



## The Great Hunger : Ireland 1845-9

*Cecil Woodham-Smith*

Download now

Read Online →

## The Great Hunger : Ireland 1845-9

*Cecil Woodham-Smith*

### **The Great Hunger : Ireland 1845-9** Cecil Woodham-Smith

The Irish potato famine of the 1840s, perhaps the most appalling event of the Victorian era, killed over a million people and drove as many more to emigrate to America. It may not have been the result of deliberate government policy, yet British 'obtuseness, short-sightedness and ignorance' - and stubborn commitment to laissez-faire 'solutions' - largely caused the disaster and prevented any serious efforts to relieve suffering. The continuing impact on Anglo-Irish relations was incalculable, the immediate human cost almost inconceivable. In this vivid and disturbing book, Cecil Woodham-Smith provides the definitive account. 'A moving and terrible book. It combines great literary power with great learning. It explains much in modern Ireland - and in modern America' - D.W. Brogan.

### **The Great Hunger : Ireland 1845-9 Details**

Date : Published June 1983 by New English Library (first published 1962)

ISBN :

Author : Cecil Woodham-Smith

Format : Mass Market Paperback 429 pages

Genre : History, Cultural, Ireland, Nonfiction, European Literature, Irish Literature, Literature, 19th Century, Historical, European History, Classics, British Literature, Travel

 [Download The Great Hunger : Ireland 1845-9 ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Great Hunger : Ireland 1845-9 ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online The Great Hunger : Ireland 1845-9 Cecil Woodham-Smith**

---

## From Reader Review The Great Hunger : Ireland 1845-9 for online ebook

### Niall Fitzpatrick says

Having learned about the great famine during school in Ireland I was always aware of Britain's maltreatment but the potato crop failure seemed to be highlighted as the main culprit. The evil truth was always going to be too much for innocent young minds to fathom.

From the many sources used in this important book it is amazing that to this day the systematic policies of privation that kept Gaelic Ireland restrained in a constant precarious state of cyclical starvation have never been acknowledged by any British government since.

It's a well written book but the subject matter makes difficult reading, especially if you're Irish or of Irish descent from that era. Now when I see corn kernels all I can see is Peels Brimstone and the lyric from the song Fields of Athenry "for they stole Trevelyn's corn so their young might see the morn".

This wasn't a disaster or a calamity, it was simply murder on a mass scale. To this day Ireland's population is still below its 1845 level. God sent the blight but the British created the famine.

---

### Mary says

This is the best book I have ever read in my life. It is extraordinarily informative, gripping and horrifying. The catastrophe developed after centuries of colonialism, where the bountiful agricultural resources were extracted from Ireland while the Irish people were reduced to barely subsistence level lives: diet of one staple (in spite of the variety of exports they raised), starvation every year before the potato crop was ready, work to pay rent with hardly any currency exchanged, education and language outlawed, no professions allowed. The way the government handled the crisis is an early example of the deliberate subjugation of human suffering to the dynamics of market forces and profiteering. After a complete failure of the potato crop, the government expected the people to recover themselves with no seed and no currency to buy it. The people had sold even their clothes to get food.

The flight to America usually offered no relief as the people were sent off with little or no food for the voyage and insufficient water. Most arrived as skin and bones, many naked or nearly so, with typhus or cholera spreading through the ships. There was no welcome for these immigrants. They were detested for their extreme neediness and the disease they brought to American cities (Canada and US). There was no infrastructure to receive such an influx of destitute, unskilled, starving people. They died, along with their doctors, nurses, and priests in filthy off-shore fever hospitals or they were exploited in miserable death-trap slums.

The author uses primary sources, such as letters, newspapers, and government edicts to tell the story. Names are mentioned, both the good guys and the bad guys. (However, the author did miss the story of the Ottoman Sultan's exchange of letters with Queen Victoria and the assistance he sent to Drogheda secretly so as not to upstage her contribution.) Everyone who has Irish blood in their veins needs to know this story, which is much more complex and significant than the words "Irish potato famine" convey. This book should be life-changing for whoever reads and understands what happened and why.

## **Adrian Fingleton says**

I actually bought this book about (probably) ten years ago and put it off for so long possibly because I did not expect it to be a pleasant read. And I was right, it's not, but it is an important book. And I certainly think that it's a period which anyone who wants to understand modern Ireland should understand more fully.

The book is exhaustive, exhausting, horrifying and educational. I'm not especially interested in the politics of the tragedy, but with the cold light of 20-20 hindsight it's evident that there were some catastrophic decisions made by the British parliament that effectively ignored the reality of millions of starving people. In effect, by challenging the absentee landlords to fund the starving tenants they were telling those same landlords to throw starving people out on the roads to die of hunger, disease or exposure. And that's one of the worst pieces of information – apart from the fact that during the famine, food was being shipped OUT of Ireland, people were also being thrown forcibly out of their hovel-homes.

Even when the 'lucky ones' among those people managed to get to Canada or America they faced challenges in being allowed enter and, as they had zero skills beyond potato-growing, they simply created slums everywhere they went, with the terrible diseases they carried another factor to consider.

Partly I decided I could no longer put off reading the book as I had managed to clarify that my great-great-grandparents were married in 1845 (as the Famine began) and my great-great grandfather, James Fingleton, was born in 1849. I doubt I will ever know how this period affected them, though it most certainly did. But this book is really a great piece of work and I could only recommend it hugely to any prospective reader.

---

## **Jo says**

This is excellent, a really comprehensive account of the famine. The digression about the life of the Irish emigrants in New York is too long, but on the other hand there's a good explanation of contemporary theories about the cause of the potato blight, and of the discovery of the real cause in the 20th century.

---

## **DoctorM says**

A fine introduction to one of the great disasters of the modern world--- the Irish Famine of the mid and late 1840s. Woodham-Smith tells the tale with both compassion for a land where perhaps a quarter of the population was destitute even in good years and with a subtle, icy coldness for the administrators in London who refused to take any of the steps that seem so obvious today. (Yes, I'm New Orleans-born, and my thought while reading "The Great Hunger" was that the relief efforts undertaken in Ireland after 1845 managed to make the way the American administration handled the Katrina disaster seem like a model of planning and efficiency)

Woodham-Smith was writing at the end of the 1950s--- before demography and statistics were assimilated by historians, and she relies on prose rather than statistics to tell her tale. The more recent, more social-science look at the famine is Kinealy's "The Great Calamity, which should be read in tandem with Woodham-Smith.

But Woodham-Smith's account is telling--- powerful and poignant both ---and she lays out a clear account of a period when one disaster (the potato blight, extreme weather, typhus, cholera) followed close on another, and where horror spread not only across Ireland, but to Montreal and New York as well, where refugees from the famine carried plague to new shores.

Woodham-Smith lays out the sheer backwardness of Ireland in the 1840s, of a land so impoverished that when the British government did import American wheat for famine relief, there were no mills to grind it--- since the bulk of the rural population could afford nothing but potatoes and almost never had bread. She points out the paradox of continuing grain *exports* at the height of the famine, since many small and middling landlords had no domestic market for grain, and were themselves dependent on exports to pay their own rents to the largely absentee big landlord class. She also skewers the bland, blind belief of the Treasury mandarins in London, with their unquestioning belief in free trade and laissez-faire that kept them from distributing free or cheap seed or provisions lest it "undermine the market". She catches the blindness, too, of the Young Ireland revolutionaries of 1848, who tried to lead a peasant uprising with no planning or weapons, and with no conception that the rural population were too starved and broken to have any energy for rebellion.

A fine book, and a fine introduction to a ghastly topic. Very much worth reading.

---

### **Arwen says**

I picked this book up at a time when I am researching my family history and at the moment in particular my 3 x great grandparents Hugh and Catherine who came from Roscommon, Ireland, to England in 1852. They would have been teenagers at the time of the great famine.. Having read the book, I'm surprised they or anyone else lived to emigrate. I know my ancestors were humble people who couldn't read or write, and I really wonder how they survived, and how many of their families perished.

It's easy having read this horrific story to blame the British government for the deaths of so many Irishmen but I think the blame must be more widely spread. It struck me that although individual members of the Church made heroic attempts to help the people, often dying themselves, the Church as a whole did precious little for Ireland; surely it must bear a great responsibility for the overpopulation and ignorance of the people. The whole landowning system was disastrous and very few people of influence in England had any idea of Ireland's particular problems.

The book is written in a dry and unemotional style, which adds to the horrific nature of its subject. Widespread famine, death by starvation and subsequent typhoid and other diseases don't make for comfortable reading but this book is recommended for anyone with an interest in Ireland.

---

### **Tony Gualtieri says**

The mendacity of the British government in denying the extent of Irish suffering and the absurdity of English culpability into exacerbating that suffering issue clearly laid out in this touchstone of historical prose.

---

### **Viola says**

'Is Britain's cover-up of its 1845-1850 holocaust in Ireland the most successful Big Lie in all of history?

The cover-up is accomplished by the same British terrorism and bribery that perpetrated the genocide. Consider: why does Irish President Mary Robinson call it "Ireland's greatest natural disaster" while she conceals the British army's role?

Potato blight, "phytophthora infestans", did spread from America to Europe in 1844, to England and then Ireland in 1845 but it didn't cause famine anywhere. Ireland did not starve for potatoes; it starved for food.

Ireland starved because its food, from 40 to 70 shiploads per day, was removed at gunpoint by 12,000 British constables reinforced by the British militia, battleships, excise vessels, Coast Guard and by 200,000 British soldiers.'

" The Great Hunger" Woodham-Smith, Cecil is a well documented and researched book. The approach by the British to the Famine was disgraceful.

The main culprits were Trevelyan, Routh & Lord John Russell and the heartless Irish landlords.

The British adopted a laissez faire view and in 1848 Trevelyan wrote in a letter to Routh " Ireland is on her own,we can do no more for her, let the Famine take it's natural course".

---

### **Matthew Bartlett says**

A heart breaking, step by step retelling of how the Great Famine afflicted Ireland, causing a mass exodus by the population. It reveals a poor response to the famine as well as what diseases resulted and what happened to many who tried to flee and survive.

---

### **Louise says**

After reading this book I'm amazed my Irish ancestors survived long enough to be able to emigrate to England and for that I am truly thankful or I wouldn't be here to write this review. Truly harrowing in it's detail of the sufferings of the Irish people and what we now see as their callous treatment by the British government. I also hadn't realised that famine was a regular occurrence in Ireland because of their reliance on the potato, although in this case it went way beyond anything that had ever happened before. The conditions people lived in were appalling and the ones who thought they were emigrating to a better life fared just as badly, thousands of them dying of typhoid fever either on the crossing or as soon as they reached Canada/America/England. Well written and thought provoking, a must read for anyone researching their Irish roots.

---

### **Glen says**

This is by now a classic on the subject, and fans of detailed documentation will not be disappointed. The human disaster that was the Irish Famine was an event defying easy explanation, though it stands as a grim reminder of the biologist's dictum that it is the little things that rule the world. In this case the spores of *phytophthora infestans*--the potato blight--combined with the single-crop reliance of the vast majority of Ireland's inhabitants to produce a catastrophe that in turn gave rise to a huge and hugely influential diaspora of Irish people and to the deaths of roughly a million more. It also fanned flames of anti-English hatred on the part of the Irish that had been smouldering for the preceding 600 years. How culpable the British

government was in allowing the Irish Famine to progress to the levels it did is one of the preoccupations of this monumental historical study, and the culprit appears to be dogmatism as much as anything else. Specifically, dogmatic devotion to precepts of *laissez faire* economics that were treated as political Gospel by the ruling ministers governing Irish affairs sealed the fate of millions of Irish, and sowed the seeds that were to emerge in the 20th Century in the form of the wars for Irish independence and the Troubles of the North.

---

### **Katy Walters says**

This is such a heartbreaking and emotional read. It is also full of history, politics of the time and an indepth soul searching account of the suffering of the Irish people. It is a book that I keep close as my family suffered in that period.

---

### **Ann McReynolds says**

Cecil Woodham-Smith's magnificent record of the Irish diaspora led by the infamous policies of the absentee Anglo-Irish landowners of the early 1800s stands alone in defining the causes, the conditions under which "tumbling" of the people's homes left them to walk the roads, the "murrain" which caused potatoes to rot in the fields, and the infamous steerage passage to America with its own deadly costs.

---

### **Roderick says**

". . . as a nation, the English have proved themselves to be capable of generosity, tolerance and magnanimity, but not where Ireland is concerned. . . The moment the very name of Ireland is mentioned, the English seem to bid adieu to common feeling, common prudence and common sense and to act with the barbarity of tyrants and the fatuity of idiots."

The story of the Great Famine period (1846--49), and the absolute colonialism practiced by the British over the Irish, directly and/or indirectly causing millions of deaths. Living conditions were some of the worst, as viewed by writers and some "social scientists."

Extremely well-researched, with appalling details about the living conditions in Ireland, and the rest of the UK where they may have tried to flee to, and the conditions when many were "sent" to the Americas. Famine, disease, lack of resources, a laissez-faire attitude by the British Government, various forms of "fever," etc . Unbelievable suffering.

Fabulous resource.

---

### **Leslie says**

This is an older history of the famine (first published 1962), a good example of well-written general history. Its subject is, of course, thoroughly horrifying. What struck me as I read was how much history repeats itself and how little some learn from it. The Irish died not really because of the potato blight but because of

insanely stupid laws governing land ownership and tenancy that were set up to benefit a tiny few and to exploit and degrade the many and were subsequently defended, even at the height of the famine, on the basis of the sanctity of private property and the untouchable profit of landowners (which their own shortsighted greed ultimately diminished or destroyed anyway); a grossly unequal distribution of wealth; contempt for Ireland, the Irish, and Catholicism, for a culture and a religion that were widely regarded as inherently backward and dangerous; and, above all, a blind faith on the part of government and the wealthy in the power of a free market and an insistence, in the face of all evidence and all common sense, that government intervention and assistance were always wrong ("government isn't the solution to the problem; government IS the problem" sums up their ideology pretty well) because it distorted the market, reduced the incentive for private enterprise, and encouraged dependence instead of manly self-reliance (sound familiar?). The free market gospel was mean-spirited, self-serving idiocy then, and it's mean-spirited, self-serving idiocy now. Perhaps this book should be required reading for complacent neo-cons now who spout the same slogans.

---

### **Petra says**

A lot of information about Great Famine is in this book. I liked insight into the immigration process, detailed process about potato blight and also I learned something about people who "were in charge" during famine. A lot of citations, in a well arranged way divided chapters...great introduction to one of the biggest disaster of 19th century and its consequences.

---

### **Les says**

I wasn't taught about the Irish Potato famines at school. Although I thought I'd self-taught myself about them subsequently, I still wasn't prepared for the tragedies described in this book; tragedies that have left a legacy to this day. There were famines before and after the period covered by this work, but the author argues convincingly that it is the period 1845-49 that is largely responsible for the sometimes difficult Anglo-Irish relations that persist to this day (and even before Brexit.) The book is not new, and tastes change, so the author's style may not be to the taste of all modern day readers. But she tells the story well. A small criticism (mild spoiler alert) is the way the book ends by describing, in great detail, Queen Victoria's visit to Ireland in 1849. But perhaps the author's purpose was to contrast strongly the way that the Queen was feted compared to the general condition of the Irish people at that time. Certainly, the surprisingly warm welcome the Queen received was not reciprocated by any change in the British Government's attitude towards Ireland or its willingness to help the desperate state of its people.

---

### **Phillip Kay says**

How equipped are our governments to deal with emergencies? Supposing a worldwide epidemic, which many scientists forecast, or even a tornado, were to strike, would there be an effective support system with adequate funds to spring immediately into action? Do we want this to happen? Have we learnt anything from the past?

Cecil Woodham-Smith wrote a book in 1962 called *The Great Hunger* which implicitly asks these question. She had shown how slow the British Government was to learn from the mistakes made in the Irish famine in her book *The Reason Why* (1953), which details how administrative failure and ignorant leadership were able to destroy the British Army in the Crimea in the 1850s without the Russians having much to do with it.

In *The Great Hunger* Woodham-Smith shows how doctrinaire adherence to laissez faire economic theory, ignorance of conditions in Ireland, hatred of the Irish and unchecked colonialism applied to what was officially part of Britain led to the deaths of more than four million men, women and children in Ireland, and the emigration of two or three million more, many of whom died on their journey, in the period 1845-49. (A note about figures: everything is ambiguous, none more so than statistics. A census of Ireland in the nineteenth century was impossible. Many districts could not be reached because of inadequate roads. The poor were often not counted. During the famine records could not be kept because of administrative breakdown. It is not known accurately what the population of Ireland was at the time of the famine, nor is it known how many died. Stick to official estimates if you want to downplay the tragedy, double those figures if you want to exaggerate it).

It started with bad weather, unseasonably damp and humid, the perfect conditions for the newly arrived potato blight to spread. A simple crop to grow, in Ireland the potato had become the staple food of the nation and was at the mercy of the weather: there had been regular 'shortages' for many years, during which the people went without. Now in 1846 the fungus *phytophthora infestans*, hitherto unknown in Europe, completely destroyed the Irish potato crop. The bulk of Ireland's conservatively estimated 8 million people (possibly as high as 12-14 million as the western counties were never adumbrated effectively) had no food of any kind. This was just the beginning.

The whole of Europe was affected by an economic recess; food supplies were short across the continent and none available to help Ireland in her hour of need. Following starvation came fever, typhus and others. There was no effective way of dealing with widespread sickness in Ireland, and thousands and then millions died untreated and in some cases unburied. The humid summer was followed by one of the coldest winters on record, and people who had had to sell their clothes to feed their children died of exposure. Complete poverty meant that the Irish had no funds to buy seed for the following spring, widespread lack of education meant they had no knowledge of other crops or efficient cropping methods. In 1847 the weather was good and the crop of potatoes healthy, but only a tiny fraction of what it needed to be to feed the people. Then in 1848 the blight returned, destroying the entire crop for that year.

Ironically, Ireland is a fertile country. During the famine, farm produce which might have fed most of the starving was leaving Ireland for England in a steady stream. As Woodham-Smith explains, this anomaly had its roots in the system of land tenure, which goes back to Elizabethan times. Elizabeth I, Cromwell and many other British leaders followed a policy of dispossessing Irish nobility and awarding their lands to their own followers. Ireland was a plundered country, with no thought taken to integrate it with the rest of the nation or build its economy. Over the centuries the estates were broken down to smaller lots, but the revenues from them were spent in England by absentee landlords. Many of these became impoverished but remained improvident. Soon the only way to attract investment for produce was to sell competitively in foreign markets, hoping to squeeze income for establishments in Britain from the proceeds. Nobody worried about the Irish. They grew the food and sold it to pay their rents. They ate potatoes and lived in hovels. Nobody asked about crop failure.

The key figure in the way the Irish famine was dealt with in Britain was Charles Trevelyan, permanent head of Treasury. Others were Charles Wood, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Lord John Russell, Prime Minister. These men could be said to be responsible for what has been described emotively as genocide in Ireland. Of course they did not create the problem, which had existed for centuries and was a condition of England's conquest of Ireland: it was a powder keg awaiting someone to throw a match.

Trevelyan's contribution was to ignore the problem. Though there was a food shortage throughout Europe in the mid 40s, no planning or forecasts were made for the fragile economy of Ireland. Though the system of poor relief had been shown over many years to be underresourced and impossible to operate, reliance was made on it in the crisis. Throughout the famine Trevelyan was reluctant to send aid to Ireland because that would prohibit market forces from operating and be destructive for the economy (a doctrine of laissez faire

Trevelyan rigidly adhered to, as did the government of which he was a part). The fact there was no market, and no economy after 1846, was ignored, along with the stream of reports which detailed the breakdowns in every system of administration in the country. If there was a problem in Ireland, Trevelyan thought, it was the fault of the Irish people, and it was up to them to fix it. The fact that Britain governed Ireland was effectively ignored in the process. Trevelyan was a true bureaucrat, and dealt with many problems merely by calling for further reports on them.

Through convoluted reasoning Trevelyan thought the people responsible for the mass of starving Irish were the landlords, who refused to fund relief funds. He caused rates to be levied, which the bankrupt landlords couldn't pay, and their response was to clear the land, evicting tenants by police and military aid and demolishing their dwellings. The starving were thus forced on the parish and the poorhouses, which were also bankrupt and unable to cope with millions of new applicants for assistance. The British government did provide some slight assistance for poor relief, but as they thought that too was the responsibility of the landlords, they eventually withdrew it. The problem passed from hand to hand, and people died.

Perhaps this is one way tragedies happen. People who don't know what to do do nothing, and ask, What problem? There's no problem!

One of the saddest stories in Woodham-Smith's book is that of the nationalists, the Repeal Association, the Young Ireland party and the revolutionary group lead by Fintan Lalor. With the passing of the great Daniel O'Connell the nationalist movement in Ireland was in the hands of leaders who knew less about the condition of the Irish than the British did. Breathing fiery rhetoric about driving the despoiling English from the land, they strove to organise forces of rebellion from starving men who only gathered in dozens, and mainly for food. But the British, which meant effectively Trevelyan, used this so-called rebellion as a further reason for withholding aid.

Woodham-Smith's book has been criticised as simplifying the problem, and as anti-British. The same complaints have been made against her masterpiece *The Reason Why. The Great Hunger* tries to be objective. Woodham-Smith uses statistics a lot, refrains from judgmental remarks, quotes from a wide range of existing sources. But she does have a prejudice, against the entropy in large organisations and the tragedies they inflict. She says emigration to Australia was negligible (over one million came to Australia from Ireland), that this was because of the expense of the passage (there were several systems of assisted passage) and that there was no network of Irish to welcome them if they did arrive (there were many earlier Irish migrants, not to mention the convicts) so her information on Australia is deficient. Otherwise her uses of source material is impressive.

Inappropriate administrative procedures, rigid adherence to beliefs inapplicable to the situation encountered, racial prejudice, refusal to see problems arising or deal with them when they arrive – these methods kill as effectively as the gas chamber. Malthusian economists even forecast the deaths of millions of Irish people and saw it as a reasonable solution to the problem of overpopulation.

Today the world's population is approaching seven billion. Crises involving millions of people are more likely to happen now than they were in 1845 in Ireland. Have the responses we are likely to make learnt from the past?

---

## Suzanne says

Well , that wasn't pretty. Well-researched, informative, and educational, but definitely not pretty.

I'd always wondered how the Irish potato famine happened, how a country could depend so heavily on one crop, one food source so completely, that its failure could have the kind of devastating effect this one did. *The Great Hunger* explains the perfect storm of conditions and forces that resulted in starvation for millions of people, emigration for hundreds of thousands more. At the time, all of Ireland was part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland under the 1801 Act of Union, with a combined Parliament in Westminster that had assimilated the Irish economy and legislature with that of England. The famine was a result of, cumulatively: land use policy, landlord-tenant relations, cycles of repression and rebellion, political and religious strife, bureaucracy, the ease with which potatoes could be cultivated and therefore the extent to which the Irish poor with very little land became dependent on that crop, administrative ineptitude in averting anticipated disasters, export policy, food distribution snafus and public works mismanagement, and conservative laissez faire economic policy by the English Treasury. The head of the English Treasury did not want to interfere with commerce with too much welfare --when there was no commerce to interfere with and absolutely no money at all for people to engage in commerce. The situation was complicated by simultaneous crop failures all over Europe the same year the Irish potato fell to serious blight (1846), and a serious financial crisis in England in 1847. Soup kitchens and the distribution of imported corn meal, which was nutritionally inadequate anyway, didn't make a dent in the vast need. It became impossible to collect taxes to fund relief efforts among the landed Irish gentry who were becoming insolvent. After two years of this, a second round of the potato blight occurred in 1848. A pathetic attempt at an uprising by the Young Irelanders led by William Smith O'Brien failed, as it's pretty hard to get people who are literally starving very organized, but resulted in further animosity between the Irish and English as the insurrection was put down. It was a mess. Even children were so eager to get out of Ireland they would commit crimes serious enough to result in sentences of exile or "transportation" that would get them sent to North America or Australia.

Some parts of the book get a little dry, with talk of legislative acts, politics and taxation rates, but there are also heart-breaking stories about the people: terrible descriptions of starving people, especially the children, and of the horrendously bad living conditions of the destitute, sick and dying, landlords turning people off of their little plots for non-payment of rent and tearing down their homes. Whole families were living in tiny windowless cellars or literally in ditches and bogs, many "half-naked" because they'd sold all their clothes along with everything else that wasn't nailed down or even remotely edible-- and the definition of "edible" became increasingly flexible as the crisis deepened. People were actually dying by the side of the road of starvation. Epidemics of dysentery, typhus and "ship fever" decimated not only the emigrants travelling to North America in horribly ill-equipped ships, but also the towns where they landed, because there were not enough quarantine sites or hospitals to control the spread of disease. This did not endear them to their new neighbors.

The complete devastation occurring over the four years covered was so extreme it's hard to realize it was only 165 years ago, in a Western country. Sir John Russell, the Prime Minister at the time, said the famine was "such as has not been known in modern times, indeed . . . like a famine of the 13th century acting upon a population of the 19th." The book points out that the English tried to help for the first couple of years, but seriously faltered in their later attempts. The author credits not maliciousness on the part of the English government, but rather "obtuseness, short-sightedness, and ignorance." But she generously allows that "it is doubtful if any Government in Europe, at the time, could have done more." Still, the English don't really come off looking that good.

---

## Mark O'hagan says

It was only after visiting the Famine museum in Strokestown House that I felt compelled to investigate the

full story of the famine. This book is an outstanding piece of research into Ireland's darkest hour and should be considered as essential reading for every student of Irish history

---