

On landlord-assisted emigration from some Irish estates in the 1840s^{*}

by Desmond Norton

Abstract

This article utilizes the recently-discovered archive of a firm of Irish land agents to investigate landlord-assisted emigration from some of the firm's client estates during the 1840s, and during the famine years in particular. Such emigration was not merely a response to starvation in Ireland: much of it was also a precondition for improvement of estates, especially in western parts of Ireland. It is concluded that landlord-assisted emigration during the famine was probably on a larger scale than modern historians have hitherto assumed: however, precise and verifiable estimates of the numbers involved will remain an impossibility.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the author acquired about 30,000 hitherto unknown letters written during the decade of the great Irish famine, part of the papers of the business of James Robert Stewart and Joseph Kincaid. During the 1840s, their firm was the most important land agency in Ireland. Addressed mainly to Stewart and Kincaid's office in Dublin, most of the letters were written by landlords, tenants, the firm's partners and its local agents. After about 200 years in operation as a land agency, the firm in which members of the Stewart family were principal partners – called Messrs J. R. Stewart & Son(s) from the mid-1880s onwards – ceased business in the mid-1980s.

During the 1840s Stewart and Kincaid had management responsibilities for estates in about half of the thirty two Irish counties. Most of the letters concern matters which one might expect: rents; distraint; poverty; 'voluntary' surrender of land in return for 'compensation' from the landlord upon peaceably quitting; formal ejection; petitions from tenants; major works of improvement; applications by Stewart and Kincaid, on behalf of client proprietors, for government loans to finance improvements; recommendations of agricultural advisers hired by Stewart and Kincaid, etc. Finally, many of the letters refer to landlord-assisted emigration and it is these which form the core source for the present article.¹

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¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all correspondence cited is from the Stewart and Kincaid archive which remains in the author's possession. Details on other aspects of their estate management can be found in my draft book, provisionally entitled *Landlords, tenants, famine: business of an Irish land agency in the 1840s*. Unless otherwise indicated, the details which follow are drawn from that draft.

For some decades before the 1840s, the intensity of Irish emigration had become exceptional in the context of contemporary Europe. About 100,000 people are thought to have left Ireland for North America between the 1780s and 1814, and about a million Irish emigrants crossed the Atlantic between 1815 and 1845.² Even emigration on this scale did not reverse population growth. But a century of substantial decline began in the late 1840s, when emigration became a more important agent of depopulation than famine mortality. In 1841 the population of (the island of) Ireland was 8.175 million. From 6.55 million in 1851, it declined in every census to 1936, when it amounted to 4.25 million.³ Thus, the famine (which commenced following the partial failure of the potato crop in the autumn of 1845) did not merely reverse rapid population growth: through its dynamic effects it perpetuated further declines for very many decades.⁴

Writing of the period before the famine in the years after the establishment of the Irish Free State, Pomfret wrote that ‘the landlords [of properties in Ireland] as a class were alien and absentee, and had little interest either in the welfare of the peasants or in improvement of their property’.⁵ These views are still widely held in Ireland, though probably not to the same relative extent by historians. The Stewart and Kincaid correspondence indicates that taken as a group, the firm’s client proprietors during the famine decade did not fit the caricature of lazy, uncaring and inhumane owners of Irish estates. In their treatment of tenants who remained at home, some of the Stewart and Kincaid client landlords were notably benevolent.⁶ In regard to landlord-assisted emigration, some of the motivation was undoubtedly humanitarian: ejection without any ‘compensation’, or death in Ireland from starvation or disease, were alternatives. But among the destitute in arrears of rent, formal ejection on estates managed by Stewart and Kincaid was relatively rare.

Humanitarian feelings aside, landlord-assisted emigration during the famine years was an important aspect of programmes of estate improvement, implemented by the firm on behalf of all, or almost all, of its major clients. But even before the famine, there were major improvements on most of the estates managed by Stewart and Kincaid. Until c. 1840, most of the properties mentioned in the discussion that follows were held by middlemen, who set the land in rundale. This was a communal mode of occupation under which each tenant might, from time to time, occupy several tiny detached plots. It was inefficient. By the mid-1840s, and reflecting initiatives by Stewart and Kincaid, many of the firm’s client proprietors had begun to abandon the old rundale and middleman systems and had rationalized the structure of holdings by amalgamating the tiny plots – the so-called squaring of the land. Thus, in order to avail of scale economies, and to ensure that each tenant would have a quasi-permanent interest in improving the land, policy was now to allocate each tenant a single plot under the head landlord. The squaring often meant that impoverished cottiers had to go. Even before the famine,

² David Fitzpatrick, ‘Emigration, 1801–70’, in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, V (1989), p. 565.

³ Commission on emigration and other population problems, 1948–54, *Report* (Dublin, 1955), statistical appendix, Table 1.

⁴ The forces behind population movements out of Ireland have often been classified as ‘push’ (economic conditions within Ireland) and ‘pull’ (relatively attractive conditions outside Ireland) factors. Push factors

were obviously paramount during the late 1840s. For discussion of dynamic effects of the famine emigrations, as well as of push and pull factors, see Fitzpatrick, ‘Emigration’, pp. 600–07.

⁵ John E. Pomfret, *The struggle for land in Ireland, 1800–1923* (1930), p. 27.

⁶ This group included Jane Coleman who owned land in Kildare, John Hamilton of Donegal and Gertrude Fitzgerald whose estate was in Limerick.

the agency assisted some of them to move to North America; others were compensated for peaceable surrender and migrated or emigrated. However, extreme population density remained, especially in the western counties. The famine provided opportunities and increased incentives for substantially greater population clearance. Much of the assisted emigration reflected economic calculation by Stewart and Kincaid rather than by the proprietors themselves. Note however that both before and during the famine, many tenants begged the agents for assistance to enable them to go to North America.

Stewart and Kincaid's clients benefited in various ways from large-scale assisted emigration during the famine. First there were the savings in not having to finance (directly, or indirectly through extra taxation) the relief of starving tenants who were induced to emigrate.⁷ Second, within a few years, many of those who had emigrated were remitting substantial sums to their relatives who had stayed in Ireland, and some of those monies accrued to landlords who would not otherwise have received rents. Third, large-scale population clearance was essential for the creation of holdings which could be viable in the long run. In 1847 and 1848 substantial tracts of land on Stewart and Kincaid's client estates lay idle. During the same years, Stewart and Kincaid applied for government loans to finance improvements on the lands of virtually every proprietor for whom the firm acted as agent. In almost every case, they received the sums sought on behalf of the proprietor. Most of these monies were spent on drainage and sub-soiling. Following speedy implementation of such works, some of the improved lands were operated as farms on the landlords' own account under the immediate management of Stewart and Kincaid's local agents. Most of the latter properties were probably rented out as soon as viable tenants – on farms larger in size than those newly squared in the earlier 1840s – could be found.

I

During the 1840s, the overwhelming bulk of the emigration assisted by Stewart and Kincaid was from impoverished districts in the northwest, in the Midlands near the river Shannon and in the southwest, on an arc of a curve moving from Sligo in the northwest to Clare and Limerick in the southwest. They are the estates to be discussed in what follows. Extracts from letters pertaining to several estates will be provided. These reveal the agency's attitudes, and in some

⁷ High levels of poor rates during the famine years forced many landlords into debt, or increased their existing indebtedness. In the late 1840s landlords were administratively liable for payment of poor rates on land with an annual valuation of less than four pounds. Some historians have stated that this particular arrangement gave landlords special incentives to clear their estates of small tenants. I cannot accept this view as really substantive. First, we know from economic theory that in competitive markets the incidence of a tax on transactions – the question of who ultimately pays it, after part of it is possibly 'passed on' – is independent of who (the supplier or the demander) administratively pays it. Second, the theory of economic rent indicates that the incidence of a tax on land values is on the landowner. Third, note that the poor rate had to be paid whether or not there was a tenant on the land. Although the high levels of poor rates in 1847 increased the incentives of landlords to clear their estates, it should also be recognized that the 'Quarter Acre Clause' of the Poor Law Extension Act (June 1847) increased the incentives of many small tenants to emigrate, if financially feasible. The clause indicated that any occupier of more than a quarter of an acre of land would not be deemed destitute, and was therefore ineligible to receive relief financed through the poor rates.

cases those of landlords for whom the firm acted, towards the tenantry in general and on assisted emigration in particular. It will be concluded that the extent of landlord-assisted emigration in and around the famine era was probably much greater than historians have hitherto assumed or estimated; furthermore, even if we had an exact listing of all those tenants who received payment (in cash or in kind) from their landlord after surrendering their holdings, it would still be impossible to estimate the volume of landlord-assisted emigration with any degree of precision. It will also be shown that although most of the landlords of the estates in the sample to be considered (not selectively chosen) were absentees, as a group they did not have the characteristics claimed for them by Pomfret.

The third Viscount Palmerston (1784–1865), who owned lands in counties Sligo and Dublin, was one of Stewart and Kincaid's most important clients. He was British foreign secretary for most of the 1830s (until 1841) and from 1846 to 1851. He became prime minister in 1855. Palmerston first came to his Sligo estates in 1808 and he closely monitored developments there from c. 1820 onwards.⁸ He visited his north Sligo properties in 1841 and again late in 1845. Through Anglo-Irish landlords like Palmerston, the English establishment of the late 1840s had hands-on knowledge of the problems of Irish agriculture.⁹

Palmerston's assistance to tenant emigration from County Sligo commenced before the famine, albeit on a relatively small scale. The early emigrants came from the very north of the county, but many of those who left in the late 1840s originated from Palmerston lands in southern Sligo. Palmerston's early assistance was intimately related to rationalization of the structure of holdings – his abandonment of the middleman and rundale systems, and their replacement by a more efficient mode of tenure which involved squaring the land. In the early 1830s, several of the leases to middlemen on Palmerston's north Sligo estate were for the life of King William IV who died on 20 June 1837. Kincaid saw this as providing an opportunity to get rid of pauper undertenants. In a letter to Palmerston dated 24 June he indicated that he hoped that he would be supported by him 'in the endeavour to thin the estate of a portion of the population and create larger farms'. On the front of this letter Palmerston entered the following observations:

Kincaid recommending me to thin the population on the townlands of which the leases have expired ... I have long ago made it my mind not to do so unjustifiable an act. I have never yet acted on so cruel a system and shall certainly not begin now ... If any [tenants] can be persuaded to emigrate voluntarily well & good; but not a single creature shall be expelled against its will.¹⁰

In November 1837 Kincaid wrote to Palmerston about the lands out of lease and referred to

⁸ For Palmerston's views on overall management of his Sligo estates, see Desmond Norton, 'On Lord Palmerston's Irish estates in the 1840s', *English Historical Rev.* 119 (2004), pp. 1254–74.

⁹ In March 1848 Palmerston observed in a cabinet memorandum: 'Ejectments ought to be made without cruelty ... but any great improvement in the social system of Ireland must be founded upon an extensive change in the present system of agrarian occupation ...

This change necessarily implies a long continued and systematic ejection of Small Holders'. See extract from Palmerston in G. P. Gooch (ed.), *The later correspondence of Lord John Russell 1840–1878* (2 vols, 1925), I, pp. 224–5. Thus, although the number of small holdings had greatly decreased, Palmerston's thinking on them had hardened between 1838 and 1848.

¹⁰ Broadlands (BR) archive at the University of Southampton, BR 145/9/15.

amalgamation (squaring) in order to make them sustainable. He indicated that he had offered the tenants there assistance to emigrate to North America.¹¹ The squaring of Palmerston's north Sligo estate was nearly complete by the autumn of 1846. In comparison with what was soon to come, relatively small numbers of Palmerston's tenantry on those lands secured assistance specifically to go to North America between 1837 and 1846.¹²

Destitution during the famine, combined with high rates of property taxation associated with local authority relief, greatly accelerated Palmerston's drive for efficiency in the structure of holdings. As will be seen below, others among Stewart and Kincaid's client landlords responded to increased incentives to improve their estates in a manner similar to that of Palmerston. Early in 1847 the agents provided Palmerston with a clear cost-benefit analysis of a structured programme of assisted emigration which they urged him to adopt. Palmerston responded by opting for an emigration scheme even larger than that originally contemplated. A letter from Kincaid to Palmerston of 23 March 1847 indicates some of the reasoning behind the programme adopted.¹³ Kincaid commenced with an estimate of the costs of the new system of poor relief outside the workhouses in the absence of emigration: 'More than three fourths of the amount will be payable by your Lordship [through property taxes] ... It cannot fall much short of £10,000 for the next 7 months calculating 1000 heads of families making 6000 [persons] at 1/- per day for 200 days'. He went on to indicate that he had recently applied for a loan of £2000 for drainage work, but added that Palmerston would 'have to pay the largest proportion of the expense of feeding the people whether they work or not'. Turning to the alternative of emigration, Kincaid stated that he had made a list

of those who are desirous of emigrating from your Lordship's estates [in Co. Sligo after] surrendering their holdings [and] being taken out to Quebec. The list is not yet complete but I think it ... 150 families comprising 900 individuals who occupy 500 Irish acres of land and the expenses of their transport would be about £2500 ... I have already chartered two vessels [which] will sail in less than a fortnight ... and the only difficulty that now presents itself to me is ... what 400 shall I take out of the 900 candidates all of whom are desirous to go. The poor creatures ... see nothing but misery and starvation before them if they stay where they are.

Kincaid calculated the cost of supporting 150 families 'for the next 7 months' as at least £1500 and after that they would still be 'on the property as dead weights'. He therefore recommended that Palmerston sanction an even larger programme of assisted emigration.

In 1847 nine chartered ships left Sligo carrying about 2000 Palmerston-assisted emigrants, destined for British North America, and it is thought that another vessel sailed from Liverpool to Quebec carrying about 480 emigrants from Palmerston's estates.¹⁴ Some of those ships arrived in North America only after the harsh winter there had set in. Passengers on the last

¹¹ BR 145/9/42.

¹² Some details can be found in Desmond Norton, 'Lord Palmerston and the Irish famine emigration: a rejoinder', *Historical J.*, 46 (2003), pp. 155–65.

¹³ BR 146/9/3.

¹⁴ John C. McTernan, *Memory harbour, the port of Sligo* (1992), pt two, pp. 27–31; Tyler Anbinder, 'Lord Palmerston and the Irish famine emigration', *Historical J.*, 44 (2001), pp. 441–469; Norton, 'Palmerston and the Irish famine emigration'; id., 'Palmerston's Irish estates'.

ships to sail were poorly clothed and could not find work when they arrived. According to Anbinder, 'it was cruel to send out emigrants whose only option upon arrival in Canada was residence in an almshouse or begging in the streets . . . Stewart and Kincaid knew perfectly well that the emigrants' pleadings [to be taken to North America] should not have been the deciding factor in determining whether or not the last ships should have sailed'.¹⁵ These views on Palmerston's Irish agents seem unfair: three letters from late in 1847, written by Stewart to Kincaid (and hence unknown to historians until very recently), indicate that the partners in the firm did care about the well-being of the emigrants. However, one of those letters attributes blame to their own ignorance, rather than to any indifference or malice. As Stewart reminded Kincaid in reference to the passengers aboard the *Aeolus*, which berthed in New Brunswick on 2 November: 'We did not inform ourselves enough of the circumstances of the place they were sent to & the suitable seasons'.¹⁶

1847 was not the last year in which Palmerston assisted his tenants to go to North America. Although on a much smaller scale than in 1847, his financial support for emigration to America was maintained up to the decade of his death (in 1865).¹⁷ Within Stewart and Kincaid's files on the Palmerston properties, one of the letters of the late 1840s is particularly interesting. The following is drawn from a petition to the agents from a Palmerston tenant named Scanlon, who wrote that he had ten acres 'of which he has been dispossessed'. He had 'a family of ten persons [and] begs to recal to your recollection a promise . . . that you would give the means of emigrating to six of his family', as well as money to buy clothing. He indicated that some tenants on a neighbouring estate were 'going on Friday next', and that he and his family 'would like to be with their former friends'. This was written on 26 December 1848, a Tuesday. Thus Scanlon indicated, if given the assistance sought, that his family hoped to leave three days later. Similar examples of the speed at which tenants sought to leave Ireland, if assisted by their landlord, can be found elsewhere in the correspondence.

II

Apart from Palmerston's properties, Stewart and Kincaid managed estates in County Sligo on behalf of Edward Wingfield and Sir Alexander Crichton. Wingfield, son of the third Viscount Powerscourt, owned substantial tracts of land near the river Moy in the western part of the county. His main residence in Ireland was in Co. Dublin, but from time to time in the 1840s he stayed at his house overlooking the Moy estuary. He also spent much of his time in England, where his twin brother had property. Rationalization in the structure of holdings on his lands – squaring – was implemented in the early 1840s and appears to have been largely completed by the end of 1846. The process of squaring meant that some tenants had to leave. It seems that some received assistance to go to North America, while others (probably former undertenants) received 'compensation' which, by itself, would have enabled them to go no further than Britain. Thus, in February 1844 one of Wingfield's tenants sent a petition to Stewart and Kincaid pointing out that he was 'one of the persons whom you were pleased

¹⁵ Anbinder, 'Palmerston', pp. 464–5.

emigration', p. 164.

¹⁶ See Norton, 'Palmerston and the Irish famine

¹⁷ See Norton, 'Palmerston's Irish estates'.

to dispossess when you were dividing [i.e. squaring] the lands'. He reminded the Dublin agents of their 'promise to give as much money as would bear the expense of him and family [in all eleven persons] to America' and he indicated that he thought that '£40 would ... do so'. In March 1845 William Ormsby, Stewart and Kincaid's local agent, reported that another tenant had 'given up his holding' and he added: 'I ... told him I would give him £10-10-0 ... which he consented to'. In August 1845 a note from Ormsby observed that he had 'to pay about ten cottiers ... one pound each'. The latter payments were presumably made merely to get rid of them peaceably. Because squaring was extended into the early months of the famine, it is likely that some similar payments were made in 1846.

Wingfield financed a structured programme of emigration in 1847. Evidence for this is contained in a letter in which he referred to a request that he sign a document proposing a project on the Moy near his lands. The proposal seems to have been to make the river navigable up to Ballina, through use of public funds (which would presumably have entailed further taxation of local property). Wingfield responded to Stewart and Kincaid in December 1848 as follows:

Was this project to advantage the property or give any permanent or reproductive employment to the people ... I should certainly sign it ... Some years ago Mr Nimmo [who built many harbours in the west of Ireland] expended several thousand pounds ... to establish a harbour ... & also to cut away ledges of rock to make the Moy navigable [from the sea] to the town of Ballina which proved to be a complete failure & throw away of money & what was then done suffered to ... be carried away by the ... seas ... A grant for such a purpose would be the means of bringing back the idle population which I paid so much to get rid of by transporting to America [in 1847].¹⁸

MacDonagh has noted that Wingfield did implement a programme of assisted emigration in 1847, while McTernan indicates that families from Wingfield's estates sailed from Sligo for British North America on board the *Marchioness of Perth* in June of that year.¹⁹ There is also evidence indicating that other Wingfield tenants might have been on board one or more of the ships which carried Palmerston's emigrants to North America in 1847.²⁰ We have no definite idea of the numbers involved. However, given the foregoing details, and given the knowledge (from the Stewart and Kincaid correspondence) that large tracts of Wingfield land lay idle in the first half of 1848, it is reasonable to infer that Wingfield directly assisted the emigration of a significant number (perhaps hundreds) of persons from his estates in 1847.

A letter to Kincaid dated December 1848, from a tenant named Wills whose rental payments were in arrears, indicates that there was probably a very small amount of assisted emigration

¹⁸ It might be inferred from the final sentence in this passage that Wingfield lacked humane feelings toward his tenantry. However, several of his letters to Stewart and Kincaid indicate the contrary. For example, in October 1846 he instructed the agents to 'consider where charity is to be dispensed, among my tenants ... & assist them accordingly everywhere, in the best manner'.

¹⁹ Oliver MacDonagh, 'Irish emigration to the United States of America and the British colonies during the famine', in R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams (eds), *The great famine* (1957), n. 17; McTernan, *Sligo*, pt two, pp. 26, 34.

²⁰ J. R. Stewart to J. Kincaid, 17 May 1848.

from the Wingfield lands in 1848/9. Wills requested: 'Allow me what you said you would for sending my sisters to America ... I wrote [to Wingfield] a letter by this post, requesting of him ... either to give me employment or to allow you to let me go as you are letting part of the tenants go with the littel things they have'. Thus it seems that the only assistance received from Wingfield by most of the tenants to whom Wills referred was that although they were in arrears of rent, they were allowed to sell whatever property they had in order to finance their departures – probably migration to Britain in most cases. In fairness, however, the correspondence reveals that Wingfield was in financial difficulties by the early part of 1848 when, it seems, he had fallen into deficit in his accounts with the firm of Stewart and Kincaid.²¹

Sir Alexander Crichton, once Physician-in-Ordinary to the Emperor of Russia, resided in Kent. Most of his townlands in Sligo were in the south of the county, where Palmerston also owned some properties. Apart from those townlands, Crichton owned about 2000 acres further south, in the adjacent county of Roscommon. For some years before 1848, his properties in Ireland had been managed by his son Alex. However, following several murders and attacks on landlords and their agents in 1847, Sir Alexander feared for his son's safety. Among those murdered was Major Denis Mahon of Strokestown House in Co. Roscommon (on 2 November 1847). This case was regarded as so serious that it was debated in the House of Lords. Mahon was not one of the firm's clients, but his murder was committed on, or contiguous to, Crichton's Roscommon property.²² Like Palmerston, early in 1847 Mahon had asked many of his tenants to surrender their holdings 'voluntarily' in exchange for assisted emigration, and during the summer of 1847 he sent over 1000 of such persons, including their families, to America aboard four ships.²³ Following the outrages of 1847, Sir Alexander temporarily withdrew his son from Ireland and, around the end of the year, he appointed Stewart and Kincaid as his principal agent.

Early in 1848 Edward Smyth, the firm's agent in Sligo town, began to apply policies on the Crichton lands in southern Sligo akin to those which he was simultaneously implementing on the Palmerston properties in the same district: the Crichton townlands were subjected to squaring and other works of improvement, and to some clearances of their population. Compensation was given to some of the tenants or former undertenants who left the lands to be newly squared. On 24 April 1848 Alex Crichton (Sir Alexander's son) wrote to Stewart and Kincaid: 'I do not know what particular claim Jane Supple has to ... assistance to emigrate to America'. He continued: 'Biddy Davy ... has better claim to assistance'; however, 'for every £5 you give, you will I think have five additional claimants'. He added: 'I will with your leave first try what can be done with the Misses Supple & Davy ... William Shaw [a middleman] ... says

²¹ Edward Wingfield to Stewart and Kincaid, 28 Mar. 1848.

²² Police reports dated 4, 5 and 7 Nov. 1847 are in error on the location of Mahon's murder. These errors explain why some modern historians are also mistaken on the same point. In support of these assertions, see Desmond Norton, 'Where was Major Denis Mahon shot?', *Co. Roscommon Historical and Archaeological Society J.*, 9 (2003), pp. 54–8.

²³ Woodham-Smith states that 'Mahon chartered two vessels to take them to Quebec'. See Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The great hunger* (1962), p. 324. More recently, Raymond Browne has provided details of four ships which carried Mahon's emigrants to America. See his draft chapter 'From the Union to the famine' in Raymond Browne (ed.), *A history of Kilbride parish, Co. Roscommon*, currently near completion.

the ladies he expects will be satisfied with two or three pounds'. In a letter to Stewart and Kincaid dated at the end of April, Shaw referred to persons 'that sent up petitions to your honer' and he indicated that 'if I got the money [for them] the[y] would go off'. In regard to 'Bridget Davey', who wanted the agency to pay her passage to New York, Shaw informed them that 'there is a man' from the district 'going out on the eleventh of May and Miss Davey said that nothing would please her better than to be out with him'. A week later Shaw wrote to Stewart and Kincaid: 'I will give Jane Soopple two pounds . . . There are a great deal of the cotters [who had probably been undertenants] that are speaking to me concerning compensation. Will I give it to every person that throws [down] the house and go'.

It seems likely that in 1848 Stewart and Kincaid did assist some Crichton tenants in south Sligo, specifically to emigrate. But even if we had a list of all of those in the district who received money from them, we would still have a fundamental problem in estimating the extent of assisted emigration from the Crichton lands there. Elsewhere I have written in reference to Palmerston properties:

Assisted emigration . . . in 1848–9 may have been associated with squaring [in south Sligo]. The scale of such emigration is impossible to determine, partly because one cannot clearly distinguish between 'assistance' to emigrate and 'compensation' of tenants who peaceably departed. Smyth's letters of 1848 make references to 'compensation' of tenants who would leave without causing trouble. But in most cases, the 'compensation' was probably no more than would facilitate migration to Britain (not then regarded as 'emigration').²⁴

The same observations are applicable to Stewart and Kincaid client proprietors generally, including Sir Alexander Crichton.

Moving further to the south, none of the letters referring to Crichton's properties in Roscommon refer to assistance specifically to emigrate. The correspondence indicates that large numbers of his Roscommon tenants, or undertenants on those lands, departed in the late 1840s. It seems that only some of them received 'compensation'; furthermore, it seems that the sums which the latter group received would have enabled them to migrate (within the United Kingdom) only. However, it should be recognized that Sir Alexander Crichton's financial position placed him very close to the doors of the bankruptcy courts in the late 1840s.²⁵

III

The firm also managed many thousands of acres in Roscommon on behalf of two other proprietors, Daniel Ferrall and George Nugent, the Marquess of Westmeath. It is not surprising that there was no organized programme of assisted emigration from Ferrall's lands: in order to avoid imprisonment in Ireland for nonpayment of debts, he was 'on the run' under a false name in England during the early years of the famine, and to avoid imprisonment for nonpayment of substantial new debts incurred in England, he fled to France at the end of 1848.

²⁴ Norton, 'Palmerston and the Irish famine emigration', p. 162.

²⁵ See, for example, Alexander Crichton to Stewart

and Kincaid, 13 June 1849. Many encumbered estates were broken up and sold in the late 1840s and early 1850s.

In 1847–8 there was a vigorous programme of depopulation, to be attained mainly by ‘voluntary’ surrender and departure, to anywhere off the Ferrall lands, in exchange for small sums of money. Stewart and Kincaid paid such sums to many of Ferrall’s own tenants, perhaps to some of the late tenants of former middlemen, and in some cases to squatters on Ferrall land. It seems that hundreds of families were involved, and that the agency gave many or most of them from £1 to £1 10s. each. That the depopulation of the Ferrall lands was intimately related to a desire to improve his estate is clear from a letter from Ferrell to Kincaid of 27 January 1847 in which Ferrall instructed:

Give moderate sums to such of the tenantry as are willing to . . . quit and, if we can by such means remove a part of the overpopulation, we can then borrow money from the Government as you propose, or devise other means of improving the land, and recovering the losses we may sustain by those advances etc to defaulting tenants, who may emigrate.

It is unlikely that many of Ferrall’s tenants received enough in ‘compensation’ to enable them to go to North America.

The financial position of a majority of those cleared off the Roscommon estates of George Nugent (who resided in Co. Westmeath in the Midlands) was similar to that of Ferrall’s small tenants: in most cases, the sums given to them in ‘compensation’ were small.²⁶ But Stewart and Kincaid did assist some of Nugent’s tenants specifically to go to America. In April 1847 Stewart wrote to Kincaid referring to ‘the poor creatures in Kilglass [in east Roscommon contiguous to the river Shannon]. [It] is indeed a charity to help them away from the scene of death and destitution. I think that probably more will go soon’. In October 1847 Stewart wrote to Kincaid that some of Nugent’s tenants were talking ‘about going to America and giving up’, and in May 1848 Nugent requested Stewart to send him ‘the accounts of the expenditures including sums given for emigration’. Finally, in apparent reference to Nugent’s tenantry in the Kilglass district, Stewart wrote to Kincaid in October 1848: ‘Several applicants for emigration who would give up some land. Shall we start them off?’. Thus, whereas it seems that a large number of Nugent’s tenantry probably went to Britain through the small sums which they received in ‘compensation’, an unknown number went to America through more structured schemes organized by Stewart and Kincaid.

In the 1840s Edward Pakenham, third Earl of Longford (whose principal residence was in Westmeath), owned at least 18,500 statute acres in counties Longford and Westmeath, both of which are in the Irish Midlands. There was a small amount of emigration to America from the Westmeath estate in the early 1840s. In March 1842 Stewart and Kincaid’s local agent there wrote about ‘Pat Kieran who I hear is about going off to America’, and he added: ‘I think it was ten pounds that was promised him on giving up his land’. In fact, Kieran was paid £16,

²⁶ George Nugent had financial problems throughout his life. First, the family estate was burdened with debt, much of which went back to 1796 when his father had divorced his mother for adultery. Second, there were the financial consequences of George’s sexual adventures and of a fifteen-year legal battle which followed the first of his three marriages. His second marriage was in 1858 when he was aged 73, but four years later he again resorted to litigation in order to obtain a divorce because of his young wife’s adultery. See Lawrence Stone, *Broken lives* (1993), ch. 12.

some £8 of which was paid by four incoming tenants; thus, the remaining £8 was ‘assistance to emigrate’ rather than ‘compensation for improvements’ or for Kieran’s sale of his interest in the land he held. In the Stewart and Kincaid correspondence, the earliest indication of emigration from Pakenham properties in Longford is in a petition from Catherine Curren dated August 1846, which stated: ‘Pet[it]ione[r] is under ejection for nonpayment of rent . . . With the depressed state of times, my husband and son were obliged to go to America . . . which left your pet[it]ione[r] and eight helpless children . . . Pet[it]ione[r] humbly prays for mercy as she does not know the day or hour she may have relief from her husband and son’. Stewart and Kincaid assisted Curren to emigrate – presumably to join her husband in America. On 12 November she wrote from Longford town to the agents: ‘I beg . . . that ye will be pleased to remit me 3£ in addition to the 2£ already given. I had to release some articles I had to pawn . . . Myself and children are in want of clothing to fit us out for the voyage and to procure some sea store and to pay our travelling expenses to Dublin’. She added: ‘We will be in Dublin on Tuesday or Wednesday next . . . We cannot leave here unless ye are pleased to send us the sum now claimed which will be the last till I am in Dublin’.

Assisted emigration from Pakenham’s Longford estate was probably low until 1847 when, on an unspecified date, Stewart wrote to Kincaid in Longford town: ‘I hope you got on . . . well [collecting rents] in Longford but some there the small farmers will not be able to pay up. Get some of them off to America if you can & soon. The price to New York now is only £3 or £3 3s. for adults’. Early in 1848 Stewart and Kincaid implemented a programme of emigration among Pakenham’s tenants. This is inferred from the fact that in February of that year Stewart informed Kincaid: ‘I accepted a bill [of exchange] for Miley [American packet agent in Dublin] for £400 . . . for L[or]d Longford’s emigrants’. This sum paid to Miley would have covered the cost of transporting about 170 persons (including children as well as adults) to America.

John Wingfield was twin brother to Edward Wingfield, whose properties in west Sligo have already been discussed. In 1802 he assumed the additional surname of Stratford and became known as such. He owned over 2000 statute acres in the south-western county of Clare. To the south of Clare he also owned over 2000 acres in the Robertstown district of north-west Co. Limerick.²⁷ Stratford had no residence in Ireland during the 1840s: he dwelt at Stratford Place in London and at Margate in Kent.

Assisted emigration from the Stratford lands in Clare in the pre-famine 1840s was low. Thomas Reidy was one such emigrant. In January 1842 the local agent on the Clare estate wrote to Stewart and Kincaid that Reidy ‘has his mind made up to remove to Van Diemens land with his family, ten in number . . . If he had his [land] rent free he could badly support & clothe his long family by the produce of it . . . He expects your Hons. will have the kindness . . . of sending off himself & family. He has no means’. Kincaid responded favourably. In April, the same local agent informed Kincaid that Reidy ‘requested that I would state to your Hon[ou]r as vessels were not going out to Australia; that he has his mind made up to enjoy the offer your

²⁷ Details on these estates can be found in Desmond Norton, ‘Progress and distress on the Stratford estate in Clare during the eighteen forties’, *The other Clare*, 26 (2002), pp. 50–7; id., ‘Stratford’s Robertstown estate during the 1840s’, in Thomas J. Culhane, *The Barony of Shanid* (2003).

Hon[ou]r was very kind to promise, to send himself & family to America which is only 8 now, as two of his children died since he wrote first to your Ho[no]ur on the subject'. Having received some small assistance from Stewart and Kincaid, another named tenant and his family sailed to America from Galway on 1 April 1846.²⁸

The correspondence on the Clare estate contains only a single letter written in 1847. But it contains important information, namely, that a programme of assisted emigration from the estate was implemented in the spring of that year. Thus, early in May, Stewart wrote to Kincaid: 'You see by the enclosed . . . the numbers sent from Col. Stratford's Clare estate. [Arthur] Vincent [their local agent on Stratford's Robertstown estate across the Shannon from Clare] gives a piteous account of their wretched appearance & want of clothing. I only wonder. He did not venture on two or three pounds to get them some, but he don't venture far *without orders*'. This batch of emigrants probably left from the city of Limerick, possibly along with some others from the Robertstown district.

Following the termination of a lease for the entire Robertstown estate, the agents began to square that district in 1841–2. This implied getting rid of many former undertenants. In December 1841 Arthur Vincent wrote to Stewart and Kincaid: 'You have given me the liberty of assisting those poor cottiers to emigrate . . . What struck my mind to offer, is, one pound to each member of the family . . . £100 or £150 in this way would clear off a good many paupers'. But the levels of payment contemplated by Vincent did not satisfy the cottiers. Vincent therefore suggested that they should be offered more. In January 1842 he informed Stewart and Kincaid: 'There are six families [on a named townland] comprising in all 37 individuals who look to us for assistance to emigrate. I . . . told them that they might expect £1 each . . . They say we may keep this much as it would be of little or no assistance to them [to go to North America]. The very least which I think will quiet them is £2 each . . . I would be for giving it'. How much was paid to emigrants from the estate in 1842 is unknown.

It seems that there was some assisted emigration from Stratford's Limerick estate early during the famine: in February 1846 Vincent wrote to the agency: 'A few of the cottiers on the Robertstown estate are inclined to emigrate. Will you allow me to give them some allowances on getting their holdings thrown down. I think it would be well to lessen them'. In March, Vincent again referred to the cottiers:

With respect to the allowances you would give the cottiers on giving up their cabins I cannot get one who will accept of £5, as all their other effects when sold would not make as much as would pay their passage to America. What they look for is £2 for each member of the family . . . I think £100 could not be better converted than in thinning the poorer portion of cabins on this property.

Apart from the cottiers early in the year, emigration from the Robertstown estate in 1846 seems to have been low. But there may have been some assisted emigration from that district in 1847. The only subsequent reference to emigration from the estate is in a letter to Kincaid dated December 1848, posted in the city of Limerick by J. R. Stewart. In this he indicated that he had

²⁸ John Blackwell to Stewart and Kincaid, 3 Apr. 1846.

just come from the Robertstown estate, and he added: 'I have arranged for exporting 3 or 4 families & if we were merely wanting to get people off could send lots more. But of course I only send those who have land & whose rent which they are unable to pay would [from new tenants] soon come to the cost of emigration'.

The agency managed two other estates in Co. Limerick. These comprised the properties of Gertrude Fitzgerald on Mount Blakeney and Thomastown townlands and of Sergeant Warren near Ballingarry.²⁹ Both of these estates were to the south of Robertstown. Their proprietors resided at Whitegate in south-east Co. Cork and in Co. Dublin, respectively. Stewart and Kincaid commenced management of the Fitzgerald estate around the beginning of 1844. The lands of middlemen whose leases had expired were then squared, and at least some former under-tenants were compensated for surrendering their holdings. In one case in 1844, Stewart and Kincaid gave assistance specifically to emigrate from the estate. Thus, in April, a tenant who had surrendered his land wrote that he had 'not words to express my gratitude for your kindness'. He indicated that he had engaged a firm in Liverpool 'to carry us out' but he added: 'I had not sufficient money to buy clothing' and he hoped that 'your honor will forward me your order'.

Several of the letters about Mrs Fitzgerald's estate in 1848 refer to assisted emigration. On 20 March she wrote from her residence at Whitegate House to Stewart: 'Miss Russel [whose brother was apparently John Russell of Thomastown] arrived [at Whitegate House], to say that you & Mr Kincaid had signified your intention of enabling two other sisters to emigrate to America ... Please write by return of post as Miss R said that the packet is to sail for Dublin on Monday & that she and her two sisters ... will come down to me from Cork [city] on Saturday to know your decision'. This was written on a Monday. The fact that the Russell sisters hoped to leave Cork one week later again illustrates the speed at which emigrants were willing to leave. Two or three of the Russell sisters left Cork, on route to America via Dublin, on or close to the date which they had planned for their departure. It seems that they were content with whatever assistance they got from Stewart and Kincaid on behalf of Mrs Fitzgerald who, on 27 March, informed Stewart: 'I have just had a second visit from *Miss Russell* the *elder*, & one of her sisters, they are well satisfied now with your decision ... You will smile when I deliver a message from the elder Miss R, namely to request that you will desire the physician on board the ship in which her sisters are going to America, to take particular care of the eldest of the two as her health is delicate'.

The emigration of the Russell sisters was not an isolated event: in the spring of 1848 Stewart and Kincaid organized a programme of emigration from Mrs Fitzgerald's estate. On 18 March 1848 Stewart informed Kincaid: 'Sankey [an employee of Stewart and Kincaid] getting out a lot of the Mt Blakeney people, but it will cost a good deal'. Two days earlier, Sankey had reported to Stewart:

I went ... to Mt Blakeney yesterday ... John Bernard and his wife are ready to go but want 30s. for clothes. They certainly are very poor and must get some assistance ... David

²⁹ Further details on these estates can be found in Desmond Norton, 'Distress and benevolence on Gertrude Fitzgerald's Limerick estate in the 1840s', *North Munster Anti. J.*, 42 (2002), pp. 21–34; id., 'The Limerick estate of Sergeant Warren during the great famine', *NMAJ* 43 (2003), pp. 75–83.

Fitzgibbon is anxious to go but his wife being in the family way he will not be ready to start for 6 weeks. He will require some money for clothing as he and his family (in all 4) are naked ... I next visited Finns and saw Thomas' family in all 7. I offered £10 on the part of Mrs Fitzgerald if the brothers would give the balance ... of cost of sending them out ... But I fear when the cost of clothing be added, that £40 will hardly cover all ... I think I may increase Mrs F's donation to £15 ... As the 2 [Keefe] families number 14 it will take about £70 to send them out ... Money must be given for clothing but I think a small sum in this way will induce many to go.

On the following day, Sankey noted that he was 'surrounded by emigrants'. In the same letter he mentioned the names of two further families to be taken to America, largely or entirely at Mrs Fitzgerald's expense. In the agency's surviving correspondence, the last letter requesting assistance to emigrate from Mrs Fitzgerald's estate is dated April 1848. The writer sought the agency's 'generous assistance' to enable his family of nine to go to America. He added that 'of course we could not be penniless on landing in a strange country that we should have something to carry us into the interior'. The correspondence lists the names of many tenants on Mrs Fitzgerald's estate in the 1840s. The relevant *Valuation* indicates that few of them were there in 1851.³⁰

Developments on Sergeant Warren's townlands were similar to those on Mrs Fitzgerald's. Again there was considerable assisted emigration. In May 1847 Stewart wrote to Kincaid that he feared 'we shall have to pay the increased rate [of transatlantic passage] for Sergt Warrens people'. Much of the correspondence about the estate in 1848, a year at the end of which Stewart reported that 'the Ballingarry estate is in a most wretched state', pertains to assisted emigration. Early in 1848 the agency had a tenant on the estate, John Scollard, imprisoned for nonpayment of debt: Stewart and Kincaid claimed that he was £85-odd in arrears. In mid-March, Scollard wrote to them that he would 'give you up the possession' of his land 'by your assisting me and family in going to America ... I would wish to prepare for the first of April, in procuring some clothes'. Stewart and Kincaid's response was favourable. This may be regarded as surprising, in view of the extent of Scollard's debt to the firm. On 22 March, Scollard wrote to them: 'I have made up my mind with Mr Sankey ... to go to America ... He told me that you would not give us any clothing until we would go to Dublin', but Scollard added that he hoped to be ready to leave for Dublin 'from the 10th to the 12th of April if we get the clothing and some cost' [for travel to Dublin].

Also on 22 March 1848, Sankey wrote to Stewart and Kincaid that 'David Dunworth [a Warren tenant] has been begging with me to be sent to America. I offered to send 6 of his family'. Sankey's letters make no further reference to him until several weeks later, when Sankey wrote to Stewart: 'I know he wants me to send out 6 of his family which will cost £35 and then I calculate £10 for James Dunworth and his wife. Shall I do this?' Sankey was on the estate on 23 March, when he took possession from Patrick Guiry and from other tenants. On the same date he reported: 'I know not whether you will think I have gone too far but when I looked over his [Guiry's] farm and saw the good state it is in at present I settled on giving him £40 and £10 to

³⁰ *Primary valuation of tenements, County of Limerick, Barony of Coshma* (1851), pp. 69, 70.

Brosnaghan'. Sankey added: 'Fitzgeralds gave up quietly and I have arranged with Michl. in case he does not go to America that he is only to get £20. His brother Pat will not go so I gave him £8 and £5 settled the two cottiers'. Thus, in 1848, it was not the case that all of those on the estate who received significant sums upon surrendering their land went to America.³¹ The correspondence lists the names of about fifty tenants on Warren's estate, mainly in 1845–6. It is probable that these included almost all those heads of households who were immediate tenants to Warren. The relevant *Valuation* indicates that only about nine of them were still on the estate in 1852.³²

The above-mentioned estates aside, evidence of landlord-assisted emigration from the properties of the agency's other client proprietors in the 1840s is less clear-cut. This is partly because the files concerning most of those estates are relatively thin. Though none of them refer to organized programmes of emigration, several letters in those files do refer to instances in which, on behalf of the landlord, Stewart and Kincaid offered money to individuals upon leaving an estate, and in some cases the sums offered were quite large. Thus, the evidence is that probably a majority of the client landlords gave meaningful assistance to some of their tenants – large or small in number – to emigrate in the 1840s, and during the famine years in particular. Although very many tenants did beg for assistance to emigrate, on some of the estates the decision to implement such measures probably reflected the policy of Stewart and Kincaid, and the initiative probably came from them rather than the proprietors alone. It is likely that Stewart and Kincaid were doing a job which they found distasteful, but that they regarded it as necessary for the viability of the estates under their care and in many cases for the survival of existing and former tenants. No claim is advanced here that a majority of other land agents or other landlords in Ireland in the 1840s thought along the same lines as Stewart and Kincaid. Furthermore, in a great many cases 'voluntary' surrender of land, in return for assisted emigration, was hardly 'voluntary' in any acceptable interpretation of the word: ejection without much 'compensation' must often have been the only immediate alternative.

IV

The Stewart and Kincaid correspondence does not enable us to make even an approximate estimate of the number of persons from the totality of the estates under the firm's management who were 'assisted', specifically to emigrate, during the famine; however, it is reasonable to infer that several thousands of people were involved, and that the landlords' direct costs in pounds (including expenditures on clothing and food over and above ship rations) were probably about four times the number of beneficiaries. In addition, it must be recalled that large numbers of tenants on estates managed by Stewart and Kincaid were 'compensated' for surrender of their holdings. Some of those people presumably used the monies to migrate to Britain, and an unknown proportion used them to go to America. It seems that most of those

³¹ Michael Fitzgerald probably stayed in Ireland. In Sept. 1848 Sankey wrote to Stewart and Kincaid, 'Michl. Fitzgerald is an invalid and unfit to go to America. He wants £20 the amount formerly offered him in case he

stays at home'.

³² *Primary valuation of tenements, County of Limerick, Barony of Connello Upper* (1852), pp. 9, 21, 24, 25, 93, 94.

who left estates managed by Stewart and Kincaid in 1846–8 received ‘compensation’ or benefited from ‘assistance’.³³ But the distinction between the two is nebulous.

It is difficult to see how one can sensibly attach much confidence to the estimates of ‘assisted emigration’ presented by some modern historians. Oliver MacDonagh was cautious when, in the 1950s, he wrote that ‘in 1846–52, landlord-assisted emigration must have been very small; it can scarcely have exceeded 50,000 in extent’.³⁴ In a note, MacDonagh was careful to add: ‘This is my own estimate . . . It is put forward most tentatively . . . It must be remembered how difficult it was to decide exactly what amounted to “assistance”’.³⁵ MacDonagh also remarked that ‘an offer of “assisted emigration” often meant no more than eviction and a small sum’ of money ‘which could not possibly have paid the fare’; thus, whether he regarded some of the ‘compensation’ as a form of ‘assistance’ remains an open question.³⁶ Although MacDonagh provides the names of several landlords who financed ‘assisted emigration’ during the famine, those names include only three of the landlords mentioned in this paper (Palmerston, Wingfield and Warren). Serious doubt is therefore cast on MacDonagh’s upper bound estimate of 50,000 for ‘landlord assisted emigration’ over the seven years 1846–52.

Some of the more recent writings of historians have expressed no caution, or less caution, than MacDonagh on ‘assisted emigration’ during the famine. In 1994 Christine Kinealy wrote with apparent certainty that ‘landlord-assisted emigration accounted for only about 5 per cent of the total’.³⁷ In 1999 Cormac O’Grada referred to ‘emigrants whose passages were paid by landlords or by the state’ and he added: ‘Only a small share of all passages overseas were so financed, certainly no more than 4 or 5 percent’.³⁸ O’Grada cites MacDonagh’s estimates, and research by David Fitzpatrick, as his sources. Fitzpatrick had reported in 1989 that ‘references were found to . . . cases of assistance by individuals (usually landlords) or groups, who probably aided at least . . . 22,000 [emigrants] between 1846 and 1850’.³⁹ Fitzpatrick’s principal sources are similar to those of MacDonagh. It is inferred that assistance specifically to emigrate from some of the estates managed by Stewart and Kincaid is absent from Fitzpatrick’s calculations. In providing a map indicating his lower bound estimates of privately assisted emigration from each county in Ireland, he states that those estimates are for ‘the number of emigrants receiving any financial assistance from landlords or other non-official benefactors’.⁴⁰ But apart from his apparent exclusion of assisted emigration from some of the estates discussed in this paper, it seems that Fitzpatrick also excludes the very many (at least on estates managed by Stewart and Kincaid) who received only ‘compensation’ upon surrendering their holdings, even if they allocated such funds to finance emigration. If the Stewart and Kincaid correspondence had

³³ The fact that payments in cash or in kind appear to have been given to most of the tenants who departed from estates managed by Stewart and Kincaid in the 1840s, suggests that so-called tenant right was more prevalent than historians have hitherto assumed. On the tenant right issue, see *Evidence taken before Her Majesty’s commissioners of inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect to the occupation of land in Ireland* (1845), pts I to III, and W. E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland* (1994), ch. 4.

³⁴ MacDonagh in Edwards and Williams (eds), *Great famine*, p. 335.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 475.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 335, 336.

³⁷ Christine Kinealy, *This great calamity* (1994), p. 304.

³⁸ Cormac O’Grada, *Black ‘47 and beyond* (1999), p. 115.

³⁹ Fitzpatrick, ‘Emigration’, p. 592.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 622.

been available when Fitzpatrick conducted his research, it might well have induced him to raise his lower bound estimate, and it seems likely that this consideration, along with appropriate attention to MacDonagh's caution, would have led those who wrote on the subject in the 1990s to express less of a sense of precision in their estimates.

On the matter of 'assisted emigration', Tyler Anbinder probably moved in the direction of realism when, in 2001, he wrote in regard to the famine era that 'about 6 to 8 per cent of emigrants in this period left Ireland . . . as the result of assistance from governments, religious and charitable organizations, or landlords'.⁴¹ Anbinder does not distinguish between those people who were assisted specifically to emigrate, and those who were 'compensated' upon surrender of their holdings (an unknown proportion of whom also emigrated).

Apart from the point that some modern historians appear to have underestimated the approximate extent of assisted emigration during the famine era, the Stewart and Kincaid correspondence of the 1840s yields the following overall impressions. Even before 1846–7, the agents recognized that some assistance to emigrate was desirable and they attempted to facilitate such departures with humanity and even with compassion. Thus, given that little or no net cost would be imposed on the landlord in the long run, the small-scale emigration supported by Stewart and Kincaid in the pre-famine years reflected a concern for tenant welfare. But although Stewart and Kincaid continued to bear the well-being of the tenantry in mind, in 1847 and 1848 the welfare of client landlords became paramount in the firm's thinking and actions: population growth was now to be abated, not through occasional assistance to emigrate on a case-by-case basis, but through substantive programmes of estate clearance which involved 'voluntary' surrender of land on the part of many tenants, most of whom appear to have been 'compensated' before leaving an estate or 'assisted' to leave the British Isles entirely.

⁴¹ Anbinder, 'Palmerston', p. 445.