

Ireland during the Famine

1. *Punch*

The English satirical journal, *Punch*, consistently under-estimated the severity of the crisis in Ireland and depicted the famine as a moral issue. It blamed indolence of the Irish for the continuation of the famine and for 'sponging' on the British taxpayer. Hard work or industry (symbolised by a shovel) at home or emigration were *Punch*'s answers to poverty in Ireland.

In the main, British press coverage of the Famine was coloured by anti-Irish prejudice and political and practical considerations. The general tenor was that the Irish were a backward race and lived on inferior food - the potato; they were ungrateful and disloyal; Ireland was a drain on British resources; and Britain was being flooded with Irish paupers. *Punch*, in particular, along with *The Times* 'reinforced traditional animosities and alienated the sympathies of the British upper and middle classes'.

UNION IS STRENGTH

John Bull: 'Here are a few things to go on with, Brother, and I'll soon put you in a way to earn your own living.'

17 October 1846

Here John Bull (England) presents his Irish 'brother' not only with food but also with a spade to help him 'to earn your own way of living'. *Punch* assumed that self-help was a priority and came to see Irish indolence for the continuing catastrophe.



HEIGHT OF IMPUDENCE

Irishman to John Bull: 'Spare a trifle yer Honour, for a poor Irishman to buy a bit of -- a Blunderbuss with.'

12 December 1846

In this cartoon, published two months after 'Union is Strength', John Bull is accosted by an Irishman who has reverted into a violent stereotype, demanding money for a 'blunderbuss'. Now 'Paddy' is given the ape-like features increasingly common in hostile images of the Irish.



CONSOLATION FOR THE MILLION
THE LOAF AND THE POTATO

Loaf: 'Well, old fellow, I am delighted to see you looking so well. Why they said you had the Aphis Vastator.'

Potato: 'All humbug sir never was better in my life thank Heaven.'

11 September 1847

This caricature shows the potato restored to health and hand-in-hand with cheap bread. It reflected British complacency about the food situation in autumn 1847.



THE ENGLISH LABOURER'S BURDEN
Or, THE IRISH OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN

[See Sinbad the Sailor]
24 February 1849

Loans to combat distress in the west of Ireland were regarded as unacceptable burdens on England's respectable poor.



THE NEW IRISH STILL
SHOWING HOW ALL GOOD THINGS MAY BE
OBTAINED (BY INDUSTRY) OUT OF PEAT

August 1849

The shovel is labelled 'INDUSTRY'. The caricature expresses the British view (delusion?) that only exertion was needed to lift Ireland out of famine.



HERE AND THERE
OR, EMIGRATION A REMEDY

15 July 1848

The cartoon portrays a poor family in Ireland (on the left) and a prosperous family living abroad (on the right). Note the strained inclusion of a shovel among the prosperous family, a symbol of labour.

