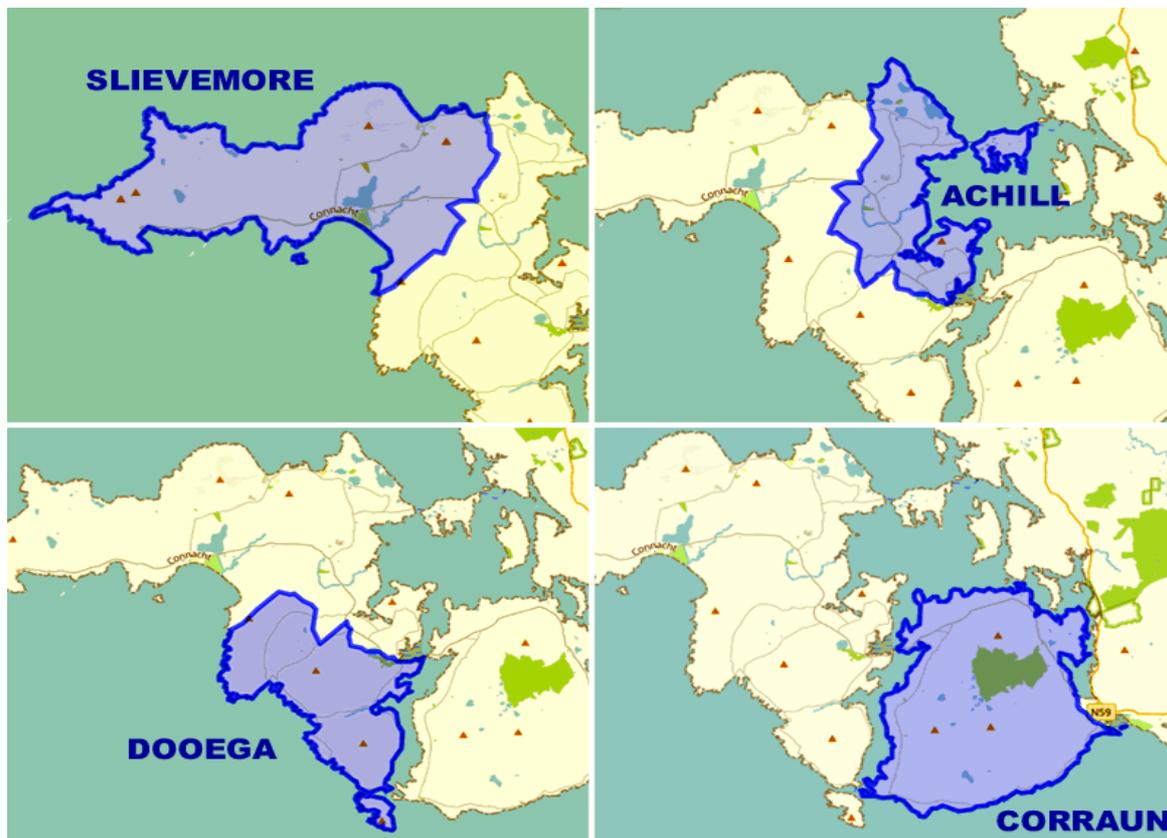


CDB Report on Achill 1892

In 1892 the newly-formed Congested Districts Board dispatched a number of inspectors to report on the local conditions in areas along Ireland's Atlantic seaboard. The following is the contents of the report on the District of Achill prepared by Major Robert Rutledge-Fair.

The report covers the District's four Electoral Divisions of Achill, Corraun, Dooega and Slievemore:



Electoral Division	Area in Statute Acres	Poor Law Valuation	No. of ratings at or under £10 and above £4 valuation	No. of ratings at or under £4 valuation	Population in 1891	No. of families in 1891	No. of families on Holdings between £2 and £4 valuation	No. of families on holdings at or under £2 valuation	No. of families in very poor circumstances	No. of families which have no cattle
Achill	8861	£432	5	273	1417	276	26	209	73	c.100
Corraun	18288	£557	21	289	1602	290	37	219	75	
Dooega	10249	£713	11	449	1698	310	23	294	110	
Slievemore	17143	£849	18	510	1810	373	33	282	88	
TOTALS:	54541	£2551	55	1521	6527	1249	119	1004	346	c.100

(1) Whether inland or maritime.

The district is maritime.

(2) Average quantity of land cultivated on holdings at and under £4 valuation, under (a) oats, (b) potatoes, (c) meadow, (d) green crops.

There are about four acres on an average cultivated on a holding at and under £4 valuation in the following way:

Under potatoes:	2 acres
Under oats or rye:	2 acres (generally the latter)
Total:	<u>4 acres</u>

There may be said to be practically no meadow or other green crops grown.

(3) Extent of mountain or moor grazing, and rights possessed by tenants, whether in common or otherwise.

In the Achill and Dooega Electoral Divisions tenants on the Pike Estate are granted grazing by the Trustees on 9,000 acres of mountain lands at the following annual charges:- Cattle 3s., Horses 6s., and Sheep 1s. each. In Corraun Electoral Division the Trustees of the late S. Dickens gave grazing on some 5,000 acres to their tenants for cattle at some 5s. per "sum" horses, 5s. each, and sheep, 5s. per eight. The Trustees of the Achill Mission who own land in all four Electoral Divisions charge their tenants the following amounts for grazing over 10,000 acres of mountain and moor:- cattle 2s. 6d., horses 3s., and sheep 6d. each. On the three above mentioned Estates the grazing rights are vested in the owners by the adoption of this custom, and the charges which I have quoted could at any time be increased. There are four other landlords in the district who own smaller tracts of mountain, on which their tenants enjoy the right of free grazing as part of their holdings.

(4) Extent and description of land, if any, which could be profitably reclaimed and added to existing adjoining holdings.

There is sufficient mountain and moor-land round most of the villages which could be profitably reclaimed and added to existing adjoining holdings. The owners are always willing to allow their tenants to cultivate such land, and no rent is charged for several years. Where seaweed can be obtained bog-land is being gradually reclaimed.

(5) Particulars as to any suitable land in district which could be obtained, and to which families could be migrated with a reasonable prospect of success.

I cannot hear of any suitable land in this district being for sale to which families could be migrated with a reasonable prospect of success.

(6) Method of cultivation, manures, rotation of crops, etc, etc.

Spade cultivation is carried on in this district.

The manures in use are dung or seaweed spread on ridges over which seed potatoes are laid about a foot apart. After this sowing, seaweed (or sods impregnated with smoke and soot, generally taken from the roofs of the houses and cut into small pieces with spades) is used as a sort of top-dressing, the potatoes being afterwards moulded. In fine weather the land is also burned. In some of the villages there is a scarcity of seaweed, especially on the south side of the Achill Island. Shell-fish scraped from the rocks are also used as manure.

The rotation of crops is as follows:- Rye or oats - where the latter will grow - then potatoes, and potatoes follow rye, until the soil is worn out. The land is then allowed to lie idle for a few years when the same rotation of crops is again commenced. Grass seeds are rarely sown.

(7) General information with regard to stock, and suggestions as to improvement of breeds - (a) cattle, (b) sheep, (c) horses and donkeys, (d) pigs, (e) poultry, etc, etc.

Cattle and sheep are of the most inferior description that can be imagined; ponies are rough but hardy and capable of great endurance; pigs are very bad and not much bred by the people - I am told those bred on the Achill Island nearly always die. Pigs are generally brought from Newport and sold at Achill Sound Fair; these thrive fairly well.

Poultry are small, especially ducks and geese; the hens are splendid layers, the people deriving more profit from the sale of eggs than from any other industry, except migratory labour; many tenants told me that they would rather lose their cattle than part with their hens.

Kyloe and Galloway bulls and black-faced rams might be tried, but "soft" breeds of all kinds of stock should be carefully avoided, as the land is altogether too poor to rear a really good class of animal.

A few cockerels of a hardy breed might also be sent to this district, Andalusians for choice, as I hear they thrive well formerly. West Mayo seems to have been altogether omitted from the recent distribution of cockerels.

(8) Markets and fairs for cattle and produce of district; also statement as to where the people obtain food and other supplies, and the prevailing custom with regard to the disposal of butter, eggs, and poultry; to what extent are they sold in the first instance to local shopkeepers and dealers, and, generally speaking, how old are the eggs when sold to the first buyer, and about how long when they reach their ultimate destination in Great Britain.

Monthly fairs are held at Achill Sound and Mulranny; some people also go to Westport and Newport fairs. Food and other supplies are obtained from local dealers, except clothes which are generally bought in England and Scotland by the migratory labourers; any clothes purchased in the district are bought at Westport.

No butter or poultry is exported - very little is sold for local consumption. Eggs are exported in thousands by the local dealers who purchase them from the people. They are generally kept a fortnight and are then sent by boat to Westport. Sometimes they have to be retained three weeks owing to bad weather. They are always nearly three weeks old before reaching their final destination in Great Britain.

(9) Rail, steamer, sailing boat, road, postal and telegraph facilities.

Westport is at present the nearest railway station for this district, being twenty-eight miles from Achill Sound; but a line to Achill is now in course of construction. No steamers call to any part of the district. Sailing boats trade with Westport and convey all goods purchased there to Achill Sound. There is very little cart traffic from Westport. The postal arrangements are good: letters are delivered daily, except on Sundays, at three post offices in the district.

A telegraph office was opened last year at Achill Sound.

(10) Employment for labourers in the district, whether temporary or constant, and rate of wage.

The employment for labourers is temporary - just a little at spring and harvest time - wages being 2s. per day.

(11) Migratory labour, average earnings per head, and where earned.

The migratory labourers probably number 1,318 persons in this district. They leave between March 20th and June 20th, returning from September 20th up to Christmas. All females and a few men go to Scotland, working in Lanark, Ayr, and Mid Lothian. The great majority of the male labourers proceed to Lancashire, Cheshire and Yorkshire. The average earnings for men are from £9 to £10 cash, and £1 10s. value of clothes purchased. The average earnings for women are from £5 to £7 cash, and £1 10s. value of clothes purchased.

(12) Weaving, spinning, knitting, and sewing, whether used locally or sold, and where.

There are very few weavers in the district; this industry being almost entirely confined to making a little flannel for men's shirts, etc., etc. The women spin and knit for their own families. Nothing is ever sold. I understand the girls bring home from Scotland large quantities of thread for knitting socks and small shawls.

(13) Kelp-burning, and sale of seaweed.

There is no kelp-burning carried on in the district. A little kelp was formerly made on one of the north-east headlands (Ridge Point), but for some years the price was so low that the people abandoned the industry for migratory labour and emigration. It has never since been revived though the price now given for kelp is fairly remunerative. Some £15 is paid annually to the Achill Mission Trustees for seaweed on Inishbiggle Island (which forms part of the Achill Electoral Division) by the people of the adjoining district of Ballycroy. No other seaweed is sold.

(14) Sale of turf, nature and extent of bogs.

There is no turf sold. The bogs are practically inexhaustible, and the turf is of excellent quality.

(15) *Lobster fishing, number of men and boats employed.*

There are numbers of lobsters all round the coast of the district, but the people do not fish for them - although Connemara and Inishkea fishermen take them in hundreds almost from the very doors of the people.

(16) *Sea fishing, Facilities for sale of fish and number of boats and men solely employed in fishing.*

Very few of the people can be called fisherman. I doubt much if there are half a dozen bone fide fishermen in the entire district. Up to the present time no facilities for the sale of fresh fish existed and the consumption was confined to local wants and a little salt fish which was taken to Westport and sold. The Westport Mulranny and Achill Railway ought to alter matters in this respect.

(17) *Number of boats and men employed in carrying turf or seaweed or in fishing. Classification of boats.*

The number of boats employed in fishing, or carrying turf or seaweed, and their classification, are as follows:-

3	Hookers, 2nd class
11	Hookers, 3rd class
226	Yawls and rowing boats
35	Curraghs

	Total, 275 boats

(18) *Fish; whether consumed at home or sold.*

Fish is generally consumed in the district, salmon is sent to the English markets, and a little salt fish is sold at Westport.

(19) *Extent of fish-curing.*

Fish are salted in a very inferior manner; otherwise the people of the district know nothing of fish-curing.

(20) *Piers and harbours, existing and suggested, and how far those existing are adapted to wants of district.*

On the north of Achill there is only one pier which was built by the Board of Work in 1880-81, a proportion of the expenditure being defrayed by the Earl of Cavan. This pier is made almost entirely of solid concrete. It has stood well and is now vested in the Grand Jury of the County. The site selected is unfortunately very much exposed, and the pier affords no shelter in stormy weather. It is therefore not much used by fishing boats.

Another pier has been suggested at Doogort, about four miles west of Lord Cavan's pier. There are a considerable number of families in the locality and the proposed site has been well chosen, having regard to the difficulty of obtaining sheltered places anywhere on the coast. On the south side of the district, piers or slips have been made at Kildavnet, Dooega, and Keel.

The pier at Kildavnet, built many years ago by the Grand Jury, a substantial structure, is still in good repair. A boat-slip (a very useful little work) made last year under the Relief of Distress Act already requires some slight repairs.

The small pier built at Dooega, in 1886, by the Piers and Roads Commission has been washed away. £1,200 was expended by the same Commission at Keel in making a harbour for fishing boats. The place chosen is perhaps the most sheltered on the north side of Achill, and if sufficient funds had been provided the project in all probability would have been successful. The present state of this harbour may be briefly described as follows:- All solid concrete work built on a rocky foundation, has stood the force of many severe storms without the slightest apparent damage. The inner works, which seem to have been made of slight stones and faced with concrete, are now little better than a heap of ruins.

At Dooagh, a village two miles further west, a landing place for currachs was made by cutting away the solid rock. This landing place might be much improved, but it could never be used by large boats.

There are several small piers on the east side of Achill, most of which are useful for landing goods brought from Westport by sailing boats. That at Bunacurry is the most useful, and I hear fish are sometimes landed there. The road leading to this pier is in very bad repair.

(21) *Extent of salmon and freshwater fisheries. Number of men earning their livelihood therefrom.*

There are no freshwater fisheries in the district. There are fifteen bag nets and four drift nets at various points round the coast. Thirty-five men are employed at wages averaging 10s weekly. Seven carts at £1 each per week and two hookers at £4 10s per week each, are also engaged: each hooker carries a crew of three men. Salmon fishing is carried on from April to August, but the bulk of the fish are taken in June and July, and it is during this latter period that the carts and hookers are employed.

(22) *Banks and Loan Funds.*

There are no Banks or Loan Funds in the district.

(23) *Mineral and other resources.*

A copper mine was worked in the Corraun Achill Electoral Division by two companies, both of which, I hear, failed. Iron ore and sulphur are also found there. Soapstone in large quantities and very easily worked can be obtained in the Dooega Electoral Division.

(24) *Relative prevalence of cash or credit dealings, length of credit, interest charged, extent of barter, etc.*

During spring and summer, credit dealings prevail. All debts are expected to be discharged when the migratory labourers return from England and Scotland, 15 per cent. is generally charged for long credit. Should the potato crop be deficient, credit has to be obtained at Christmas or in some cases even earlier.

Barter is carried on extensively in eggs and corn, which are exchanged for tea, sugar, and tobacco. Enquiries lead me to believe that while the people are still deeply indebted to the local shopkeepers, their debts have not materially increased of recent years.

(25) *Estimated cash receipts and expenditure of a family in ordinary circumstances.*

The cash receipts and expenditure of a family in fairly comfortable circumstances (husband, wife, two sons aged 19 and 12, and two daughters aged 17 and 14) are, on an average, as follows:

Receipts				Expenditure			
	£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.
Father's migratory earnings (with clothes)	9	0	0	Rent of holding	1	0	0
Son's do (with clothes)	9	0	0	Grazing for cattle & sheep	1	0	0
Daughter's do (with clothes)	6	0	0	County cess	0	2	6
Sale of eggs (1800)	4	10	0	Clerical charges	0	10	0
Sale of pig (profit)	1	10	0	Meal, 4 bags	3	0	0
Sale of one bullock	3	0	0	Flour, 6 bags	3	12	6
				Groceries, 1/2lb tea & 1 st. Sugar per week	7	10	0
				Tobacco, 8oz per week	5	14	0
				Clothing for those at home (say)	3	0	0
				Household etc	2	10	0
Total	33	0	0		27	19	0

Estimate for a family in poor circumstances (husband, wife, and five children; eldest a boy, 13 years of age):

Receipts				Expenditure			
	£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.
Father's migratory earnings (with clothes)	10	0	0	Rent of holding	1	0	0
Sale of eggs	4		0	Grazing for cattle	0	10	0
Sale of pig	1	10	0	County cess	0	2	6
Sale of one bullock (one sold every two years)	1	10	0	Clerical charges	0	5	0
				Meal and flour	4	4	0
				Groceries	3	15	0
				Tobacco	2	12	0
				Clothes (say)	3	10	0
				Household etc	1	10	0
Total	17	0	0		17	8	6

(26) *Estimated value of home-grown food consumed, and period during which it lasts.*

Estimated value of home-grown food is as follows:

	£	s.	d.
Potatoes, 4 tons at £2 per ton	8	0	0
Corn, 30 cwt, at 5 s. per cwt	7	10	0
Straw, 2 tons, at 30 s. per ton	3	0	0
Total:	18	10	0

(27) *Dietary of people, number of meals daily, and kinds of food throughout the year.*

The dietary of the people consists of three meals daily each person; the custom of taking four meals in some instances (especially during spring work) is now creeping in.

Breakfast:- Tea and flour bread. Very poor people, potatoes and tea.

Dinner – Potatoes and fish or eggs; in many cases tea also.

Supper – Potatoes and milk or eggs.

In summer Indian meal stirabout is substituted for potatoes, and eggs and milk are also then more used.

(28) *Clothing, whether home-made or bought, etc.*

The clothing of the people in this district is principally bought in England and Scotland. Money is also sent home by the migratory workers to purchase wool for flannel and making stockings.

(29) *Dwellings: kind of houses, home-life and customs, etc.*

The houses are nearly all built of stone, though a few sod huts may also be seen. The houses generally contain a kitchen and one room – better class houses having two rooms. The cattle occupy one end of the kitchen, and the family take their meals and some members sleep in the other end. The fowl roost on the rafters. I am told pigs are often kept in the same apartment.

(30) *Character of the people for industry, etc*

In spring, a good deal of work is carried out very energetically to enable the migratory labourers to leave for England and Scotland; but at other periods of the year the people do not exert themselves to improve their holdings, very little work being done in winter.

(31) *Whether any organised effort has been made to develop the resources or improve the condition of the people. If so, by what means.*

A considerable number of families were assisted to emigrate in 1883-84 by the Tuke Fund Committee. Most of these families resided in the north-eastern corner of the Island, and an improvement in the general circumstance of the people in this part of Achill is plainly to be seen. In the remaining portion of the district the number of families leaving was so small that little appreciable effect could be expected.

(32) *Suggestions as to any possible method for improving the condition of the people in the future.*

I see no reason why cottage industries, which flourish in Donegal, should not fare equally well in Achill. An effort might be made next winter to teach the women a better system of knitting and supply them with materials in the same manner as has been so successfully carried out in County Donegal. Skilled instructors would have to be employed, and a Local Committee could, I have no doubt, be easily formed to supervise the necessary details. There are several buildings now vacant which I hear could be obtained at a mere nominal cost for such a purpose.

The extension of the railway system to Achill ought, in addition to the many other benefits which it will confer, largely to assist in the development of fishing – an industry which would, with proper encouragement, afford ample means of subsistence to many families who are now struggling under adverse circumstances. To enable fishing to be thoroughly developed, it will be necessary to provide places of refuge or shelters for boats. The entire coast of Achill is singularly deficient in this respect, and doubtless to this cause must be mainly attributed the neglect of the islanders to make use of this important means of improving their condition.

The following places seem most suitable to me for these refuges or shelters:- on the south, the small harbour at Keel already commenced by the Piers and Roads Commission in 1886; Campport in Dooega Bay, and Achillbeg. On the north shore:- a pier built at Doogort would be very useful. At the same time it is right to mention that the construction of any of these works must necessarily entail a large expenditure of money, but without them I fail to see how fishing can be safely carried on.

– Robert Rutledge-Fair, Inspector
27th April 1892