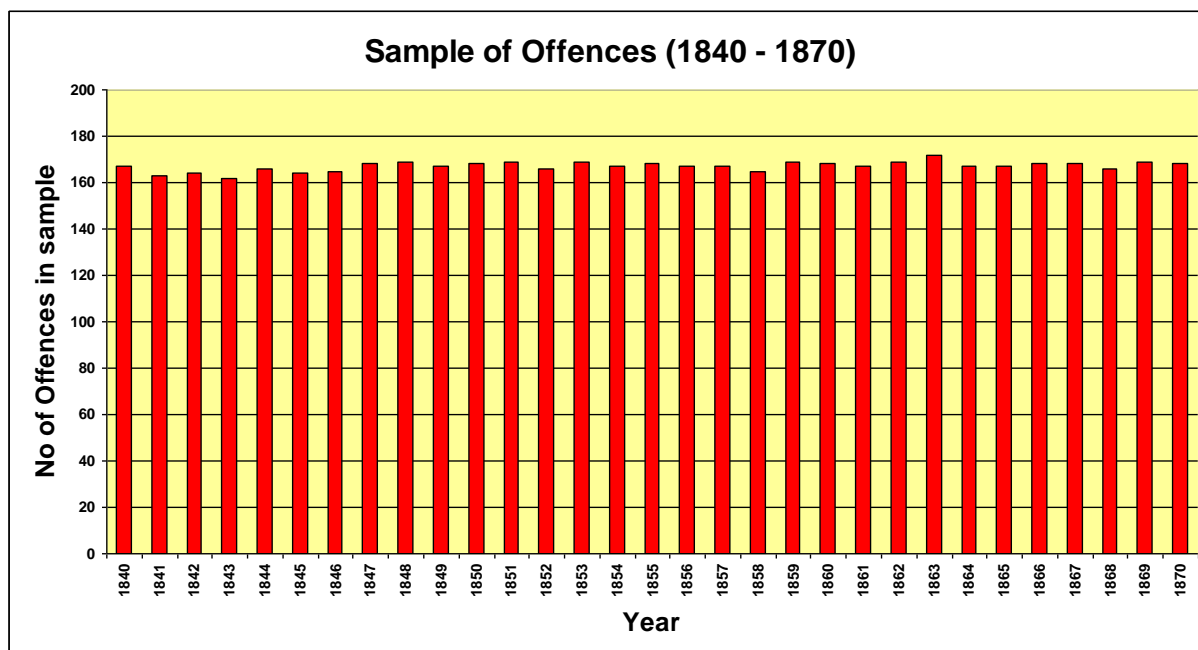


SAMPLE OF COUNTY CORK PRISON RECORDS (1840 – 1870)

Compiled by Frank O'Donovan, Bantry

While browsing through some Prison records for County Cork I stumbled across one which “caught my eye”, so to speak. It was a Donovan man in 1853 and the reason he was sent to prison was for ‘*Furious Driving*’. Now the motor car was not around in that era so I can only guess that he was driving a donkey and cart, a horse and cart or trap. And of course there were no tarmacadamed roads either. A bit more curiosity and I saw a wide variety of offences. These included assaults, being drunk, owing money and suspicion of ... It was the latter which surprised me in that clearly people were imprisoned based only on a suspicion.

I decided to note a selection of Offences and I kept going until I reached a total of 5,179 covering the period from 1840 to 1870 inclusive. To get a balanced picture I took a selection of surnames and for each I took a sample of offences for that name for each year, with a few exceptions. Thus I believe I got a representative sample in the survey. As can be seen in the chart below I included over 160 Offences for each year.



On the Table below I have listed each Surname I used and placed an Offence Committed opposite each name. This shows the selection of Surnames used (50) by me. It also shows a sample of the Offences committed by each name. Clearly people were sent to prison for very minor or indeed doubtful crimes. That table will give you a flavour of crimes in that era.

Surname	Offence
Allen	Stealing Turnips
Barry	Keeping An Unregistered Dog
Brennan	Threatening Constable
Brien	Blaspheming In The Streets
Burke	Setting Fire To A Stack Of Corn
Butler	Stealing Hay
Cotter	Breaking Into National School
Cronin	Stealing Butter
Crowley	Travel In A Railway Without Payin Fare
Daly	Stealing Turf
Delaney	Bowling On The Public Road
Donovan	Furiously Riding A Horse
Forde	Stealing Paper
Galvin	Keeping Lodges Without Being Duly Registered
Harrington	Throwing Stones & Fighting In The Streets
Hayes	Obstructing An Overseer Of Public Works
Healy	Having A Stolen Napkin In His Possession
Hurley	Suspicion Of Stealing A Duck
Kennedy	Receiving Stolen Mutton
Kenny	Stealing 1s /1½d
Keohane	Breach Of Sabbath & Gambling
Leary	Obstructing The Streets By Selling Cabbage
Looney	Stealing 1 Yard Of Flannel
Lucey	Stealing Bogwood
Lynch	Feloniously Milking A Cow
Maguire	Stealing A Pair Of Braces
Mahony	Selling Spirits Withot Licence
Manley	Wilfully Cutting Young Trees
Manning	Stealing potatoes
McCarthy	Having Unregistered Arms
Moloney	Wilful Trespass On A Strand
Murnane	Selling A Stolen Shirt
Murphy	Causing Dogs To Bite Owen Herlihy
Murray	Stealing Furze
Neill	Annoying John Driscoll
Norris	Eloping From Work House
Power	Disturbing A Congregation In Chapel Also To Keep Peace
Regan	Administering Unlawful Oaths
Reynolds	Stealing Lead
Ryan	Stealing Manure
Shea	Having Fraudulent Weights
Sheehan	Nuisance At A Well
Slattery	Stealing A Pair Shoes
Sullivan	Stricking With A Stone
Sweeney	Illegal Fishing
Vickery	Debtor
Warner	Threatening
White	Stealing A Pocket Handkerchief
Williams	Picking Pockets
Young	Stealing A Table Cloth

Let us have a look at some other examples of crimes resulting in prison sentences:-

(Spellings in some are not correct but I did not alter the data so as not to distort it)

- Eloping From Apprentiship
- Assaulting One Of The Coast Guard
- Assaulting A Sub Constable
- Begging In The Public Streets
- Breach Of The Sabbath By Digging
- Throwing Bowls On The Public Road
- Receiving Lodgers Without Licence
- Stealing A Piece Of Calico
- Committing A Breach Of The Public Peace
- Breaking Glass In Bantry Wk Ho
- Enterg The House & Stealing Brass & Bells
- Exposing A Quantity Of Fish For Sale
- Obstructing Public Streets
- Stealing two pigs
- Contempt Of Court At Blarney P. Sess.
- Kerry Convict On Route To Dublin
- 74th Regt Court Martial
- Destroying A Blanket In Dunmanway Bridewell
- Debtor
- Deserter 68th Regt
- Disobedient Apprentice
- Fighting At Leap
- Carelesly & Negligently Driving
- Being A Confirmed Drunkard
- Drunkenness At Victoria Cross
- Expose For Sale Beer & Spirits Without Lincence
- Deserting His Wife
- Bigamy
- Suspicion Of Stealing Potatoes
- Dredging For Oysters
- Importuning For Prostitution
- Exposing His Person Bathing
- Stealing Frize Out Of A Mill
- Injuring A Horse
- Insubordination In Bantry Wo Ho
- Larceny Of Slate
- Manslaughter
- Travelling By The Youghal Traim Without Paing Proper Fare
- Cursing In The Streets And Using Obscene Language
- Obstructing The Master In The Cork U W House
- Singing A Seditious Song
- Refused To Be Sworn
- Stealing Silk Kerchief
- Fail To Abate A Nuisance
- Scaling A Garden Wall

- Pawning A Stolen Watch
- Wilful Perjury
- Wilfully Breaking 3 Cups & Saucers
- Receiving Stolen Goods
- Attempt To Convey Tobacco Into The City Goal
- Cutting Grass
- Suspicion of stealing plough
- Sending A Threatening Notice
- Wilful Trespass & Breaking Young Tree
- Vagrant
- Stealing Lead Copper & Brass
- Head Of Mob Threatn To Strike With Stone
- Throwing Stones At Constabulary
- Threatening To Burn The House
- Suspicion Of Being Deserter
- Stealing A Petticoat & Shirt
- Stealing Turnips
- Stealing Winkers
- Stealing A Pair Cart Wheels
- Riot
- Unlawfully Receiving A £1
- Appearing In Arms And Attacking
- Burning an effigy

Let's have a quick look at some of the Amounts of Money owed by Debtors:

£ 4.0.0	£14-8-6	£28.15.11
£1 17 6	£15 16 -6	£29-18-10
£1. 3.10	£15-6-1	£3. 5.4
£1.10 .5	£16 .16 .3	£3.1.6
£10.18.6	£16 .6 .1	£34 15 10
£11. 9.6	£17.15.11	£35.10
£11-9-6	£17.16.3	£3-5-7
£12 5 6	£2 .2.0	£36.7.8
£12.11.6	£2 14 6	£37 .8. 2
£12.16.0	£2. 5. 6	£4 16 5
£12.9.6	£2. 6. 6	£4. 2. 0
£12-10-7	£2.4.10	£40-10-3
£12-1-8 1/2	£20.2.6	£42.10.6
£13 .0.0	£217.7.2	£43.11.1
£13 5 8	£22. 1.6	£44-11-5

Going through the 5,179 records I tried to categorise them so we could get a result to display crimes and their respective popularity. The summary is on the Table below:-

Offence type	Number out of 5,179	% of Total
Stealing	1,560	30.1 %
Assault	882	17.0 %
Drunk	292	5.6 %
Debtor	242	4.7 %
Vagrant	231	4.5 %
Trespass	196	3.8 %
Burglary & Robbery	120	2.3 %
Absconding	114	2.2 %
Disorderly	91	1.8 %
Larceny	83	1.6 %
Riot	81	1.6 %
Threatening	81	1.6 %
Other	78	1.5 %
Drunk & Disorderly	78	1.5 %
Breaking Glass / Windows	71	1.4 %
Family	69	1.3 %
Suspicion of	68	1.3 %
Begging	65	1.3 %
Insubordination	64	1.2 %
Receiving / In Possession	61	1.2 %
Lunatic	52	1.0 %
Disobeying	40	0.8 %
Property damage	40	0.8 %
Importuning For Prostitution	36	0.7 %
Indecent Exposure	36	0.7 %
Court Martial / Naval or Military Offender	36	0.7 %
Breach of the Peace	34	0.7 %
Pawning	33	0.6 %
Fishery	32	0.6 %
Trees / Plants	29	0.6 %
Obscene / Unsuitable Language	29	0.6 %
Excise Laws	28	0.5 %
Murder	24	0.5 %
Casual Trading / Obstructing St / Gaming	23	0.4 %
Manslaughter	23	0.4 %
Deserter	21	0.4 %
Rape	17	0.3 %
Obstructing	16	0.3 %
Smuggling	12	0.2 %
Convicts in transit	11	0.2 %
Damaging Blankets / Sheets	10	0.2 %
Bowling on the road	10	0.2 %
Fenian Member / Enrolling in Militia	10	0.2 %
Throwing Stones	9	0.2 %
Injuring / Killing an Animal	9	0.2 %
Driving / Riding	6	0.1 %
Blasphemy / Sacrilege / Breach of Sabbath	5	0.1 %
Contempt	4	0.1 %
Perjury	4	0.1 %
Breach Of Lodging Housing Act	4	0.1 %
Milking a Cow	3	0.1 %
Disturbing Congregation	3	0.1 %
Not Paying Train Fare	3	0.1 %

Clearly the broad category of *Stealing* is a poll-topper so below I have sub-divided the 1,560 Offences so we get a breakdown:-

<u>Stealing sub-divisions</u>	<u>Number</u>	
Clothes	417	26.7 %
Money	160	10.3 %
Turnips	149	9.6 %
Potatoes	126	8.1 %
Sheep	105	6.7 %
Food	94	6.0 %
Other	92	5.9 %
Animals	67	4.3 %
Poultry	52	3.3 %
Timber	40	2.6 %
Boots / Shoes	35	2.2 %
Household Items	31	2.0 %
Farm items / tools	30	1.9 %
Hay / Straw	23	1.5 %
Attempt	22	1.4 %
Wheat / Oats / Barley / Corn	15	1.0 %
Copper / Lead	14	0.9 %
Turf	12	0.8 %
Wool	12	0.8 %
Pick Pocket	12	0.8 %
Base Coin (making /using)	12	0.8 %
Clock / Watch	11	0.7 %
Grass	11	0.7 %
Furze	10	0.6 %
Railway Items	5	0.3 %
Sand / Seaweed	3	0.2 %
Total:	1,560	100.0 %

Clothes are obviously the large or popular item here so I have broken down the 417 as follows:-

<u>Clothes sub division</u>	<u>Number</u>	
Shirt	54	12.9 %
Fabrics (e.g. cotton, linen)	49	11.8 %
Coat	34	8.2 %
Shawl	22	5.3 %
Trowsers	19	4.6 %
Blanket	19	4.6 %
Cloak	15	3.6 %
Gown	12	2.9 %
Sheet	12	2.9 %
Petticoat	12	2.9 %
Handkerchief	9	2.2 %
Balance - various items	160	38.4 %

The 52 **Poultry** stolen were:-

▪ Turkey	18
▪ Hen	18
▪ Goose	12
▪ Duck	2
▪ Peacock	1
▪ Fowl	1

Since Turnips and Potatoes were the most common food items taken I gave them their own classification in the above Table. All other foods I put into the ***Food*** classification. A sub-division of the 94 **Food** items yields:-

▪ Fruit	24
▪ Vegetables	12
▪ Meat	10
▪ Butter	10
▪ Flour	9
▪ Bread	9

(plus a small numbers of a varied selection).

I noted that Sheep stealing was common so I gave them their own class; all other animals I included under **Animals**. The 67 ***Animals*** taken were:

• Cow	23
• Pig	17
• Donkey	7
• Horse	7
• Lamb	6

(plus 7 others)

There were 882 ***Assaults*** and 82 of these were on Police or Constables or Sub Constables.

And finally a few more reasons why people ended up in a County Cork Prison:-

- Treasonable Practices
- Attempting To Rescue Prisoners
- Breach Of Agreement
- For Being Unlawfully Sworn In
- Refusing To Give Evidence In A Case
- Taking Forcible Possession Of A House
- Engaging In Military Exercises
- Not Giving A Satisfactory Account
- Unlawfully Drilling With Pike
- Deserting His Family

The above are almost funny to read relative to crime nowadays.

Were these the “***good olde days***”???

Frank

Email: **northlongfield@gmail.com**