that a night watchman held a wake over his son who died of scarlatina. The man had been previously cautioned by the police against the holding of a wake and consequently the full fine of £5 was imposed.[23] Yet, only a few months before, the *Freeman's Journal* doubted the efficacy of fines in deterring the holding of wakes. Referring also to the action of the clergy, they claimed that something more than 'mere moral suasion' was needed to stamp out the custom.[24]

As the complete disruption of social ties during the Famine had shown, the proper treatment of the dead - namely the traditional wake - was abandoned only when a major crisis had already cut off the renowned strong ties between neighbours. In 1880 a medical report to the Local Government Board, referring to the interment of a victim of typhus fever in Swinford, underlined how the deceased's dwelling was 'completely isolated, and no one in the vicinity approach[ed] the house.'[25] In April 1879 the *Nenagh Guardian* reported the letter of a constable who warned a family of the illegality of holding a wake for their dead child, victim of a 'infectious disease'. In spite of the warning, the child was waked for one night.[26] Finally a case reported in 1883 to the House of Commons can also shed light on the actual implementation of the public health act and its effectiveness in stopping the holding of wakes.

In March, the M.P. for County Wicklow William Joseph Corbet drew the attention of the House to a case previously reported by the *Freeman's Journal*. The case was that of a man named Bartholomew Roe, who died in Saint Andrew's parish (Dublin) of a fever 'of

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[21] *FJ*, 10 Jan. 1878.
[22] *FJ*, 9 Oct. 1879.
[23] *Nenagh Guardian*, 17 Dec. 1879.
[24] *FJ*, 14 Jul. 1879.
[25] *Local Government Board (Ireland). Further Reports, Dated Respectively 9 and 15 July 1880, Made to the Local Government Board in Ireland by Dr. C.J. Nixon, Temporary Medical Inspector, Relative to an Order Outbreak of Fever in the Swineford Union, County Mayo*, pp. 4-5, H.C. 1880 (277-I), lxii, 278-9 (henceforth cited as *Nixon Report*).
[26] *Nenagh Guardian*, 19 Apr. 1879. For a similar case see *Nenagh Guardian*, 15 Mar 1879.

a very malignant type'.[27] His body was waked for two nights; in the following days, his widow died of the same disease and 'some' of his eight children were taken to the fever hospital in Cork Street. Corbet asked whether the Local Government Board had fulfilled the requirements of the 1878 Public Health Act as regards the speedy interment of the dead in case of death by infectious disease.[28] George Otto Trevelyan pointed out that the public health act gave the Local Government Board the powers mentioned by Corbet only in case of 'the existence or apprehension of any formidable epidemic or outbreak of infectious disease', therefore its provisions were not applicable in the aforementioned case. According to Trevelyan, the report of the medical inspector of the Local Government Board showed that the spread of the fever was due to the 'concealment of the disease by the first families attacked'. Also, there was no clear evidence of contagion directly attributable to the wake. [29]

However, even when implemented, the measures against wakes prescribed by the Public Health Act were still defective. On the one hand, the imposition of the full fine was discretional, and the effectiveness of such a prohibition on a dearly defended custom such as the waking of the dead is questionable.[30] On the other hand, preventive measures such as the removal of the sick to a fever hospital could only be enforced by an order of a magistrate: in rural areas the order might have been difficult to obtain in short time.[31] Also, after the 1832 Anatomy Act the poor genuinely feared that if they died in fever hospitals their bodies would be handed over to medical schools for dissection.[32] The enforcement of the 1878 Public Health Act was considered to be by contemporary observers a difficult task outside urban areas. According to Colonel Edgar Flinn, member of the council of Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland, the Act 'in a great majority of districts [had] well nigh become a dead letter'.[33] Flinn pointed out the widespread difficulties in the setting up of local health boards. Moreover, sanitary authorities in rural districts were 'never anxious to move in any measure of sanitary work [...] and so year after year the Public Health Act is systematically evaded'.[34]

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[27] *Hansard* 3, cclxxvi, p. 1896.
[28] *Hansard*, 3, cclxxvii, p. 693.
[29] *Hansard*, 3, cclxxvii, pp. 693-4.
[30] *FJ*, 14 July 1879.
[31] *Nixon Report,* pp. 5, 279.
[32] Robins, *The Miasma*, p. 75.
[33] From 1895 to 1910 Edgar Flinn was also medical inspector of the Local Government Board in Ireland.
[34] Edgar Flinn, 'Administration of the Public Health Act in Ireland' in *The Irish Builder*, xxvi, no. 597 (1884), p. 327.

3. Conclusions

The lower classes' attitude in times of epidemics - however marked by 'sheer' ignorance - is a further reminder of their attachment to funeral customs such as wakes, as they were only spontaneously abandoned only after complete disruption of social ties. Although the 1878 Public Health Act gave strong powers to sanitary authorities, its implementation was difficult, especially outside urban areas; when implemented, measures specifically designed against the holding of wakes were of dubious effect. Although the maximum fine of £5 was indeed high, its enforcement was discretionary. As with any other kind of deterrent – clerical admonition *in primis* – its actual effect on the funeral customs of the lower classes was likely to be, as the *Freeman's Journal* had pointed out, a mere and ineffective 'moral suasion'.

III

The Higher Classes

3.1 The Funerals of the Rich

1. Introduction

Funerals of the Irish higher classes were synonymous with pomp, status and solemnity. The aim of this chapter is to attempt to assess the variation of funeral customs of the higher classes during the nineteenth century, given the changes in the structure of Irish society as well as the growing 'commercialisation of death' common throughout Europe.[1]

2. The funeral

While the lower classes' celebration of death focused on the wake and its hospitality, the status of the higher classes was evident in the funeral cortège. In a society obsessed with 'the gradations of social placing' the funeral was the final staging of such order.[2] It was, also, a public representation of the place of the deceased 'in politics and history'.[3] A solemn, largely attended funeral was the means through which the deceased's achievement in life could be reasserted for the last time. Other aspects of the higher classes' attitude towards death, such as food at funerals or the consumption of alcohol appear to be downplayed by contemporary sources or, at least, seldom mentioned. In 1873 the leading Catholic newspaper the *Freeman's Journal* published an editorial criticizing the 'funereal breakfasts and luncheons, regulated in sumptuousness by the means of the deceased'. 'We have never heard this commented on' – wrote the *Freeman* - 'but it exists'.[4] A trace of this attitude is also mirrored by the heading of 'Nowlans' funeral' registered by the Bruen family in 1836: 3 gallons of whiskey were bought for the price of £1 7*s*. and three bottles of sherry for 9*s*.. This was, clearly, only their contribution for the funeral.[5]

However, the most significant celebration of the deceased was by all means the funeral cortège, as respectability could be conveyed by its length[6]– as well as the number

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[1] 140 funeral reports have been analyzed for the present study. These reports were published in different papers (the *Freeman's Journal,* the *Tuam Herald,* the *Westmeath Examiner,* the *Nenagh Guardian,* the *Anglo Celt*), during the period from 1800 to 1900.

[2] Ruth Richardson, 'Why was Death so Big in Victorian Britain?' in Ralph Houlbrooke (ed), *Death, Ritual, and Bereavement* (London, 1989), p. 106.

[3] Thomas Laqueur, 'Bodies, Death, and Pauper Funerals' in *Representations*, no. 1 (1983), p. 118.

[4] FJ, 15 Sept. 1873.

[5] Bruen of Oakpark papers (N.L.I. MS 29,773/19), p. 3).

[6] See as an example *FJ,* 15 Jan. 1852; 24 Feb. 1853; *Tuam Herald,* 17 Dec. 1842; 9 Dec. 1843; 20

of carriages representing members of the gentry – although the physical presence of a member of the higher class was not fundamental, as long as a carriage representing his name and coat of arms was present.[7] In 1938, an Irish folklore commission informant stated that in case of a death of a member of the aristocracy 'very few attended those funerals. Even the neighbouring gentry did not attend. They sent their mourning cars, with driver and footman, to make up a funeral cortege.'[8] This is probably what headings such as 'paid [...] for horses to Dr. Stones's funeral' in families' accounts refer to.[9]

However, the order in which the mourners had to precede or follow the hearse is the first element which deserves analysis. At the funerals of the landed gentry, their own tenants led the cortege. Servants, also, were to be present in full mourning,[10]as a symbol of gratitude towards the deceased's generosity: eighteen servants headed the funeral of Lord Powerscourt in 1809.[11] Writing his funeral instructions in 1816, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, landowner and inventor, stated that he wanted his coffin to be borne by seven of his labourers, expressly indicating the name of the man who was supposed to occupy the foremost position.[12] The image of the poor mourning servant as it appeared in newspaper reports is well represented by a report which appeared in the *Newry Telegraph* (quoted by the *Freeman's Journal)*, regarding the funeral of Du Pre Alexander, second Earl of Caledon, in 1839. During the ceremony, 'as the corpse was being put into the church', one of his lordship's principal domestics, named William Martin, dropped dead at the entrance to the church; 'excessive grief' - we read in the account - 'is supposed to have been the cause of his death, the poor fellow having been in his lordship's service for many years'.[13] However, servants generally played a discreet role, being closer to the family of the deceased and would generally take part in the cortège by occupying one of the family mourning carriages, while the tenantry would often be in a more prominent position,[14] as they were in 1804 at the funeral of William Robert Fitzgerald, second Duke of Leinster. Leading the funeral was 'a number of his grace's tenantry walking six and eight abreast'. The head of the cortège was reported as follows:[15]

Sept. 1845; *The Nation,* 13 Nov. 1886; 2 Apr. 1887; 13 Sept. 1890; *Nenagh Guardian*, 3 June 1882.

[7] *Nenagh Guardian*, 21 Nov. 1883. See also I.F.C., MS 550 (County Cork, 1938), p. 66.

[8] I.F.C., MS 550 (County Cork, 1938), p. 66.

[9] Bruen of Oakpark papers (N.L.I. MS 29,773/18), p. 17).

[10] *FJ,* 15 Feb. 1866. See also Bessborough papers (N.L.I. MS 29,805/9).

[11] *FJ,* 26 July 1809;

[12] Edgeworth Papers (N.L.I. MS 10,166/7/1168).

[13] *FJ*, 19 Apr., 1839.

[14] Killadoon papers (N.L.I. MS 36,048/2).

[15] *FJ*, 29 Oct. 1804.

A number of his Grace's Tenantry,
Walking six and abreast
Four horsemen
Bearing mourning standards, with the Coroner
And initial L
THE HEARSE
(at each side of each were pages)
Most superbly ornamented with black velvet
And feathers; and hung with the escutcheons of the
House of Leinster.
The duke's favourite horse (led by a groom)
The students of Maynooth
Two and two, one hundred in number
Six mourning coaches

The mourning standards with the letter 'L', as well as the hearse bearing the escutcheons of the house of Leinster, all testified to the noble rank of the deceased. On the other hand, its closeness to the Catholic cause was conveyed by the students of the Roman Catholic college of Maynooth, which he had contributed to founding. As for the 'superbly ornamented' hearse, it was to become a relatively common item for funerals of the Irish gentry throughout the century.

Further reports show the constant presence of the tenantry, often acting as coffin bearers - depending on the last will of the deceased. The Earl of Limerick, planning his funeral in 1860, was content with having his tenantry meeting the funeral at a given place and then walking with the cortège.[16] In the case of the Earl of Donoughmore, his coffin was carried to the grave, in accordance with the deceased's directions, 'by his own tenants, [for] a distance of a mile [...]'.[17] Tenants bore the coffin of Lord Cloncurry at his funeral in April 1869.[18] The same was reported for Lord Roden (who asked for a private funeral), in 1870.[19] These reports do not, however, generally define which kind of 'tenantry' was supposed to lead the cortège. Nonetheless, additional information suggests that better off

[16] Killadoon papers (N.L.I. MS 36,069/11).
[17] *FJ*, 5 Mar. 1866.
[18] *FJ*, 9 Apr. 1869; See also *FJ*, 17 Feb. 1852; *Tuam Herald*, 25 Nov. 1842;
[19] *FJ*, 1 Apr. 1870.

tenants would occupy a prominent position. At the funeral of Lord Dunkellen in August 1867,

> The coffin was raised on the shoulders of the tenantry, who carried it all along the line of procession through the town [...] the tenantry of the several estates of Lord Clanricarde were represented in the procession by sixteen respectable farmers from each estate, and who walked in the following order [...][20]

Other articles refer to them as 'tenant farmers', in addition to the gentry present at the funeral.[21] On the occasion of the funeral of the Earl of Limerick in January 1866 they were mentioned as 'numerous and respectable tenants'.[22] At the funeral of landowner and magistrate James Smyth, they headed the cortège on horseback.[23] Tenants would bear the coffin on their shoulders to the grave, as happened on the occasion of the funeral of Lord Massareene in 1863, when his tenantry were permitted 'by request' to bear his remains to the tomb.[24] They would take part in funeral cortèges along with members of the nobility or the gentry taking the position that was considered appropriate to them: before the coffin as a testimony to their landlord's public standing. Also, their position in society – namely as workers and labourers – was to be represented as well. In 1865, at the funeral of the banker and liberal M.P. for Wexford, John Edward Redmond, the cortège was headed by 'one thousand labourers (wearing hatbands)'. twelve of them carried tools – adorned with black crape – such as shovels, pickaxes and crowbars.[25]

The presence of the tenantry heading a landlord's funeral cortège is remarkably constant up to the 1870s, as a public reminder of the power that the landed class still held in the post-famine period.[26] Although, notably, after the 1870s, it is mentioned with less frequency. The Land War might have contributed to the decline of this custom. However, there is no clear evidence that the presence of the tenants in funeral cortèges was actually becoming rare.[27] It is also true that during the 1870s and the 1880s, funeral reports become more frequent but poorer in detail. Changes in the newspapers must be also taken into account. While in the pre-famine period newspapers had been typically four-pages long, they began 'to get bigger and cheaper'. They also started to gain access to a much greater

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[20] *FJ*, 22 Aug. 1867; See also *FJ*, 8 Oct. 1852.

[21] *FJ*, 7 Nov. 1867; see also *FJ*, Dec. 1855.

[22] *FJ*, 15 Jan. 1866; see also the funeral of Captain Ralph Smyth, in *Westmeath Examiner*, 29 Nov. 1890.

[23] *Tuam Herald*, 2 May 1868; see also *FJ*, 8 Dec. 1854.

[24] *FJ*, 6 May 1863.

[25] *FJ*, 21 Aug. 1865.

[26] W. E. Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants in Ireland 1848-1904* (Dundalgan, 1984), p. 5.

[27] It is mentioned, for example, in *Anglo Celt*, 17 Dec. 1870; 13 Apr. 1872; *Tuam Herald*, 22 Aug. 1874; 24 Apr. 1875; 18 Dec. 1875; 15 Apr. 1876; 6 Mar. 1886; 11 Aug. 1888.

amount of information, thanks to devices such as the telegraph.[28] As a result, the number of funerals mentioned rose, leaving less room for a single, flamboyant and detailed funeral account.

3. Masters and Workers

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of relatively constant growth for Irish trade. The Irish economy was becoming increasingly more open and commercialized.[29] From the 1860s onwards, funerals of members of the growing trading elite start appearing in the press as a symptom of their growing social importance and wealth, promptly symbolised by impressive funeral cortèges. The structure of these cortèges underlines the progressive assimilation of the mores and customs of the gentry maintained by those in the commercial sector and professional sectors. With their funerals factory workers made their appearance, taking the leading position that was usually reserved for the tenantry.[30] At the funeral of the banker and antiquary Charles Haliday in 1866, the coffin was borne for 200 yards 'on the shoulders of workmen who had been in the employment of Mr Haliday, and who at intervals relieved each other'[31] When landed estates and factories were part of the deceased's property, they would also be carefully reflected by the funeral cortège. The hearse drawn by six horses which carried the remains of John D'Arcy was preceded by over three hundred workmen employed in the deceased's brewery. They formed 'four abreast' at the front of the hearse.[32]

The wealth of these funerals was clearly represented by the hearse, which was drawn by four to six horses, exactly as the hearses of the nobility were (even though the minimum number of horses for a nobleman in the pre-famine reports examined is six).[33] Furthermore, their status as a class was for the first time during the 1860s stated throughout these funeral reports.[34] Describing the funeral of Francis Codd, a merchant and honorary secretary of the chamber of commerce, the *Freeman's Journal* underlined his prominence

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[28] Christopher Morash, *A History of the Media in Ireland* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 88.

[29] Peter M. Solar, 'Irish Trade in the Nineteenth Century', in David Dickson, Cormac Ó Gráda (eds), *Refiguring Ireland. Essays in Honour of L.M. Cullen* (Dublin, 2003), pp. 287-8.

[30] *Westmeath Examiner*, 1 Nov. 1884;

[31] *FJ*, 18 Sep. 1866.

[32] *FJ*, 2 Mar. 1864.

[33] See *FJ*, 19 Oct. 1844;

[34] *Westmeath Examiner*, 9 Dec. 1882.

in the 'mercantile life' of the country.[35] Similarly, merchant and magistrate Alderman Scally was praised for having 'through the exercise of a vigorous intellect and clearsightelness [sic] he realised an ample fortune by trade [...] faithfully discharging his duties to society and to the poor, to whom he was a kind and considerate benefactor'. His hearse was drawn by six horses bearing sable ostrich plumes; a feature present in more than one funeral of members of the nobility.[36] A good example of a funeral of a member of the industrial elite was that of Sir Benjamin Lee Guinness's in 1868. The body lay for six days in the chapel at St. Anne's House (Benjamin's house at Clontarf). When the cortège started, it was headed by 1,000 tenants and workmen of the deceased, walking four deep and wearing scarves and hatbands.[37]

The last important feature mentioned by the press did not regard the cortège itself, but the undertaking firm which took care of it. Undertakers' companies were usually mentioned in newspaper funeral reports. Lines such as 'Mr. D. Hurley, Clonakilty, supplied the coffin, a massive oak one, richly mounted, and Mr. D. O Leary, J P, the funeral requisites' or 'the funeral arrangements were excellently carried out by Mr. Keogh, of High- Street and Cook Street' became common from the 1850s.[38] Their mention was a symptom of their growing influence throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

4. A Growing Market?

The number of people listed as 'undertakers' by the census grew steadily throughout the century. Unfortunately, the data provided by the census are not precise enough to draw an accurate picture of the growing undertaking market. The main problem lies in the fact that undertaking was not solely confined to undertakers. Others involved were carpenters, coffin makers, publicans and, above all, upholsterers who would only be involved in providing funerals as a side-line.[39] According to the censuses figures returned from 1841 to 1891, the number of undertakers steadily rose from 21 in 1841 to 80 in 1891.

Undertakers were classified under different headings by the census commissioners throughout the nineteenth century. After the 1841 census they were listed in general as

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[35] *FJ*, 30 Apr. 1867.
[36] *FJ*, 25 Nov. 1862.
[37] *FJ*, 28 May 1868.
[38] *Southern Star*, 9 Mar. 1895; See also *The Nation*, 15 May 1875.
[39] *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to take the Census of Ireland for the Year 1841*, p. xxi [504], H.C. 1843, xxiv, 21.

'undertakers' or 'funeral furniture maker, undertaker'.[40] In 1871 they were listed as 'cabinet maker, upholsterer, undertaker'[41] and from 1881 as 'funeral furniture maker, undertaker'.[42] Coffin makers were also returned, but have not been taken into account for this inquiry. Their number, when returned, was remarkably low, although the range of people employed in occasionally making coffins could include all the workers returned as carpenters.[43] Overall, in the period under examination there is a steady rise in the number of undertakers.

Although statistically not significant, a survey of undertaking firms which advertised on national and regional newspapers during a period spanning from 1841 to 1891 have also been attempted. The data returned have proved to be significantly scarce, as only an overall total of 22 firms published funeral-related advertisements.[44] However, advertisements published in one particular newspaper (the *General Advertiser,* based in Dublin) show a consistent increase until the 1870s, followed by a slight decrease. Notwithstanding the lack of statistical data precise enough to track the growth of the undertaking sector, it is nonetheless an indicator of growth during the post –Famine period.

Overall, firms dedicated exclusively to providing funerals are - out of the already scarce total number - a minority. Of the 22 companies found in the four newspapers under examination only four were specifically concerned with the undertaking of funerals.[45] Six were upholsterers or furniture makers. The others mainly provided mourning clothes, under the general heading of 'family mourning'.[46] The characteristics of these adverts match the classification of the census post 1841, where undertakers were classified, as noted, under the heading 'furniture makers'. Table 2 shows the diversification of the advertised firms in relation to their primary activity.

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[40] *The Census of Ireland for the Year 1861. Part IV. Report and Tables relating to the Religious Professions, Education, and Occupations of the People. Vol.ii*, p. 724 [3204-III], H.C. 1863, lx, 362.

[41] *Census of Ireland, 1871. Part III. General Report, with Illustrative Maps and Diagrams, Summary Tables, and Appendix*, p. 230 [C.1377], H.C. 1876, lxiii, 284.

[42] *Census of Ireland, 1881. Part II. General Report, with Illustrative Maps and Diagrams, Tables, and Appendix,* p. 113 [C.3365], H.C. 1882, lxxvi, 537.

[43] I.F.C., MS 581 (County Longford, 1938), p. 307.

[44] The four newspapers used for the inquiry are *General Advertiser*, *Southern Reporter*, *Northern Whig*, *Galway Vindicator.* The years taken into account are 1841, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891. For every year of the inquiry – depending on the availability of issues – 90 issues of each paper have been examined (the months of January, June and December).

[45] *General Advertiser*, 20 Jan. 1870; 14 June 1890; 21 June 1890; *Northern Whig*, 7 June 1851.

[46] See *General Advertiser,* 8 June 1850; 18 Jan. 1890.

Table 6. Funeral related adverts

Main occupation	Advertised
Undertakers	4
Furniture makers	1
Upholsterers	3
Family Mourning	14
Auctioneers and evaluators	1

The majority of 'family mourning' advertisements suggest that the sector willing to pay for newspaper ads included the nobility, the gentry and the upper middle class. This trend was on the rise in the post-Famine period, as pre-Famine adverts were specifically written for members of the higher classes. An advertisement published in the *Southern Reporter* in 1830 was addressed 'to the nobility and the gentry of Cork and its vicinity'. The store in question provided 'black silks, bombazines, crapes [...] and every article connected with family mourning'.[47] Mention of the nobility is not present in the advertisements published in the 1840s, nor in the successive years. Also if we compare this advertisement with a similar one published in 1870, the difference is clear: 'Funerals, respectably and economically supplied at Conway's Bazaar George Street'.[48] In the 1870s, the words 'respectably' and 'economically' could stand side by side adding value to the advert. The strategies of the firms which advertised in the *General Advertiser* were similar. Jason Burke, an auctioneer who provided funerals, claimed that he could do it 'in the best manner, on the shortest notice and on the best reasonable terms'.[49] The upholsterer McDowell would supply and conduct funerals 'fully furnished with economy'.[50] The need to stress low prices reveals the kind of customers that these adverts were directed at. The professional treatment of death was no longer a service reserved for the nobility and the gentry. Thus, the change in the advertisements reflects the rise of the upper middle classes as potential customers, as during the second half of the 1800s when the gap between these classes narrowed in common with the rest of Europe.[51] Moreover, in the post-famine

[47] *Southern Reporter and Cork Commercial Advertiser*, 29 June 1830.
[48] *Southern Reporter and Cork Commercial Advertiser*, 1 Jan. 1870.
[49] *General Advertiser*, 1 Jan. 1870.
[50] *General Advertiser*, 8 Jan. 1870.
[51] Andy Bielenberg, 'The Industrial Elite in Ireland from the Industrial Revolution to the first World War', in Fintan Lane, *Politics*, p. 159.

period Ireland enjoyed years of relative economic growth and cultural assimilation with England, along with its Victorian culture of mourning.[52]

5. A Professional Service

A few complete accounts of funeral expenses survive in Irish archives. However, to sum up the variety of services advertised and provided by the growing industry of undertaking during the second half of the nineteenth century the funeral account of Lady Catherine, first daughter of George John Browne, third Marquis of Sligo, is a good reference point. Providing a complete funeral was a Dublin based firm, 'R.W. Champion, undertaker and job coach proprietor'. They supplied a suite of coffins in cedar, a shell upholstered in white satin 'encompassed by lead', all surmounted by a sarcophagus covered with silk velvet. As a mark of high status the sarcophagus was fixed with silvered nails. Finally a silver plate with a 'large silver cross' was secured to the sarcophagus, all for £50.[53] Additional items, such as 'silk scarves with hatbands', 'crape hoods' and 'Muslin hatbands' meant to be worn by mourners in the funeral cortège brought the cost to a total £102.[54]

'Solid' coffins were provided as a symbol of status as well as for practical protection of the body. Since the peak of the body-snatching trade, undertakers had been furnishing their customers with coffins designed to safeguard the remains against theft. Although the body-snatching trade gradually fell off after the Anatomy Act in 1832, concern over the integrity of the body remained, fuelling the provision of strong coffins for those who could afford them. As a regular customer of body snatchers throughout his career Sir Philip Crampton, surgeon and anatomist asked shortly before his death in 1858 to have his body put into a oak coffin and then 'entirely imbedded' in cement.[55]

Although given the lack of sources for the pre-Famine period, it is difficult to define the evolution of the undertaking business over the whole nineteenth century, during the final years of the period under examination it is clear that the middle-upper classes were regular clients of professional undertakers. The examination of two funeral undertakers' ledgers, covering the years 1890-1896, provides a vivid picture of the wider range of customers and services that the firm (J.& C. Nichols, funeral directors, Dublin)

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[52] Virginia Crossman, 'Middle Class Attitudes to Poverty and Welfare in Post-Famine Ireland', in Fintan Lane, *Politics*, p. 131.

[53] Richardson, 'Why Death was so Big', p. 113.

[54] Westport estate papers (N.L.I. 41,096/1).

[55] *The British Medical Journal*, i, no. 78 (1858), p. 522.

used to provide. Prices ranged from £1 8*s.* to highs of £25-30. The basic service provided for the minimum price included just a hearse, a coffin – which material is not specified – and fees for the interment at the graveyard.[56] The invariably 'solid' oak coffin and a hearse were the items that would mark the first main difference between funerals of the middle to upper classes and the ones of lower classes.

Generally a hearse and an oak coffin were the prerogative of the middle to upper and higher classes,[57] not to mention the custom of carrying the remains of army officers on gun carriages.[58] As for the basic funeral, the ledger does not report the number of horses provided for the hearse (which is presumably less than the customary four or six reserved for more expensive services, which would cost no less than £8 59*d.*). As seen, the four horses drawing the hearse were also a common feature of funerals meriting a mention in the press. More expensive funerals – where the customer is often mentioned as an 'Esquire' - present the additional items typical of the funeral of the upper classes. The coffin is of solid oak and depending on the customer it could be encased in a lead coffin.[60] Moreover, the firm would provide the mourning coach along with one or two carriages (which would be used by servants or other members of the family, according to newspaper reports).[61] Finally, the heading 'drivers, coffining the remains' hints again at the fact that the handling of the corpse was delegated to the professional services of the undertakers.[62] The wide range of customers and prices returned by these ledgers, although far from being statistically significant, shows that the professional treatment of death had become common among the middle to upper classes at the end of the century. Also, the basic funeral provided casts light on the customs of those belonging to a growing middle class – such as well-off tenant farmers – who could afford a £2 funeral, being able to sport a hearse and a solid coffin which was beyond their labourers' dreams.[63]

Additional figures can be provided by family accounts of large landed families. The funeral of Anne, Countess of Ormonde, who died in 1830, cost £373 13*s.* 7*d.*.[64] The headings for which the family paid for report £2 only for 'coffin shells' and more than £42 for 'mourning for servants', which is probably to be intended as 'mourning clothes for

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[56] Business Record Survey (N.A.I., Dub 19/2/1, p. 22).
[57] *Tuam Herald*, 6 Jan. 1894.
[58] *The Nation,* 13 May 1882.
[59] Business Record Survey (N.A.I., Dub 19/2/1, p. 19).
[60] Ibid., p. 483.
[61] Business Record Survey (N.A.I., Dub 19/2/2, p. 175).
[62] Ibid., p. 39.
[63] *First Report, from his Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland with Appendix (A.) and Supplement,* p. 432, H.C. 1835 (369), xxxii pt.1, 448.
[64] Prior-Wandesforde papers (N.L.I. MS 35,465/3).

servants'. [65] The figure was likely to be quite common. In 1849 the funeral of Patrick Walter Redmond, high sheriff of County Wexford, cost more than £190.[66] In the account we again find 'mourning for servants' (£4 3*s*. 8*d*.), the payment of a priest (over £33) and 100 'mortuary cards', for a total price of 13*s*. The funeral expenses for the second Marquis Conyngham amounted to a total of £270 in 1876.[67] Being relatively frequent, an expense of roughly £200 was probably considered a decent one, if not the 'correct' amount of money to be spent. In his will Richard French, a landowner of County Roscommon, felt the need to clarify that the sum that would be spent on a public funeral, to be invested in blankets and clothing for the poor, should not be 'exceeding £200'.[68] Indeed, such a cost would have been deemed worthy of a bishop's funeral as seen in the total funeral expenses of Daniel Murray, Roman Catholic archbishop of Dublin, amounting to £204 12*s*. 6*d*.[69]

As regards members of the nobility, status demanded a lavish – and willing - expenditure. In a letter concerning the burial of her aunt, Lady Wandesforde, Mary Austin wrote that 'she was buried with every respect due to her rank [...] her coffins both had (illegible) was very handsome and good [...]'.[70] The custom of burying a deceased in more than one coffin is a mark of the importance of their rank, and it certainly increased the overall funeral expenses; in 1811 Sophie Prior was interred with her still-born son in 3 coffins.[71] Additional costs could also be the draping of the church or the transporting of the body from abroad. On the occasion of Lady Portarlington's funeral in 1874 £18 were spent on 'Cloth for church' alone and a 'silk lace' used for the draping bringing the total cost of the funeral to £150.[72] As regards transportation, in 1838 Lord Farnham's body had to be shipped from Paris, reaching Dublin via London. From Dublin it was finally brought to the Farnham house in County Cavan (unfortunately there is no surviving account for this transport services).[73]

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Redmond papers, (N.L.I. MS 15,276/3).

[67] Conyngham papers (N.L.I. MS 35,430/1).

[68] *1844, Charitable Donations and Bequests (Ireland). Return to an Order of the Honourable The house of Commons, Dated 18 March 1844,* p. 33, H.C. 1844 (458), xliv, 33.

[69] Murray papers (D.D.A., MS 33/8/16).

[70] Prior-Wandesforde collection, (N.L.I. MS 35,469/5).

[71] Prior-Wandesforde collection, (N.L.I. MS 35,474/ 1).

[72] Expenses Occurred relatively to Lady Portarlington's Funeral, 1874 (N.L.I. MS 21,662).

[73] Farnham Papers (N.L.I. MS 18,631).

6. A Private Funeral

The need for what the lower classes would call 'a good send off' was also experienced by the higher classes. That the pomp of the Irish funeral was notoriously common is highlighted in the writings of those who did not seek such a flamboyant ceremony. This attitude was expressly quoted by the fourth Marquis of Westport, in the instructions for his funeral written in 1872. 'Feeling strongly the contrast between the pomp and shows of funerals as they are generally carried in Ireland' - he wrote - 'with the privacy and reverence of our saviour's simple burial by one good man; I desire that my funeral may be as private and simple as possible'. In his words a private funeral meant that the outer coffin (which implies the presence of more than one coffin anyway) should have been as plain as possible. Also, he did not want 'scarves, hatbands, clothes or gloves be given out to the very few who I hope will be allowed to attend at'.[74] An example of members of the nobility who asked for a sober funeral is also reported at the beginning of the period examined. In 1802 the funeral of the Earl of Clare was 'designed by his friends' to be a private one.[75] In 1816 Richard Lovell Edgeworth expressed the wish to be buried 'in as private a manner and at as little expensive as possible', as he had 'always endeavoured to discountenance the desire which the people of this country have for expensive funerals.'[76] The list of embellishments that he refuses are a good indication of the few things that would have been considered essential for a truly 'decent' funeral. 'I would have neither cloth nor plate nor gilding employed in wrapping my coffin'. Moreover, he did ask that his servants not dress in mourning. After prescribing 'that some small acknowledgment would be given to each of them', he completed his instructions by expressing the desire that 'no monument or inscription but one precisely similar to that which I have erected for my father should be erected for me.'[77] We learn from his family correspondence that his wishes were fulfilled and the family felt the need to 'wear the slightest mourning for the shortest time that decency would permit'.[78] Forty years later, Pamela Lady Campbell wrote in the memorandum for her funeral that she 'wish[ed] to be buried [...] possibly with the least possible expense wherever is most convenient, either by my husband or by my father, or anywhere in the country. For what else it [does] signify?'[79]

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[74] Westport Estate papers (N.L.I. MS 41,080/56).
[75] *FJ*, 2 Feb. 1802.
[76] Edgeworth Papers (N.L.I. MS 10,166/7/1168).
[77] Ibid.
[78] Edgeworth Papers (N.L.I. MS 10,166/7/1308).
[79] Papers of Pamela lady Campbell and her Family (N.L.I. MS 40,025/2).

Over the reports taken in consideration from the early 1800s to the 1890s, the number of funerals labelled as 'private' is fairly scarce – only six.[80] Other funerals, although not defined as 'private' by the reports, hint at the willingness of the deceased to keep the ceremony 'as simple as possible'.[81] The scarcity of private funerals suggests that the attitude expressed by Pamela Lady Campbell and Richard Lovell Edgeworth was alien within the Irish higher classes, whose attitude highlights the fact that a lavish funeral, at least until the 1870s, was considered essential for a deceased's reputation.[82] A 'private funeral', as opposed to a 'public' one, was meant to be carried out in a dignified but modest manner, without the presence of too large a concourse of people – the opposite requirement for what was considered a good funeral by every other class in Ireland. That is why a 'public' funeral, as it is referred to in contemporary sources, was a ceremony meant to draw the attention of those not directly involved in the mournful cortège.[83] In other words, a funeral 'avoiding any public demonstration'.[84] In this context, 'private' funerals were also the symptom of a more sober attitude toward religion. As such, they represented a personal choice, a remarkable dissention to the paraphernalia of Victorian funerals.

7. Funerals of Roman Catholic Bishops

According to contemporary sources, funerals of Roman Catholic bishops were as impressive as the funerals of the nobility.[85] More than a pure display of wealth, they were an occasion for the Catholic Church to fully occupy the public sphere in a powerful demonstration of political power (in its widest meaning). Thus the funeral of Cardinal Paul Cullen - one of the most prominent figures of the Roman Catholic Church in nineteenth century Ireland - was a demonstration of strength by the Church in terms of its popular following in the country. The *Freeman's Journal* provided a full report, estimating the people present in the streets of Dublin to number roughly one hundred thousand. After lying in state, the body of the cardinal was brought from his residence to the Pro-Cathedral

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[80] See *FJ*, 2 Feb. 1802; 1 Nov. 1861; 19 May 1865; 19 May 1868; 1 Apr. 1870; *Nenagh Guardian*, 16 Sep. 1885.

[81] *FJ*, 10 Mar. 1869.

[82] *FJ*, 1 Nov. 1861.

[83] *FJ*, 17 Jan. 1840.

[84] *FJ*, 24 June 1853.

[85] A sample of 82 funeral reports of Protestant and Catholic bishops, from a selection of newspapers (the *Freeman's Journal*, the *Irish Times*, the *Belfast Morning News*, the *Dublin Evening Mail*, the *Nation*, the *Tuam Herald*, the *Evening Telegraph*, *the Nenagh Guardian*) has been utilised for the study.

in Marlborough Street. A relatively sober description of the funeral emerges from the account . The 'massive oak' coffin was carried on an open hearse pulled by four black horses. The hearse was described as 'simply furnished, without gaud or show'. Apart from wreaths, white camellias and immortelles covering the coffin, no other luxurious item is mentioned. The account stresses the large presence of members of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as members of the Catholic gentry wanting to witness the funeral. Among the laity present there were, among others, Edmund William Dwyer Gray (proprietor of the *Freeman's Journal*) and the Catholic M.P William Monsell, promoter of the 1868 Burial Act.[86]

The *Belfast Morning News*, however, estimated that the number of people who actually took part in the funeral was roughly eight thousand.[87] Even the anti-Catholic *Dublin Evening Mail* admitted that when the body was lying in state in the deceased cardinal's residence, the 'doorsteps are thronged with an eager and reverent crowd',[88] while the *Irish Times* stressed that the funeral was 'of a purely religious character'. The cortège that followed the coffin to the cathedral was also described as being of 'great magnitude'[89].

The order of the cortège was the standard for funerals of the higher Roman Catholic clergy: at the head came the schools, then religious confraternities, the clergy of the diocese, the bishops, the 'Lord Mayor and members of the corporation' and finally the general public'.[90] The presence of the authorities in the cortège – such as the Lord Mayor riding in the municipal gold coach – were also testimony to the actual political weight of the ultramontane Cardinal.[91] His case was not an isolated one. In the pre -Famine period, when the political power of the Catholic Church was rising along with its firmer grip on Irish society, funerals of the Roman Catholic higher clergy were similarly conducted on a grand scale.

On the death of Archbishop Daniel Murray in 1852 the *Freeman's Journal* mentioned the 'admirable management and unparalleled excellence of the police arrangements' carried out to manage the high number of people 'of all creed and classes'. More precisely, the working classes took their place 'at the end of the streets and along the pathways'. As with other similar reports, the extraordinary silence on the occasion was

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[86] *Irish Times,* 30 Oct. 1878.
[87] *Belfast Morning News*, 28 Oct. 1878.
[88] *Dublin Evening Mail,* 26 Oct. 1878.
[89] *Dublin Evening Mail*, 28 Oct. 1878.
[90] *Irish Times*, 26 Oct. 1878.
[91] *The Nation*, 2 Nov. 1878.

stressed. Also praised were the efforts of the police in keeping order in the presence of more than one thousand people assembled near the streets where the funeral cortège was meant to pass by.[92] However customary an expression it was, it is also true that the presence of people of 'all creed[s]' could be a natural consequence of the good relations that Murray had with Protestants during his period as a bishop.[93] Furthermore, the 'solemn' atmosphere might have been noisier than the article suggests. The concourse of people assembled near the Metropolitan Catholic Cathedral in Marlborough Street was, according to the *Dublin Evening Herald*, 'immense'.[94] The funeral arrangements, also, appeared to be unusually rich. The outer coffin was described as 'one of the most beautifully designed' works of art. In all, he was provided with three coffins: A 'shell' coffin, an extra size lead coffin and finally an oak coffin. In his funeral expenses account the usual list of black gloves, crapes and various services raised the costs.[95]

Similarly, the funeral of the Archbishop of Armagh Michael Kieran in 1869 was described as 'the solemn and imposing splendour of the ritual ceremonials of the Catholic faith'- a powerful sentence, given the fact that the Church of Ireland had been disestablished two months before. The coffin was placed within a cedar shell and a lead case covered with purple velvet. While the body lay in state in his house, 'thousands of persons of every station in life went to take a farewell look at their beloved archbishop'.[96] As for Archbishops Murray and Cullen, the coffin provided was of cedar along with a shell and a lead case. The cortège from the primate's residence to St. Patrick Cathedral was headed by a mixed body of schools (such as the convent schools and the Christian Brothers' schools). The presence of schools at the head of the cortège was a signal of the importance of the education question within the Roman Catholic Church. Kieran himself dedicated much of his pastoral work to the establishment and the fostering of societies which promoted education and temperance in Dundalk.[97] After the representatives of the schools came a delegation of the St. Patrick's Total Abstinence Society, followed by 'the parishioners' with crape hatbands. This feature is a reminder of the presence of the tenantry at the head of funeral cortèges of the higher classes though unfortunately, there is no further description of the kind and number of parishioners who attended this funeral.

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[92] *FJ*, 1 Mar. 1852.
[93] James Kelly, Dàire Keogh (eds), *History of the Catholic Diocese of Dublin* (Dublin, 2000), p. 263.
[94] *Dublin Evening Herald*, 1 Mar. 1852.
[95] Murray papers (D.D.A., MS 33/8).
[96] *FJ*, 20 Sept. 1869.
[97] Tom Bellew, 'Michael Kieran, 1803 – 1869: Parish Priest of Dundalk, 1848 – 1869. Archbishop of Armagh, 1866-1869' in *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society,* xxiii, no. 2 (1994), p. 157.

One may surmise that it was probably a selection of 'respectable' citizens similar to those who, instead of witnessing the funeral of a nobleman, took part in the cortège as the 'respectable farmers' seen above. Finally the report does not mention any intervention by the police, nor does it provide precise details of the route followed. Behind the cortège a large number of the local gentry along with merchants and traders walked 'in processional order', and as a closure for the cortège, there was a long line of carriages of the nobility and the gentry. After the service in St. Patrick's Cathedral, the coffin was borne by 'a number of the parishioners' who carried it to a nearby vault expressly built for the remains.[98] The presence of the police as being useful 'for the maintenance of a decorum and quiet order' is also mentioned twenty years later on occasion of the funeral of Cardinal Edward McCabe, archbishop of Dublin.[99] His cortège was headed by boys from the Christian Brothers' schools, followed by the clergy.[100] Similarly, the clergy headed the cortège of the archbishop of Armagh Joseph Dixon in 1866. At the conclusion of the funeral service, the coffin was borne to the hearse by 'gentlemen of Armagh and Drogheda'. When the cortège left the cathedral, the hearse was followed by pupils of Christian Brothers' schools and a deputation of the medical profession and gentlemen 'representing' Drogheda and Armagh. The crowd that passed through the town of Armagh was estimated to be ten thousand people by the *Ulster Observer* (reported by *The Nation*).[101]

The political potential of funeral cortèges was more evident on the occasion of the death of the Roman Catholic archbishop of Tuam, John Machale, a nationalist priest better known as 'the lion of the west'.[102] Writing about the funeral arrangements, the *Dublin Evening Mail* pointed out that Roman Catholic bishops and 'nationalist members of the parliament' were expected to attend. Also, the ceremony was to 'be made the occasion of a great demonstration'.[103]It was surely a demonstration of attachment in Tuam where, according to the *Evening Telegraph*, from the windows of several houses black flags were suspended.[104] However, the funeral cortège did not bear the features of a nationalistic parade, as feared by the conservative press, as closing the cortège, along with carriages

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[98] *FJ*, 21 Sep. 1869. A 'cavalcade' of gentry was reported to follow the hearse of Patrick Burke, Roman Catholic bishop of Elphin, in 1843. See *The Tuam Herald*, 22 Sept. 1843.
[99] *Evening Telegraph*, 14 Feb. 1885.
[100] *Evening Telegraph*, 16 Feb. 1885.
[101] *The Nation*, 5 May 1866.
[102] Colin Barr, *Paul Cullen, John Henry Newman, and the Catholic University of Ireland, 1845-1865* (Paris, 2003), p. 12.
[103] *Dublin Evening Mail*, 9 Nov. 1881.
[104] *Evening Telegraph*, 9 Nov. 1881; see also *FJ*, 9 Nov. 1881.

sent by the local gentry, was the carriage of the Protestant bishop of Tuam.[105] Aside from him, and in common with other of Roman Catholic cortèges, the funeral was headed by the children of the convents of the Sisters of Mercy, followed by boys from the Christian Brothers' schools.[106]

The actual presence of a large number of people at these funerals was a matter of high importance to the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Although newspaper accounts invariably stress the impressive size of the crowds witnessing any funeral, extracts from the correspondence between the Catholic clergy confirm that the funeral of a bishop would attract a considerable number of spectators. In a letter addressed to the rector of the Irish college in Rome, Tobias Kirby, Paul Cullen wrote in 1864: 'Dr. Yore died a very happy and holy death [...] I suppose we had two hundred priests present at the office - all Dublin was at the funeral. Probably not less than 200,000.'[107] A year later, in a letter to Archbishop Cullen from the town of Drogheda, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh Joseph Dixon wrote: 'We buried poor Dr. Brown on Monday. The respect paid at his funeral by the whole town of Cavan and all the neighbourhood round about Catholic and Protestant surpassed almost anything of the kind that I ever witnessed'.[108] Newspaper accounts were also keen to stress the grief expressed by the lower classes on occasion of funerals of the clergy. Generally, funerals of members of the higher classes would be witnessed by a large number of people. Robert Day noted in his diary that the funeral of a M.P. in Dublin was attended by 'a vast multitude of the lower order'.[109] Also, writing to her mother in 1836, Lady Leitrim dedicated two lines for her indignation after having attended a funeral. In her words the ceremony was featured by 'a most indecent crowd as usual, and all sorts of hustle and bustle'.[110]

8. The Church of Ireland

The first element deserving attention is the presence of members of the Roman Catholic Church who also paid their respects to a deceased bishop belonging to the established

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[105] *FJ,* 14 Nov. 1881. Similarly, on the death of the Protestant bishop of Tuam, Killala and Achonry Charles Broderick Bernard in 1890, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Tuam John McEvilly sent his carriage to the funeral. See *Irish Times*, 5 Feb. 1890.

[106] *FJ,* 14 Nov. 1881.

[107] Cullen to Kirby, 19 Feb. 1864 (D.D.A., Cullen papers, MS 42/1/IV/6).

[108] Dixon to Cullen, 21 Apr. 1865 (D.D.A., Cullen papers, MS 327/1/43).

[109] Notes and Diary of Robert Day, 1832-1839 (R.I.A., MS 12 w 17/5, p. 84).

[110] Killadoon papers (N.L.I., MS 36035/35).

church. On occasion of the funeral of Lord John George Beresford in 1862, Protestant Archbishop of Armagh, Archbishop Dixon visited the palace where the body lay accompanied by 'some of his clergy'. He was then introduced to the relatives of the deceased.[111] The political meaning of the courtesy was fully acknowledged by the *Daily Express*, which wrote about the reconciliatory and symbolic value of such a gesture. The presence at the funeral of the Roman Catholic archbishop, along with a representative of the Irish Presbyterians, was hailed as a 'most touching view'.

> This was a most touching sight, a pledge of social harmony between the three great denominations in this country. The most reverend dr. Dixon never appeared to greater advantage in the eyes of his countrymen [...][112]

The funeral cortège formed to reach the cathedral mirrored the fact that the deceased was a member of the nobility. After the town commissioners of Armagh and 'conductors in mourning cloaks' heading the cortège, there followed his lordship's servants. Following them were three hundred members of the clergy in hierarchical order. The precise order according to dignity was reserved to the two socially prominent groups: the clergy and the nobility. The members of the nobility in the cortège were to walk in order 'according to their degree – the highest in dignity first'. Remarkably, the tenantry of the bishop were present too, but not at the head of the cortège as it was customary for members of the nobility. Closing the funeral cortège at the very end were the bishop's tenants.[113] The coffin was accompanied by six pall bearers (among them the Earl of Gosford and the Earl of Belmore); behind it walked the Ulster King of Arms, followed by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland as chief mourner, symbolising the political unity between the archbishop of Armagh and the King's representative in Ireland. After the members of the primate's family, members of the nobility and various magistrates there followed the Catholic clergy, 'of whom there was a large number'. Several thousand people labelled as 'general public' then followed the hearse. At the cathedral, the wealth of the arrangements was peculiarly abundant even when compared to funerals of other members of the nobility. The coffin was described as being 'richly mounted in solid gold'. After the service, another cortège – followed by the Lord Lieutenant – was formed and the body borne to the crypt of the cathedral.[114]

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[111] *FJ*, 31 July 1862.
[112] Larcom Papers (N.L.I., MS 7508).
[113] Ibid.
[114] *FJ*, 31 July 1862.

The report published by the *Freeman's Journal* of the funeral of the archbishop of Dublin Richard Whately highlighted the employment of the police to prevent a breach of the peace. The usual large number of carriages of the nobility and gentry was also mentioned; among them were the Lord Lieutenant, the Lord Mayor and the Lord Chancellor. The 'splendid hearse and four, bearing ostrich plumes' carried a coffin which had its inner shell made in cedar covered with a lead case and upholstered with white satin, while the outer coffin was made in oak. When the cortège was ready to start it was headed by a squadron of mounted police and members of the Young Men's Christian association, followed by four mutes[115] attired in sables. As the cortège reached Trinity College - where Whately had held the chair of political economy - the provost and a number of fellows and students joined the mourners.[116]

Among the carriages present attending the funeral cortège of the Protestant Archbishop of Dublin, William Conyngham Plunket, was the one sent by the Roman Catholic Archbishop William Walsh, with whom 'his grace maintained the most cordial relations'.[117] The cortège from the house of the deceased bishop to St. Patrick's Cathedral was headed by a delegation of the Young Men's Christian Association (of which the deceased was patron), followed by members of the Irish Church Missions. Then came the Trinity College students and the clergy. Behind the hearse, after the chief mourners, the vehicles 'of professional gentlemen, merchants, and leading citizens closed in the procession'.[118] This last account confirms the features characteristic of the churches' funerals seen so far, namely the importance of the cortèges as a map of power and influence once held by the deceased. The presence of Archbishop Walsh confirms again the conciliatory value given to the funeral cortège as a ritual in which social conflict could be channelled. Other examples were highlighted by contemporary press: at the funeral of the protestant bishop of Kilmore in 1884 the Roman Catholic bishop of the same diocese was present,[119]while at the funeral of the Protestant bishop of Cork and Cloyne John Gregg in 1878 members of the Cork municipal corporation, 'including many Roman Catholics', were in the cortège.[120]Similarly, the Catholic bishop of Kilmore Nicholas Conaty, along with 'several' Roman Catholic priests, attended the funeral of the Protestant bishop of

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[115] Mutes were professional mourners hired by undertaking companies. Their presence marked funerals of the Victorian period. See Jacqueline Simpson, Steve Roud, *Oxford Dictionary of English Folklore* (Oxford, 2003).

[116] *FJ*, 16 Oct. 1863.

[117] *Dublin Evening Mail*, 6 Apr. 1897.

[118] *Dublin Evening Mail*, 6 Apr. 1897.

[119] *Nenagh Guardian,* 26 Jan. 1884.

[120] *Irish Times*, 1 June 1878.

Kilmore John Richard Darley in 1884.[121]

Gestures of condolence could also be expressed differently: on the death of the Protestant Archbishop of Armagh Robert Bent Knox in 1893, after each toll of the Protestant cathedral's bell 'came a muffled stroke from the bell of the Roman Catholic Cathedral, which was tolled by direction of the cardinal'.[122] According to the press reports, this was often mentioned as regards the funerals of Protestant bishops. Articles on funerals of the Roman Catholic higher clergy did not report the presence of members of the Church of Ireland hierarchy, although members of the Protestant gentry were, in a few instances, mentioned as in the example of the funeral of the Roman Catholic bishop of Ossory William Kinsella where, among the laity present, the *Kilkenny Journal* quoted the Marquis of Ormonde.[123] In only one case out of the sample of reports under examination the clergy of the Roman Catholic church and of the Church of Ireland were reported to have mingled in the funeral cortège of a Roman Catholic bishop, namely on occasion of the death of Charles Tuohy, bishop of Limerick, in 1828: a year of sectarian tension .[124] Overall, in the case of funerals of Roman Catholic bishops newspaper reports generally stressed the presence of the protestant gentry or of people 'of all persuasions'.[125]

9. The Freemasons

Among the funerals considered worth attending by the lower classes were the funerals of Freemasons. A witness to the IFC stated that Freemasons 'had a different way of burying their dead to everyone else', adding that 'nobody but a mason would be allowed'. The funeral is described with reverential mystery.

> They'd all be wearing their colours, and they'd stand in a ring round the grave, while the burial was taking place. And when it was over they'd march in single file round the grave, and every man would bid goodbye to the corpse - the goodbye was some kind of a nod or secret sign of their own.[126]

A single manuscript from the UFM collection highlights the fact that at 'all Masonic funerals, sprigs of acacia were dropped on top of the coffin in the grave by all

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[121] *Irish Times*, 25 Jan. 1884. For similar examples, see *Irish Times*, 24 July 1899;16 Jan. 1896; 28 Oct. 1893.

[122] *Irish Times*, 28 Oct. 1893.

[123] Quoted in *The Nation*, 20 Dec. 1845.

[124] *FJ*, 25 Mar. 1828.

[125] *The Nation*, 2 Mar. 1844; 21 June 1873; 13 Feb. 1875; see also *Southern Star*, 28 Nov. 1896; *Roscommon Herald,* 26 Jan. 1895.

[126] I.F.C., MS 1403 (County Meath or County Cavan - uncertain, 1955), p. 301.

masons present'.[127] This custom is mentioned in an article published as late as 1894 in the *Southern Star*.[128] The line between Freemasons and Orangemen might be blurred, especially in sources related to the folklore. The two organizations had close links and common origins. However, 'regular' Freemasonry and Orangeism very quickly branched in different directions; during the nineteenth century, the Orangemen were an organisation onto themselves.[129]

As regards the Masonic funeral ritual, William Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry* was the basic reference for the Masonic customs adopted by the Grand Lodge of Ireland. Published in 1812, it provides a detailed description of the Masonic funeral service as it was meant to be carried out (then quoted by the official *Constitutions of Freemasonry* published in 1820). According to the *Constitutions*, the body should have been placed on a couch for the service. There is no need, for the purposes of this study, to dwell on the Masonic ritual in terms of formulas and hymns that were required to be recited, as there is no clear Irish peculiarity added to a rite that was employed by British and Scottish lodges.[130] What is interesting in the Irish context is the impact of the Masonic funeral cortège, which was meant to be solemn and recognisable, in a country where processions were the object of political debate in various periods of the nineteenth century. According to the ritual the head of the cortège was to be composed only of Freemasons, irrespective of the social role of the deceased. The 'Tyler' – a Masonic officer whose duty is to 'guard' the lodge - with his sword, at the very top, followed by the stewards bearing white rods and the 'brethren', walking two by two. Masonic tunes were meant to be played ideally with drums and trumpets, while 'the choristers, singing an anthem' would precede the coffin. The last member of the cortège ahead of the coffin was 'a clergyman'. The chief and the assistant mourner followed the coffin, which was sided by pall bearers and on which the regalia and two swords crossed were placed. The mourners would then reach the graveyard, a moment which peculiarity is recollected in the IFC manuscript quoted above.

The *Constitutions* prescribed that the lodge to which the deceased belonged should halt, along with the mourners and the 'attendants on the corpse', until the members of the other lodges had formed a circle around the grave. Then the clergyman and the officers of the deceased's lodge take position at the head of the grave 'with the choristers at each side, [and] mourners at the foot'. After an anthem is sung and an exhortation pronounced, the

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[127] U.F.M., MS 63/q3/188.

[128] *Southern Star*, 31 Mar. 1894.

[129] Petri Mirala, *Freemasonry in Ulster, 1733 - 1813* (Dublin, 2007), p. 248.

[130] Jessica Harland-Jacobs, 'All in the Family: Freemasonry and the British Empire in the Mid-Nineteenth Century' in *Journal of British Studies*, xlii, no. 4 (2003), p. 449.

body is finally interred.[131] It is not clear whether this ritual was performed to the letter or not. An account published by the *Freeman's Journal* in 1851 reports that on occasion of the funeral of Thomas Wright, a Dublin citizen, his remains were 'carried to the grave by officers of his lodge'.[132] Furthermore, the funeral of the master of a lodge in King's County was headed by 'nearly one hundred members of the mystic tie'. However, his cortège was not only attended by Freemasons. After the coffin came the staff of the King's County militia, a body of police, the chief mourners and a long line of carriages belonging to the local gentry.[133]

10. Public Order

Funerals of Orangemen were a cause of violence in the north of Ireland throughout the century. Conversely, it is hard to find a negative account of Masonic funerals in contemporary reports (such as the House of Commons reports) or newspapers. Nonetheless, a survey of the Outrage Papers from 1836 to 1841 in County Antrim shows that the constabulary kept an eye on Masonic funerals. During this period nine funerals of Orangemen and Freemasons were reported, as the people in those cortèges wore badges and played party tunes – all peaceful. However, the confusion between the words 'Freemasons' and 'Orangemen' in the reports does not help in understanding whether the cortèges were all made up of Orangemen, or if the 'party tunes' were actually Masonic songs.[134] During the same period in County Dublin only one 'large procession of Freemason society through Balbriggan' is reported.[135]

It should be noted that the rules provided by the *Constitutions* forbade members of the craft (i.e. Freemasons) from attending a funeral of a non-mason (or any public procession) wearing Masonic clothes, unless a special licence from the grand master had been obtained. It was also clearly stated that wearing party colours or playing music other than Masonic tunes would be punished with the exclusion or the suspension from the Masonic organisation.[136] These prescriptions were a constant feature of the Masonic funeral up to 1892, when a clause including other occasions than funerals was added: 'a

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[131] G.L.I., *Constitutions* (1839), pp. 24-9.
[132] *FJ*, 27 Feb. 1851.
[133] *Nenagh Guardian*, 17 Jan. 1857.
[134] Outrage Papers (N.A.I., Antrim 1836-1841).
[135] Outrage Papers (N.A.I., Dublin 1841, file 9/8277 – 9/10359, 2 July 1841).
[136] Grand Lodge of Ireland, *The Constitutions of Freemasonry; or Ahiman Rezon, to which is added a selection of Masonic Songs, Prologues, Epilogues, &c.* (Dublin, 1820), p. xli.

Masonic procession ball, concert, or other entertainment at which Masonic clothing is worn, shall not take place unless by permission of the Grand Lodge [...]'.[137] That the main concern of the Grand Lodge of Ireland was constantly abiding by the law is also demonstrated by a petition issued by lodge number 611 and ten other lodges 'for leave to go in processions at funerals'. The petition was referred on the grounds that the display of Masonic insignia were at the time illegal, and that 'Masons are bound to obey the laws'.[138] The archives of the Grand Lodge preserve one particular case of breaching of these rules. In 1829 lodges 105 and 315 had been found guilty of wearing party colours at a Masonic funeral. The defensive memorial stressed that the lodges had been 'in the habit of doing so for seventy years'. In particular, an apron trimmed with orange was mentioned to be their livery colour during the seventy year period, 'long prior [...] orange being a conspicuous colour in Ireland, and long before the unhappy distinctions of orange and green arisen in this land'. The attitude of the Masonic authorities in dealing with the question was relatively mild. The Grand Lodge prohibited them from wearing any 'party colour' as masons in future, and no further disciplinary action was undertaken.[139] This law-abiding attitude was also promoted by the Church of Ireland. In a sermon preached before a Masonic lodge in 1826 – in the midst of a period of increasing sectarian tension – the Revd. Denis McGillicuddy suggested that in case the government should 'interpose' the Masonic proceedings, that

> The exalted character of the society requires, not indeed that they should forbear remonstrating and studying to maintain themselves by all legal means, but that they should submit with a cheerfulness that may be exemplary to others[140]

The *Irish Times* did report on funerals of eminent Freemasons, to the dismay of the Roman Catholic clergy. In a letter addressed to Cullen's secretary James Murray in 1861, Bernard Delaney complained about the impossibility of preventing the Freemasons from 'boasting in the [...] press that members are buried in Dublin by the priest the same as any one else without any difficulty.'[141] An example of this attitude is found in another letter sent to Cardinal Cullen twelve years later by his nephew, the bishop of Ossory Patrick Francis Moran. Cullen was a renowned enemy of secret societies such as Freemasonry

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[137] G.L.I, *Constitutions* (1896), p. 56; for previous regulations see *Constitutions* (1839; 1872; 1875; 1888; 1896).

[138] G.L.I., *Minutes of the Grand Lodge*, 3 Nov. 1836.

[139] Lodge 315 to Grand Lodge of Ireland, 3 Feb. 1829 (G.L.I., 1/17).

[140] Denis McGillicuddy, *A Sermon on Masonic Processions* (R.I.A., Haliday Papers 1373/5, p. 23).

[141] Cullen papers (D.D.A., MS 340/1/211).

during his episcopacy.[142] In his letter Moran underlines that the *Irish Times* reported on how the Freemasons made a 'great display at Major Knox's funeral. It states that the deceased Major was a prominent member of the Masonic lodge N.XXV. No wonder that this paper would be found to be the organ of the Freemasons.' He also complained that the funeral service was read by 'Rev. D. Wheeler of T.C.D. chief editor of the *Irish Times*. And this is the paper that put itself forward as the champion of liberality [...]'.[143]

Unfortunately, newspaper reports are often devoid of details. Brothers of a deceased Freemason would be named among those present, with no other particular feature. In an 1864 account of the funeral of Charles K. Magrath, manager of the Bank of Ireland in Tralee, we read that 'the funeral of this gentleman [...] was most respectably attended. His remains were interred in the new burial ground, Tralee, attended by the Freemasons as a body. The vehicles of the gentry were present'[144]. Other articles, notwithstanding the promising title of 'Masonic funeral', do not provide a wealth of information either. According to the *Irish Times,* the funeral of Alexander Dudgeon, held in Monaghan in 1866, was attended by a large number of Freemasons who observed a 'solemn and deathlike silence'; the funeral requisites were also furnished by an affiliated company, the 'Messrs J and F Browne'.[145] In 1867 George Handcock, 'secretary to the Freemasons of Ireland, was interred in Mount Jerome cemetery. 'There were at least two hundred carriages at the funeral - the *Irish Times* reported - [...] and the members of the order assembled in large numbers around his grave.' The coffin was described as being 'of massive oak, covered in black chastely mounted, and lined with lead, and encasing an inner one of solid mahogany.'[146] In other cases a local lodge is quoted among the people or institutions who sent wreaths in memory of the deceased.[147] At the funeral service of the Protestant archbishop of Dublin William Conyngham Plunket - also a Freemason - the 'Masonic body' was assigned a 'specially reserved place in the cathedral, but insignia will not be worn in the procession'.[148]However, the report of the funeral published on the 6th of April by the *Dublin Evening Mail* reports that the large representation of Freemasons

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[142] Ciarán O'Carroll, *Paul Cardinal Cullen, Portrait of a Practical Nationalist* (Dublin, 2008), p. 160.

[143] Moran to Cullen, 30 Jan. 1873 (D.D.A., Cullen papers MS 40/9/iv/5). For a similar coffin see the report of the funeral of Henry Griffin, Protestant bishop of Limerick, in *The Irish Times*, 10 Apr. 1866; also the report of the funeral of Thomas Nulty Roman Catholic bishop of Meath, in *Roscommon Herald,* 31 Dec. 1898. See also *Roscommon Herald*, 26 Jan. 1895.

[144] *Irish Times*, 24 June 1864.

[145] *Irish Times*, 22 Feb. 1866.

[146] *Irish Times*, 25 Oct. 1867.

[147] *Anglo-Celt*, 30 May 1896.

[148] *Dublin Evening Mail*, 3 Apr. 1897.

attended 'wearing their regalia and jewels'.[149]

Unsurprisingly The Roman Catholic Church was openly hostile towards Freemasonry. After the condemnation issued by Pope Clement XII in 1738, there followed a similar action by Pope Benedict in 1751, Pope Pius IX in 1821 and Pope Leo XII in 1825. Daniel O'Connell himself, who joined the craft in 1799, publicly rejected his membership in a letter to *The Pilot* in April 1837.[150] It is not clear whether Roman Catholic priests in Ireland would *de facto* officiate at Masonic funerals, although it appears unlikely. In Ireland, as early as 1811 the Roman Catholic archbishop of Dublin John Thomas Troy, who had previously sought to reconcile Freemasonry and Catholicism, turned against the mystic tie in the 1810s.[151] A possible sign of this hostility lay in the refusal to perform the burial service at a funeral of a member of the Freemasonry in Sligo in 1828, when the parish priest refused to officiate at the interment of a Mason who was also 'treasurer to the Roman Catholic Church and some Roman Catholic public charities'. The priest refused to perform the funeral service precisely because the deceased was a member of the local lodge. Although 'the Roman Catholic bishop and other priests' had been asked to officiate at the interment, the deceased Mason was eventually buried without funeral service. Remarkably, the Masonic lodge in Sligo described the event as an 'extraordinary transaction'.[152] A further case occurred in England, involving an army chaplain, attracting the attention of Cardinal Cullen. When a sergeant of the army died in Chatham, Revd. Michael Cuffe, the resident chaplain, declined to officiate at the funeral 'on the ground that Sergeant Johnston was a Freemason'. The Masonic bias of the 'the protestant and conservative newspaper'[153] *Irish Times* was well expressed by an editorial article published after the funeral, which stated that 'It is well known in Ireland that His Holiness the Pope, and his eminence Cardinal Cullen, denounce all who belong to this mystic fraternity, but the remains of the ex-emperor of the French were not denied Christian sepulture [...] though his majesty had reached a high grade in the Masonic order'. On the same day, the newspaper published the letter of Revd Michael Cuffe stating that he was severely criticized 'by a few journals', and adding a laconic 'no Freemason is a Catholic. No Catholic can be a Freemason. The moment he becomes one he secedes from his

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[149] *Dublin Evening Mail*, 6 Apr. 1897.

[150] Terence De Vere White, 'The Freemasons' in T. Desmond Williams (ed.), *Secret Societies in Ireland* (Dublin, 1973), pp. 50-4.

[151] Petri Mirala, 'Lawful and Unlawful Oaths in Ireland 1760-1835 in Allan Blackstock, Eoin Magennis (eds), *Politics and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland 1750 – 1850* (Belfast, 2007), p. 214.

[152] *Sligo Journal*, Feb. 1828.

[153] Mark O'Brien, *The Irish Times: a History* (Dublin, 2008), p. 18.

Church'.[154] Michael Cuffe also wrote to Cardinal Cullen, enclosing in his letter a copy of the *Freemason Chronicle* reporting an attack on him. 'I however ventured to send you the 'Freemason chronicle' of yesterday my humble name is honoured by an attack in its leading article. Think not your eminence that I am grieved or that I fear [...] if I have obliged to leave the army tomorrow it is to you (?) I fly for protection [...]'. He did not make any clear reference to the funeral, nor to the behaviour of his superiors apart from the remark that, according to him, 'the most of my military authorities who are acquainted with me think I have a soldier's spirit'.[155]

The lack of similar cases does not necessarily make the 'Cuffe case' an isolated one. However, 'despite the Episcopal ban' - writes Petri Mirala in his *Freemasonry in Ulster, 1733 – 1813* – 'there is little doubt that Roman Catholicism and Freemasonry remained compatible well into the nineteenth century in the minds of many, if not most, Catholics'.[156] More precisely, the Masonic oaths were 'a borderline case between legal and illegal oaths – not expressly legal by statute, although tolerated by custom'.[157] Tolerance towards Freemasonry increased in the second half of the nineteenth century, although the attitude of the Roman Catholic Clergy did not undergo a significant change. The most direct effect of the legislation against Freemasonry in Ireland was to curb political or traditional processions (such as the St. John procession held by the grand lodge of Ireland).[158] The two party procession acts enacted in 1832 and 1850 were virtually identical in drafting, although the first was not perpetual and had to be renewed every five years. These acts were used almost exclusively against parades on the twelfth of July.[159] The 1850 act also attracted few prosecutions even against Orangemen, due to 'a reluctant magistracy combined with a preponderance Orange jurymen'.[160]

In this context, funeral accounts of Freemasons suggest that the organisation would not keep a low profile at funerals, at least in the case that the deceased was not a member of the aristocracy. As we have seen, masons were often reported as being mourners. In 1897, the funeral of a 'senior of the well known firm of auctioneers' in Longford was briefly described as being of a 'representative character'. The brethren of his lodge where

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[154] *Irish Times*, 16 Feb. 1874.

[155] Cuffe to Cullen, 21 Feb. 1875 (D.D.A., Cullen papers MS 322/1/I).

[156] Petri Mirala, *Freemasonry in Ulster, 1733 - 1813* (Dublin, 2007), p. 274; see also Andrew Prescott, 'The Unlawful Societies Act of 1799' in M.D.J. Scanlan (ed.), *The Social Impact of Freemasonry on the Modern Western World* (London, 2002), pp. 116-34.

[157] Petri Mirala, 'Lawful and Unlawful Oaths', p. 215.

[158] John Heron Lepper, Philip Crossle, *History of the Grand Lodge of Free and accepted Masons of Ireland,* i, (Dubl pp. 96-7.

[159] Neil P. Maddox, "A Melancholy Record': the Story of the Nineteenth – Century Irish Party Processions Acts', in *The Irish Jurist,* xxxix (2004), pp. 249-51.

[160] Ibid., p. 256.

quoted among the people who sent wreaths.[161] However, on the occasion of a funeral of a high member of a lodge, things were organized differently. In 1857 – a year marked by heavy rioting in Belfast - the funeral of the master of St. Brandon's lodge, in County Offaly, was celebrated by a large funeral cortège. At the cortège's head were 'nearly one hundred members of the mystic tie, clad in mourning, thus waked [...]'. They were followed by the hearse, behind which followed the staff of the King's County militia, a 'large body of police' and the usual - according to this kind of account - 'large crowd of all ranks'. No incidents were reported.[162] A further interesting case is recorded in Kilkenny, in 1845. In the town of Carlow the funeral of Captain John Gordon, adjutant of the Kilkenny militia took place. According to the *Nenagh Guardian*, the cortège was accompanied by the brethren of the Masonic lodge of Kilkenny, 'wearing the usual badge, Captain Gordon having been an old brother of the craft.' It is only a short death notice, devoid of any detail regarding the actual religious ceremony.[163] The brief nature of these accounts contributes as the main reason of there being a lack of details about Masonic ceremonies. What seems certain is that a large number of Freemasons in a funeral cortège would often highlighted by the press. A short funeral account published by the *Irish Times* in 1875 described the deceased - secretary to the provincial Grand Lodge of Freemasons of the south eastern district of Ireland - as 'eminently a practical man in connection with masonry. The funeral [...] was attended by nearly one hundred masons'.[164]

11. Conclusions

The centrality of cortèges in the funerals of the higher classes appears in all its importance when examining primary sources: cortèges were precisely codified in terms of hierarchy and social order. The fabric of relations and power of the deceased, whose life was meant to be celebrated in the most lavish fashion, was to be publicly displayed on the day of the funeral. This attitude – which was peculiarly common in the Irish social milieu among the lower as well as the higher classes – allowed the rare exception of the private funeral, which never became a common option in the period under examination. Moreover, the growing importance of the middle-upper class during the second half of the nineteenth

[161] *Westmeath Examiner*, 19 June 1897.
[162] *Nenagh Guardian*, 17 Jan., 1857.
[163] *Nenagh Guardian*, 10 May 1845.
[164] *Irish Times*, 10 Dec. 1875.

century is mirrored by the presence in funeral cortèges of workers employed in the deceased's factories. On the other hand, the presence of the tenantry was a constant feature of the accounts examined, representing the unyielding importance – in terms of *mentalité* – of the landed power in nineteenth century Irish society.

It is true that death was the focus of a growing market throughout Europe up to the end of the 19th century. In this context, the Irish case did not constitute an exception, although it must be borne in mind that the 'commercialisation' of death was a phenomenon confined to the urban middle to higher classes, which in the Irish case represent a relatively small section of the population. If, notwithstanding the lack of sources, the data collected suggest an increase of the undertaking business since the 1850s, it is reasonable to suppose that changes in rural Ireland were far less dramatic. Indeed, the folklore on death, which can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century, confirms this view.[165] The peculiarity of the Irish funeral, namely its focus on the lavish celebration of the departed life, found its most natural outlet in the funeral cortèges of members of the gentry.

The attitude of the higher clergy of the Church of Ireland was not, quite predictably, different from the social class they belonged to. Their funerals did not differ from other members of the nobility in terms of the display of wealth and social power. On the political side, the conciliatory approach of these customs – symbolized by the presence of members of the Roman Catholic clergy as well as members of the dissenting churches in their funerals – does stand out. As seen before, funerals were rarely an occasion for the sparking of social conflicts. Conversely, they were the occasion for the channelling of social conflicts into a non-violent ritual. From this perspective the tolerance of Masonic funeral cortèges is not a surprising fact when other organizations, such as the Fenians, were not prosecuted for organizing political funerals.[166]

However, funerals were the object of a political struggle in terms of dominance of the public sphere. The powerful impact of funerals as political displays was clearly shown by Cardinal Cullen's struggle against Fenian funerals during the 1860s.[167] The funerals of the Roman Catholic clergy, the importance of death's power to foster social unity was at the centre of their cortèges. Displays of wealth were also present, even though restrained by contemporary standards. This obviously reflected the social upbringing of Roman Catholic bishops; Daniel Murray was born into a family of substantial farmers (tenants of

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[165] I.F.C., MS 971 (County Cork, 1944), p. 169.
[166] Thomas J. Brophy, 'On Church Grounds: Political Funerals and the Contest to Lead Catholic Ireland' *in The Catholic Historical Review*, xcv, no. 3 (2009), p. 492.
[167] Ibid., pp. 491- 514.

Lord Wicklow in County Wicklow).[168] Paul Cullen was born into a 'farming family of nationalist political aspirations' in County Kildare.[169] Similarly, the archbishop of Armagh Michael Kieran came from a 'comfortable farming' background.[170]Their power was manifested in their growing grip on the Irish lower classes. The power and relations shown in their funerals - as precisely ordered as those of members of the nobility – stresses the importance of the education question on the one hand, and the social control over the lower classes on the other hand (mirrored by the presence of charities and associations such as the temperance societies). As the nineteenth century witnessed a period of 'intensive interaction between the lower classes and the Church', this interaction can also be read as an increasing struggle to gain control over the Irish Catholic masses.[171]Thus the funerals of the higher Roman Catholic clergy were an occasion to temporarily dominate the public sphere, as part of a constant effort marking the rise of the Catholic Church up to the end of the nineteenth century.

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[168] Donal Kerr, 'Dublin's Forgotten Archbishop: Daniel Murray, 1768-1852' in James Kelly, Dáire Keogh (eds), *History of the Catholic Diocese of Dublin* (Dublin, 2000), p. 251.

[169] Ciarán O'Carroll, 'The Pastoral Politics of Paul Cullen in James Kelly, Dáire Keogh (eds), *History of the Catholic Diocese of Dublin* (Dublin, 2000), p. 294.

[170] Bellew, 'Michael Kieran', p. 149.

[171] Lawrence J. Taylor, 'Bás InEirinn: Cultural Constructions of Death in Ireland' *in Anthropological Quarterly,* lxii, no. 4 (1989) p. 181.

Conclusions

The present study focused prominently on the lower classes' funeral customs, particularly on the well known 'merry wake' with its corollary of grief, merriment and revelry. On this ground, the centrality of the wake as a custom fulfilling diverse functions has been confirmed, following upon the literature on the subject. Through the ritual lament for the dead as well as a social gathering, this peculiar custom provided for a structured expression of grief. It also allowed the community to cope with the death of a member from the initial stage (through the laying out of the corpse) to the end of the mourning period. While it provided the bereaved family with socially accepted procedures to deal with grief, it also represented a popular occasion for communal entertainment. These two main functions - one more strictly related to the bereaved family and the other broadly connected to the pattern of Irish rural life - are at the root of the long standing survival of the 'merry wake' throughout the nineteenth century. In this context, the results of the research have consistently tallied with Sean Connolly's intuitions on pre-Famine society, particularly the importance of the psychological value of wakes.[1]

Nonetheless, following of Ó Crualaoich's structural analysis of the custom – in particular on the dichotomy between timely and untimely deaths – the research has provided the basis for a reconsideration of the lower classes' funeral customs as depicted through oral sources. The study highlights how a merry celebration was socially acceptable when the deceased was, in popular terms, 'no loss'. The analysis of 'untimely deaths', such as the death of infants in times of epidemics, suggested that the notion of 'no loss' was defined by a shared set of values, partly derived from the Roman Catholic Church, partly by the rural community. Thus, while 'merry' wakes would be held only when the deceased had fully lived the 'ordinary span of life', stillborn babies and unbaptized infants, being outside the Christian community, were not given a proper wake. A contradictory argument to this interpretation might be found in the performance of merry wakes for young baptized children, as reported by contemporary press during the epidemics of typhus in post-Famine Dublin. Those were, indeed, untimely deaths. However, they were 'respectable' deaths. Also, given the high rate of child mortality the value of lower classes strategies to cope with grief should be taken into account. As pointed out by Julie Marie Strange in her study

[1] Sean J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland*, 1780-1845 (Dublin, 2001), p. 161.

on the British labouring classes, grief could be managed in ways that, to an external observer, might appear 'unsentimental'.[2]

Thus the pivotal role of the notion of 'respectability' has been further confirmed, as opposed to a clearly defined structural response to timely or untimely deaths. Similarly, no wake was performed for people who died committing a Christian sin such as suicide. In this sense, the analysis of customs related to untimely deaths has underlined the importance of the Roman Catholic Church in defining rites of passage. It has also demonstrated how the traditional image of the 'merry wake' as depicted by oral sources hides a more complex panorama.

The role of the Church was nonetheless confined outside the 'wake', whose celebration was to be carried on despite constant anathemas from the Catholic clergy. Again, the wake's paramount psychological function comes to the fore. Customs such as the keening of the dead allowed the bereaved (and those who wished to remember their own relatives) to perform an intense and structured mourning ritual within a determined period of time. As the collected evidence shows, contemporary observers of the middle-classes as well as informants to the IFC testified to the impact the keeners had on those who participated in the communal morning. On the other hand, the presence of keeners – at least during the pre-Famine period – was surely considered to be a vital sign of respectability. The lament for the dead not only provided a means of expressing individual grief, but also represented a public celebration of the deceased, thus being a ritual counterpart to the merriment of the wake.

The occasion for merriment and revelry provided by 'timely deaths' was mainly expressed through the performance of 'wake games'. Following the classification proposed by Ó Súilleabháin, the present study has focused on the function of games; popular games such as 'the nine daughters', allowing the 'neighbouring' community to designate an outsider as the victim of the game, in turn provided a means through which to reassert communal unity. Moreover, although the evidence is fairly scarce and, at times, contradictory, there is a clear indication of the continuity of wake games well beyond the watershed represented by the Great Famine. Their longevity testifies to the long standing reputation of wakes as popular social gatherings up to the end of the nineteenth century: games, along with the provision of alcohol and tobacco, represented the main attraction of 'merry wakes'.

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[2] Julie-Marie Strange, 'She Cried Very Little': Death, Grief and Mourning in Working Class Culture, c. 1880 – 1914 in *Social History,* xxvii, no. 2 (2002), p. 151.

Along with alcohol and tobacco, games also contributed to the 'collective pleasure' that, according to Peter Narváez, made wakes particularly attractive to the lower classes. It was the Famine which was to cause a complete disruption of funeral customs, though it only hit the poorest strata of the population. For the bottom of society, the impact of food shortage and Famine-related diseases led to the neglect of wakes and funerals. Yet, contemporary as well as oral sources indicate that the Great Famine was a parenthesis that did not have repercussions on the lower classes' attitudes towards death. They suggest that funeral customs, while neglected at the peak of the Famine, were promptly resumed as soon as the crisis lessened. The resumption of funeral customs signifies once again the close link between communal ties and wakes and funerals in a public dimension. The very reluctance with which oral informants would refer to stories of neglect corroborates this view, as a partial suppression of such memories would contribute to the renewal of traditional customs.

However, changes in the population, such as the rise of the big farmer and the drastic reduction of the landless poor, could have had a long lasting effect on wakes and funerals. 'Keeners' belonged to the social class that suffered the most from the crisis. The Irish language – to which the oral tradition of the lament for the dead belonged – did suffer a severe blow, although keeners were still reported in some areas by various contemporary observers up to the first half of the twentieth century. As for the changing notion of respectability, the inquiry has shown how the performance of merry wakes was constantly reported or referred to by contemporary sources throughout the whole nineteenth century. This continuity – in particular in regards to the heavy consumption of alcohol and the consequent 'revelling' at wakes – calls for further examination of the notion of a 'decent' funeral.

The provision of alcohol, tobacco and food satisfied the need for 'a good send off', namely a rich and well attended feast in honour of the departed. Besides being relevant for an effective expression of mourning, a 'decent' wake was also fundamental in fostering a 'respectable' image of the bereaved family. Thus a merry celebration of death implied the celebration of the deceased – along with his family – playing its role as the generous host of the wake. For the Irish poor, saving money on these occasions was the cause of public shame, as hospitality was an essential feature of nineteenth century Irish society, and death provided the foremost occasion (and, indeed, an obligation) for relatives of the deceased to demonstrate their hospitality to the community. Sources constantly point out the need for the poor to provide for a lavish 'merry wake', in spite of the meagre means available. This attitude was clearly not confined to death, but it encompassed rights of passage as a whole,

in particular weddings; as a witness to the 1834 commission of inquiry into drunkenness put it, 'baptisms are generally debauches [...] births, wakes, funerals, marriages, churns in the country; are all the jovial and vehement occasions of universal revelry'.[3]

Although the attention of middle-class observers would focus on the 'revelry' enjoyed by the lower classes, the importance of material provisions for wakes went beyond a mere 'jovial' attitude. Tobacco was shared as a testimony to the respects paid to the deceased; alcohol, also, sanctioned the importance of the mourning occasion, as it did for weddings, baptisms or indeed any transaction that needed to be sanctioned. The reason why the lower classes would afford funeral expenses excessive for their means lies in the identity between a 'well supplied' wake and a 'respectable' wake. Being thus strongly connected with a broader cultural background, the need for providing a generous supply of alcohol was peculiarly resistant to the forbidding efforts of the Roman Catholic Church.

Throughout the nineteenth century the Catholic Church issued regulations against 'unruly' behaviour at wakes. The action of the higher clergy was directed against wake games as well as the notorious 'revelry' that would take place at funerals. However, regulations shows that their attention was mainly drawn by the excessive consumption of alcohol as a cause for the disruption of social order. In a wider context, the efforts of the Catholic Church must be seen as functional to the process of 'devotional revolution' first described by Emmet Larkin in his seminal 1972 article.[4] Although certainly effective in the long term, the disciplining process of the Catholic Church was not as promptly carried out as Larkin supposed, especially as regards the immediate post-Famine period.

Effectiveness of regulations against 'merry wakes' is a powerful lens through which to assess the actual implementation of the 'devotional revolution'. Firstly, the very need to constantly re-issue prohibitions during a time span of a century is a sign of the limited success that the lower clergy met in their attempt to enforce synodal regulations. Their constant failure to curb the consumption of alcohol at wakes was due to multiple factors, the most vital being the encompassing role of the drinking culture in nineteenth century Ireland, a culture to which the lower clergy belonged too. Confidential correspondence between a major player of the 'devotional revolution' such as Cardinal Paul Cullen and members of the higher clergy demonstrate that having what contemporary sources labelled as 'a drink problem' was relatively common, at least among parish priests

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[3] *Report from the Select Committee on Inquiry into Drunkenness, with Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix*, pp. 402-7, H.C. 1834 (559), viii, 728-33.

[4] Emmet Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75' in *The American Historical Review,* lxxvii, no. 3 (1972), pp. 625-52.

and curates. Discipline within the Church, although a better organised institution than it was during the early part of the century, was still lacking.

Moreover, at a local level the enforcement of synodal regulations was not regularly met with passive acceptance. As pointed out by the recent research of Cara Delay, compromise between the clergy and the lower classes was rather the rule than the exception, in a world in which 'tradition and custom, in some cases, continued to guide daily life.'[5] As for funeral customs, deterrent strategies against the consumption of alcohol at wakes were inherently weak. The recurrent threat of denying funeral masses in the houses where alcohol had been consumed during the wake were met by open resistance (or by a likely silent opposition) by the lower clergy. Funeral masses were, as a matter of fact, an important means of sustainment for the lower clergy. They were also a vital financial support for a Church that, ironically, was expanding in the effort to consolidate and tighten its grip on Irish society.

On the other hand, oral sources indicate the Roman Catholic Church as a main agent for a change of attitude towards funeral customs, although the timing for this success should be located beyond the nineteenth century, in particular from the 1920s onwards. During the period under examination by the present study the evidence supports the thesis of a substantial continuity in the heavy consumption of alcohol at wakes, which also implies a 'shaky' (in Cara Delay's words) implementation of the devotional revolution. The concern of the clergy towards wakes as a matter of public order eventually led to the investigation of the actual incidence of funeral-related affrays and, broadly speaking, to the relationship between funeral customs and public order.

The results of an inquiry conducted over a wide range of outrage papers, constabulary reports and newspaper issues has confirmed the rarity of funeral-related affrays. The relative rarity of sectarian homicide (already pointed out by the study of Richard McMahon[6]) has also been confirmed. More generally, although wakes and funerals represented an occasion for revelry and excessive consumption of alcohol[7], they were in fact a rare concern for the Irish constabulary. The cases examined suggest that alcohol played its part in fostering violence, although no fundamental relation with funeral customs is to be found. As an example, wake and funeral-related affrays frequently occurred when the funeral parties were 'coming back' from the burial, while being 'under

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[5] Cara Delay, 'The Devotional Revolution on the Local Level: Parish Life in Post-Famine Ireland' in *U.S. Catholic Historian*, xxii, no. 3 (2004), p. 46.

[6] Richard McMahon, ''The Madness of Party': Sectarian Tension and Homicide in Ireland, 1801 – 1850' in *Crime, History and Societies*, xi (2007).

[7] Thus providing for the ideal background for 'recreational violence'. See Caroline Conley, *Melancholy Accidents. The Meaning of Violence in Post-Famine Ireland* (Lanham, 1999) pp.17-42.

the influence of alcohol'. However, considering the unquestionably high amount of alcohol consumed at wakes and funerals, the rarity of serious clashes born out of such gathering – when compared with fairs or elections – stresses the fundamental role of funeral customs as a means for the channelling of occasions of conflict. The physical violence of numerous wake games should be analyzed in these terms, especially when confrontations between players were marked by a sectarian divide.

Only in the peculiar case of the Belfast riots did funeral cortèges represent a matter of controversy, requiring the prompt intervention of the authorities. Measures undertaken against funeral cortèges highlight the prominence of the Catholic and Protestant clergy in promoting a common peace keeping strategy. Although the ruling classes (such as resident magistrates) put military forces in place in order to cope with breaches of public order, the influence of the Churches proved to be a vital factor. When the attention of authorities was drawn by funeral 'processions', the actions of both the Protestant and the Catholic clergy were instrumental in allowing only close relatives to attend the funeral cortège, or in setting the time and route for funerals in order to avoid possible clashes between hostile parties. As a peculiar battling ground, Belfast thus provided for a unique testing ground for the control of the lower class funeral customs. In this limited and peculiar context the successful role of the clergy of both confessions did stand out. However, it is clear how, in a more general perspective, the limited impact of lay disciplining agencies on funeral customs contributed to the continuity of 'merry wakes'.

The difficulty of lay authorities in changing popular attitudes towards funeral customs was remarkably evident when sanitary emergencies called for a closer control of wakes. Research has shown how the undisputed authority of the Roman Catholic Church was left alone as regards funeral customs. As during the Great Famine, only a complete disruption of social ties – caused by fear of contagion – would led to a temporary halt of merry wakes. Although the 1878 Public Health Act was draconian in its provisions, giving strong powers to sanitary authorities, its actual implementation was rather difficult, particularly in rural areas. Its deterring power was, also, questionable. In the case of a death by infectious disease the act provided for a maximum fine of £5 upon the 'occupier of the room' in which a wake was to be held. Although £5 was a considerable amount of money, its application was discretional. The effect of a pecuniary fine on the lower classes, yet ready to spend the saving of years for a 'decent' wake, was unlikely to be effective, as the *Freeman's Journal* pointed out. On the other hand, preventive measures such as the removal of the sick to local hospitals encountered popular diffidence. As since the pre-

Famine period popular fear of medical dissection also focused on hospitals, the sick would frequently die in their homes, where they would be traditionally waked.

Overall, lay as well as clerical authorities met strong resistance in the attempt to change popular attitudes to death because of the renowned attachment of the lower classes to funeral customs. Burials, in such a 'funerary culture'[8] divided along sectarian lines, represented a source of conflict during the early part of the nineteenth century. The 'burial question' was initially brought to the fore in 1823, following the funeral of Arthur D'Arcy in Dublin. These events led to the passing of the 1824 Burial Act, which permitted the reading of the performance of dissenters burial services in Protestant churchyards. During the period 1824 to 1868 the Burial Act was practically ignored, as a custom of mutual toleration set in.

Although the Act provided for permission to be requested by letter to the Protestant incumbent, it was seldom observed, partly because Catholic priests saw it as an act of submission to the Church of Ireland. The *modus vivendi* became the rule, as Protestant incumbents did not require[9] any official permission for dissenting rites to be performed, is a further symptom of how conflict was eventually defused in the context of funeral customs. As for the press - in particular the *Freeman's Journal* – it contributed to shedding light on episodes worth reporting in an attempt to ease sectarian animosity. In a year of sectarian tension such as 1829 the *Freeman's* reported that at a funeral in County Tipperary the Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy walked 'arm in arm, and remained in the church yard while the priest was reading the burial service'.[10] This attitude was finally sanctioned by the 1868 Burial Act; the only concession given to the Church of Ireland being that no dissenting burial service could be recited in churchyards when the service of the established church was performed in the attached church or chapel.

The 1832 Anatomy Act had far more impact on the funeral customs of the lower classes. Although it gradually brought body snatching to an end, it focused popular fears on medical dissection as well as on the workhouse system. To the stigma of a death in the workhouse, fear of having one's body dissected was eventually added. The present study has shown, in line with the British case investigated by Ruth Richardson, how the workings of the Anatomy Act were kept out of the public eye. A major case uncovered in Galway provided the opportunity to outline the mechanism of the provision of bodies for medical schools, at a time in which Irish Catholic opinion did not conceal a profound

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[8] See Nina Witoszek, 'Ireland, a Funerary Culture?' in *Studies: an Irish Quarterly Review*, lxxvi, no. 302, p. 206.

[9] If not in rare cases, covered by the press.

[10] *FJ*, 21 Apr. 1829.

distaste for dissection, shared by both the lower and higher classes. While the former dreaded death in a workhouse, the latter found in the undertakers' devices, such as the 'patent coffin', a protection for the corpse's integrity.

Ruth Richardson has argued that one of the reasons for the growth of the role of undertakers in the Victorian period must be ascribed to fear of dissection. The need to protect one's body would have worked as a boost for the undertaking market during the peak of the bodysnatching period, creating the conditions for a full development of the lavish and rich Victorian funeral. It is certainly true that what is often considered a 'Victorian' attitude to death was developing before the reign of Queen Victoria, in England, as well as in Ireland. Whereas the British case has been well documented, the development of the Irish funeral industry has yet to be investigated. Lack of contemporary sources does not allow for tracing the growth of undertaking firms throughout the nineteenth century. However, data from the census as well as contemporary advertisements indicate a rise in the number of professional undertakers in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The presence of a developing funeral industry is also inferred by the funerals of the higher classes. Cortèges of the nobility and the gentry clearly showed the lavish, ostentatious attitude of their peers on the other side of the Irish sea. The analysis of a sample of funeral reports provided by the contemporary press has shown how the social position of the deceased and their achievements in life were carefully reflected by the structure of the cortège. While the landowners' power was represented by their own tenantry at the head of the cortège, from the 1860s their position was taken, in the case of members of the growing trading sector, by the deceased's employees. Although a lavish funeral was the norm – with substantial continuity up to the end of the century – the sample of funeral reports examined returned a number of 'private' funerals, i.e. funerals where only close relatives would make up the cortège. As a rare custom, the 'private' funeral highlights that the norm resided in a more flamboyant attitude. It is also a symptom of a rather remarkable choice of soberness, which in turn might be ascribed to a sober approach to funeral customs – in other words: to religion.

Such a simplicity was not shared by the Church of Ireland's higher clergy, whose cortèges were predictably the occasion for a public display of wealth and power. Funeral reports also draw attention to the presence of members of the higher Roman Catholic clergy at such funerals. The political message of conciliation signified by their presence was remarkably highlighted by the conservative press. This custom might have originated as an act of official deference to the Established Church before 1868, as the presence of

Catholic bishops at Protestant bishops' funerals is still reported after the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland and might have also testified to the conciliatory attitude of the Catholic Church. No mention of a parallel attitude has been found during the course of the present study in reports of funeral of the Catholic clergy. It is unlikely, however, that the nationalist press might have overlooked such a mark of respect and deference. On the other hand, funerals of the Roman Catholic clergy were largely omitted by the Protestant press.

Finally, the peculiarity of Freemasons' funerals stands out. In a country where 'party processions' played a prominent role in fostering social conflict, Freemasons kept a law-abiding attitude, distinguishing their lodges from Orange ones and testifying to their affiliation to the craft at funerals of deceased brothers. Moreover, the analysis of the records related to funeral customs of the Freemasons, as well as of the regulations of the Grand Lodge of Ireland, draws attention to aspects of strong tradition and continuity germane to the lower classes' attitudes. For the latter, the results of the study point to a progressive change that while having its roots in the post-Famine period, really only manifested in the early twentieth century.

Thanks to the formation of the Free State in 1922, the Roman Catholic Church gained a tighter hold on Irish society, when the connection between religion[11] and national identity was sanctioned with the official role of the Church in the life of the state. Certainly, the handing over of crucial sectors such as primary and secondary education contributed to the progressive change of the notion of 'respectability' for the new generations. On the other hand, the depopulation of the countryside, along with changes in its composition, indicate that those responsible for the transmission of old customs gradually disappeared. At the same time the 'strong farmer', which became a prominent figure during the last decades of the nineteenth century, had a different attitude towards funeral customs as early as before the Famine. Its rise, also, 'coincided with the growth of clerical power'.[12] In these terms the 'Irish funeral' described by John Gamble in 1831 - a wake where wine and punch were 'taken sparingly' - is a telling, though isolated account.

When Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball started their anthropological study in County Clare in the 1930s, they found a society where tradition and change cohabited under a surface of apparent immutability. Referring to the country dance, they noticed that in rural areas the custom was undergoing a change at the time, as 'it is much as it was in the last century although it may not enliven the country as it did'. Perhaps, the same

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[11] Kevin Williams, 'Faith and the Nation: Education and Religious Identity in the Republic of Ireland' in *British Journal of Educational Studies*, xlvii, no. 4 (1999), p. 319; see also Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800, Conflict and Conformity* (London, 1989), pp. 264-72.

[12] Rosemary Cullen Owens, *A Social History of Women in Ireland* (Dublin, 2005), p. 167.

observation might have been relevant to merry wakes, which they unfortunately did not mention. There were, still, occasions of leisure such as patterns, as well as 'dances in the winter, and occasions of courtship, excitement, and philandering of sorts in the countryside'.[13]

At the beginning of the twentieth century Sir Horace Plunkett in his *Ireland in the New Century* included, among the social problems of the country, the excessive drinking that would take place at fairs, markets and 'sometimes even yet, at 'wakes', those ghastly parodies on the blessed consolation of religion in bereavement'.[14] His critics, however, pointed out that the problem of drink at wakes was disappearing. Similarly to the pre-Famine middle-class observers, Fr Michael O'Riordan considered clerical censure against wakes to be effective 'to the extent of almost blotting out the abuse'. However, as for his own admission he had only 'heard of censures in connection with wakes'.[15] O'Riordan also pointed out that although the lower clergy might have been too lax in its efforts, the Roman Catholic clergy stood out as the sole agent against the excessive consumption of alcohol. In his opinion the priests' efforts had prevented things from 'having become a great deal worse'.

As Arensberg and Kimball would write nearly thirty years later, O'Riordan also noticed how the depopulation of the countryside had affected social customs. 'as the population became sparse, cross-roads dancing and other rural pastimes gradually disappeared'.[16] Nonetheless, he highlighted the fact that not only customs opposed by the Roman Catholic Church had actually fallen into disuse; 'when Sir Horace and other critics tell me that cross- roads dancing has disappeared because it was stopped by the priests, I write them to tell me also by whom was hurling and football stopped?'[17]

The answer to the reasons of the eventual decline of the merry wake lies in further research on the evolution of early twentieth century Irish society which has yet to be done, in particular from a socio-historical perspective. More research on the regional variation of funeral customs, in particular of those of the lower classes, is also needed. Furthermore, new studies would benefit from a comparative perspective. Given the peculiar interaction between the Roman Catholic Church and Irish nationalism, the impact of funerals of prominent Irish figures could be compared with similar events in Catholic countries such as France or Italy. As for Ireland, the core of the present study indicates that the exact reasons for a demise in rural traditions must be looked for beyond the period under

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[13] Conrad M. Arensberg, Solon T. Kimball, Family and Community in Ireland (Ennis, 2001), p. 207.
[14] Horace Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century* (London, 1904), p. 113.
[15] Michael O'Riordan, *Catholicity and Progress in Ireland* (London, 1906), p. 266.
[16] Ibid., p. 281.
[17] Ibid., p. 282.

examination: when looked through the lens of the funeral customs of the greater part of Irish population, the nineteenth century tells a story of remarkable, tenacious continuity.

Appendix. Table Five. Post-Famine disturbances (source: constabulary reports)

	Ulster		Leinster		Munster		Connaught	
Year	Hom.	At Funerals	Hom.	At Funerals	Hom.	At Funerals	Hom.	At Funerals
1862	22	n/a	23	n/a	27	n/a	8	n/a
1863	19	0	16	0	28	0	11	0
1864	14	0	15	0	18	0	15	0
1865	17	0	16	0	18	0	9	0
1866	12	0	8	1	25	0	6	0
1867	14	0	7	1	27	1	13	0
1868	26	0	14	0	32	1	7	0
1869	22	0	18	1	20	0	16	1
1870	15	0	15	0	32	1	15	0
1871	21	0	9	0	29	1	10	0
1872	31	1	12	0	28	0	16	0
1873	25	0	12	0	28	0	16	0
1874	26	0	13	1	30	0	15	1
1875	36	0	18	1	34	0	23	0
1876	30	1	16	0	23	1	10	1
1877	35	1	13	0	26	1	13	0
1878	25	0	8	0	30	1	13	0
1879	24	0	13	1	16	0	11	0
1880	23	0	18	0	20	0	10	0
1881	17	0	19	0	34	0	25	1
1882	20	0	12	0	32	0	22	0
1883	14	0	17	0	17	0	8	0
1884	18	0	17	0	30	2	6	0
1885	18	1	12	0	28	0	9	0
1886	23	1	10	0	28	0	13	0
1887	13	0	13	0	26	0	11	0
1888	19	0	12	0	21	1	3	0
1889	21	0	14	0	17	0	7	0
1890	12	0	10	1	26	0	8	0
1891	17	0	12	0	21	0	11	0
1892	15	0	14	0	23	0	18	0

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