



**Minister Jimmy Deenihan
International Famine Commemoration**

Hyde Park Barracks, 25 August 2013

A fáil agus a chairde uaisle, is mór an onóir dom a bheith anseo libh tráthnóna inniu ar an ócáid speisialta seo.

Distinguished guests and friends I am delighted to be here this afternoon at the International Famine Commemoration event here in Hyde Park Barracks.



We are here today to commemorate the victims of the Great Irish Famine but also to celebrate the lives that those who emigrated forged in this city and across Australia and the enduring links between our communities which live on today.

This monument where we stand today is a truly fitting tribute to the thousands of young women who travelled to these shores in search of a better life and to escape the ravages of famine. It is truly poignant that as the monument itself has become integrated into the surrounding landscape – so too did the women themselves. We can only imagine how difficult the journey was for those who left Ireland at that time and we must admire their courage as, with heavy and sad hearts, they left behind them their homeland, family, culture and traditions to seek a new future in Australia. However, these girls so far from home survived against the odds and integrated into Australian society. Many prospered and went on to have families of their own. They took their place amongst the communities in the areas they moved to, playing their part and contributing to the vibrant society that makes up Australia today. Many of you here today are part of that legacy, descendants of these girls who went on to become pioneering women in the new Australia.

There can be no doubt that the Irish famine of 1845-50 was the greatest social disaster – in terms of death, emigration and suffering – that Ireland has ever experienced. It was a watershed in the history of our country and its effects permanently changed the island's demographic, political and cultural landscape. Indeed, modern historians regard it as a dividing line in the Irish historical narrative, referring to the preceding period of Irish history as 'pre Famine'.

We know that during that very dark and difficult time in our history between 1.5 and 2 million Irish people left their country and emigrated to escape the suffering, starvation, evictions and harsh living conditions. While emigration was already taking place in the period before the famine, the famine led to a dramatic increase in the exodus from Ireland's shores and we know that the population never recovered. One wonders what Ireland would like today if this tragedy had not happened.

However, tragic though it remains, death and emigration were not the only casualties of famine. Our cultural heritage and language also suffered and as former President Mary Robinson so aptly



put it in a speech to the Oireachtas some years ago – ‘Famine is not only humanly destructive, it is culturally disfiguring’.

However, the purpose of this Commemoration is not only to remember the victims of the past but to raise awareness of famine issues all over the world – this a key aim of the National Famine Commemoration Committee which I chair. The legacy of the famine in Ireland includes a deep compassion felt by Irish people for those who suffer from hunger in today’s world and a very strong commitment to humanitarian aid and relief. Although we can safely say that famine in Ireland or Australia is not likely in our future there are other parts of the world experiencing famine today which is why it is so important to both remember the victims of the famine and also raise awareness about famine in a global context.

The Irish Government is strongly committed to providing aid to countries suffering the effects of famine and tackling global hunger through Ireland’s aid programme, known as Irish Aid and our NGOs. Irish Aid is based on a partnership with the developing world. The programme prioritises the poorest and most vulnerable communities, building self-respect, dignity and hope.

I am proud to say that Ireland has become a leading global advocate in the fight against hunger and has committed to spending 20% of its overseas aid budget in support of activities that can improve access to food and reduce under-nutrition in the world’s poorest countries. In addition to Government efforts, Irish non-governmental organisations are leading the way in ensuring that the issues of hunger and under-nutrition are placed on the global agenda.

I know this vision is shared by the Australian Government and I know that the Australian Agency for International Development – AusAID works hard to improve the lives of millions of people in developing countries.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude, on behalf of the Irish Government’s National Famine Committee, to the Irish Famine Commemoration Committee here in Sydney and all others who have contributed to today’s event and the other events I’ve attended this week. Your commitment has ensured that the catastrophic events of the Great Famine - An Gorta Mór - are being so appropriately remembered.

Go raibh maith agaibh.



Minister Jimmy Deenihan (centre, kneeling), Irish Consul-General, Caitriona Ingoldsby (in white) and to her left, Vice-Consul George O’Keeffe with descendants of workhouse orphans



Other events for the International Commemoration included:

A Dinner in the Strangers Function Room at Parliament House on 23 August 2013 hosted by The Friends of Ireland in NSW Parliament was a terrific night.



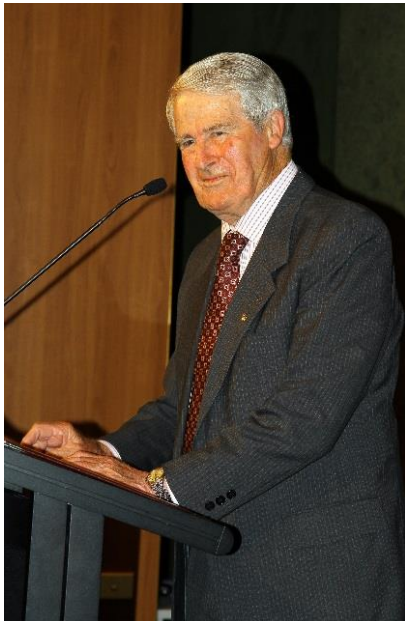
Irish Minister Jimmy Deenihan



Governor General Marie Bashir



GIFCC Chair Perry McIntyre



Foundation Chairman of GIFCC,
Tom Power



NSW Attorney-General, Greg Smith &
orphan girl descendant, Cameron Mather



**The other major event was a seminar held in NSW Parliament House Theatre
Saturday on 24 August 2013**

- 10.00 – 10.30 Opening address by Mr Jimmy Deenihan TD, Ireland’s Minister for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht as well as Chair of the Famine Commemoration Committee in Ireland
- 10.30 – 11.15 *‘Mapping and exploring The Great Irish Famine: Michael J. Murphy, Cartographer, Geography Department, University College Cork, and one of the editors of the Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*
- 11.15 – 12.00 *There is no person starving here: Australia and the Great Hunger, 1845-1855, Dr Richard Reid, Irish-Australian historian, author of Farewell My Children, Irish Assisted Immigration to Australia, 1848-1870 & Curator of the ‘Not Just Ned’ exhibition at the National Museum of Australia in 2011*
- 12.00 – 12.45 ‘Irish Famine Women: a challenge or three’, Dr Trevor McClaughlin, author of *Barefoot and Pregnant? Irish Famine Orphans in Australia*, 1991 & Volume 2, 2001.
- 12.45 – 1.45 LUNCH
- 1.45 – 2.15 ‘The Fabric: surviving physical evidence’, Megan Martin, Curator Caroline Simpson Library, Historic Houses Trust
- 2.15 – 2.45 ‘Discovering the Famine orphans and building a Memorial’, Tom Power whose vision built the memorial
- 2.45 – 3.15 ‘Who do you think they were: the orphan girls and their descendants’, Dr Perry McIntyre, Chair Great Irish Famine Commemoration Committee
- 3.15-3.45 Booklaunch: ‘Not the Same Sky’, a novel based on the Famine orphan girls written by Evelyn Conlon, Irish novelist and short story writer. Launched by Dr Jeff Kildea, UNSW.

