

The Irish Famine, Galway, and the Ballinglass Incident

The Great Famine in Ireland from 1845–1852 became one of the most devastating human tragedies in modern European history. Millions of poor Irish families depended heavily on the potato because it could grow abundantly even on very small plots of rented land. When potato blight destroyed the crop beginning in 1845, entire communities suddenly lost their primary food source. What began as agricultural disaster quickly became widespread hunger, disease, eviction, and social collapse throughout Ireland.

The Ballinglass Incident in County Roscommon during March 1846 became one of the most haunting symbols of the suffering that surrounded the famine years. Landlord Denis Mahon ordered the eviction of tenants from the village of Ballinglass because they could not pay rent. Families already weakened by hunger and poverty were forced from their homes while cold rain and harsh weather swept across western Ireland. Roofs were torn from cottages to prevent people from returning. Witnesses described mothers carrying children into ditches and fields with nowhere to go. The event shocked readers throughout Ireland and Britain when newspapers carried reports of the tragedy.

The Ballinglass evictions revealed that the Irish Famine was not only about crop failure. It was also about poverty, land systems, rent pressure, displacement, and survival. Entire villages across western Ireland feared eviction and starvation. Families faced impossible choices: remain and risk hunger, enter overcrowded workhouses, or attempt emigration across the ocean.

For the Hensler family story and the connected Irish family lines of Carroll, O'Flaherty, Gavin, and Murray, the historical timing carries deep emotional meaning. Patrick O'Flaherty was born in Galway during the same week the Ballinglass Incident unfolded. While Patrick himself was only a newborn child, the world surrounding his family would have been filled with fear, uncertainty, collapsing crops, rumors of eviction, and difficult conversations about survival. Galway was one of the regions deeply scarred by famine and emigration.

Families such as the O'Flahertys, Gavins, Carrolls, and Murrays carried forward the inherited resilience that became part of the Irish immigrant story. Many survivors eventually crossed oceans to America carrying little more than hope, family loyalty, work ethic, faith, and determination. The famine years permanently shaped Irish identity and left emotional scars that echoed through later generations.

For the KeepGoingKeepLoving project, Patrick O'Flaherty's birth during the week of the Ballinglass Incident creates a powerful historical symbol. One child entering the world in Galway while, elsewhere in western Ireland, families were being forced from their homes during the opening shockwaves of famine. Suffering and hope existed together in the same moment. That contrast captures the larger Irish story itself — endurance, sacrifice, survival, and the determination to keep going despite overwhelming hardship.