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978-0-521-55388-9 - *After the Famine: Irish Agriculture, 1850–1914*

Michael Turner

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*After the Famine* examines the recovery in Irish agriculture in the wake of the disastrous potato famine of the 1840s, and presents for the first time an annual agricultural output series for Ireland from 1850 to 1914. Michael Turner's detailed study is in three parts: he analyses the changing structure of agriculture in terms of land use and peasant occupancy; he presents estimates of the annual value of Irish output between 1850 and 1914; and he assesses Irish agricultural performance in terms of several measures of productivity. These analyses are placed in the context of British and European agricultural development, and suggest that, contrary to prevailing orthodoxies, landlords rather than tenants were the main income beneficiaries in the decades before the Land War and land reforms. This interpretation could help to explain the emergence of the land reform movement from the late 1870s, which culminated in peasant independence by 1914. *After the Famine* is an important contribution to an extremely controversial area of Irish and economic history.

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# After the Famine

*Irish agriculture, 1850–1914*

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Michael Turner

*University of Hull*



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For Alison  
Kate, James and Jessie

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## Preface and acknowledgements

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Through personal and domestic circumstances I have made many visits to Belfast in the last twenty years or so. I want to take this early opportunity to record my thanks to my mother and father-in-law, and indeed to all my contacts in Northern Ireland for making me feel so welcome. Whilst in Belfast I often took the opportunity to use Queen's University Library. I can commend the marvellous collection of nineteenth-century parliamentary papers held there. This was my initial entry into Irish agricultural history, along with my extraction of material from the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland which was concerned with the County Down livestock census of 1803.<sup>1</sup> I shall always be grateful to Peter Roebuck for alerting me to the existence of this material. This research also allowed me to become familiar with the abundant annual agricultural census material which was collected from the late 1840s which now form the main data on which this present study is based.

A more deeply rooted connection with Ireland is literally a matter of roots. My mother came from Achill Island, a remote Atlantic island connected to its administrative county of Mayo by a causeway. She was born into an impoverished family in 1913, one of eight children. This study of Irish history inevitably took on a personal meaning.

The whole exercise has illuminated the value of inter-disciplinary co-operation. I have relied upon the expertise and good advice from many disparate areas – geography, economics, history, computing, economic history, and even geology. At a minimum, the size of the data set on which this study is based – upwards of 40 variables for 70 years at the national level, and the same 40 variables for 32 counties for each of seven specific census years – are about 12,000 separate numbers. In the text they have usually been presented as some kind of transformation of the originals. This work has only been possible with the aid of modern

<sup>1</sup> This was part of the data gathering exercises related to the invasion scares of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. See M.E. Turner, 'Livestock in the agrarian economy of Counties Down and Antrim from 1803 to the Famine', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 11, 1984, 19–43.

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technology and the grant of a year away from university teaching and administration through the generosity of the Nuffield Foundation. I am happy to thank the Nuffield for the award of a Social Science Fellowship during the year 1985–6. Much of that year was occupied in data entry and transformation, and only in a small measure to data analysis. All of the data were made adaptable to a table top computer. My thanks to Norman Davidson of the Department of Geography firstly for educating me in the use of data management systems, and secondly for introducing me to the statistical and mapping packages which were in current use at the time. He also taught me the intricacies of digitising (inputting the boundaries of the Irish counties into the computer for automatic mapping). Good students always strive for independence but there is often a battle with technological constraints. Although I acquired a computer I remained dependent on Norman and his department for the use of their digitisers and pen plotters. During this, the initial phase of development, my final thanks are to Richard Middleton, formerly of Geology, for constant encouragement and the use of his packages for some of the original transformations of the data.

Immediately the Fellowship expired it was back to other duties, and in my case this involved the acquisition of the role of Senior Tutor for Social Science students at Hull University, as well as a full teaching load. In the three years while I held office the project lay largely dormant, but there occurred an immense technological change. The geographers changed systems for a start, and in general the schools and departments throughout the university acquired PC computers. My new-found skills were not wasted because the adaptation to an alternative computing system involved a steep learning curve. I ended up completing this study on a PC using the most modern of packages. For his assistance during this phase I particularly thank Chris Hammond of the Department of Economics for his interest and work on my behalf, especially in terms of mapping and allied computer skills. I also thank John Palmer of the Department of History for the use of his digitising equipment and to George Slater of the Computer Centre for his developmental work on the mapping package. For constant encouragement, often of a non-specific nature, I thank my colleagues Donald Woodward and David Richardson of the Department of Economic History, Gerry Makepeace and Stephen Trotter in Economics, and Mahes Visvalingam of the Cartographic Information Systems Research Group. A good library is a must for any substantial research, and we have a good library in Hull. Within it we have marvellous support services, but I must single out John Morris for special mention. No inquiry was too large, no search too tedious.

Away from Hull I owe debts of thanks to Cormac Ó Gráda and Peter

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Solar for constant encouragement and good advice. Peter Solar has been generous with his time commenting on earlier drafts of specific chapters and making valuable suggestions for improvements. A small army of anonymous readers, and some not so anonymous, have had their say and I am grateful to them all. In particular I would like to thank Cormac Ó Gráda a second time for his help with earlier drafts, and also Patrick O'Brien and Charles Feinstein for their help in the final tidying up process. I always took advice in the spirit in which it was given, though I may not have always applied it in the correct manner. Richard Fisher at Cambridge University Press has been a model of patience.

While the book was developing there were invitations to give papers, to test ideas, and to contribute to edited volumes. The bare data in chapter 4 and two related but separate arguments in chapter 5 appeared in a journal article in 1990 and an edited volume in 1991, but they have now been completely revised; a long general essay on post-Famine agriculture has appeared in a volume of essays, though again much of this has been revised in this book.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, my love and thanks go to Alison, Kate, James and Jessie for their patience over many years, for putting up with the countless late nights in the office and even the missed holidays.

<sup>2</sup> M.E. Turner, 'Output and productivity in Irish agriculture from the Famine to the Great War', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 17 (1990), 62-78, and, 'Agricultural output and productivity in post-Famine Ireland', in B.M.S. Campbell and M. Overton (eds.), *Land, Labour, and Livestock: Historical Studies in European Agricultural Productivity* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 410–38, and, 'Rural economies in post-Famine Ireland, c. 1850–1914', in B.J. Graham and L. Proudfoot (eds.), *An Historical Geography of Ireland* (London, 1993), pp. 293–337.