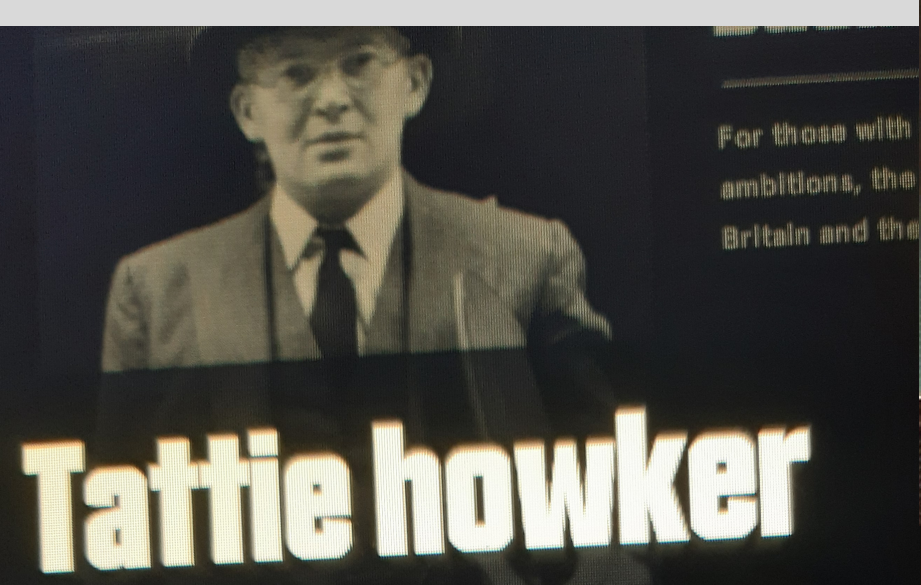


In fact, I have become more convinced each year that this great narrative of dispossession and belonging, which so often had its origins in sorrow and leave-taking, has become, with a certain amount of historic irony, one of the treasures of our society.

Speech by Uachtarán na hÉireann, Mary Robinson, to Joint Sitting of the Houses of the Oireachtas. 2 February 1997



Tattie howker

From the 19th century onwards, hundreds of Irish men and women became 'Tattie howkers' (potato pickers) throughout Scotland. The Irish were the largest group of immigrants to settle here. They initially came as agricultural labourers. Seasonal migration helped pave the way for a more permanent move, generally into urban Scotland.



After all, emigration is not just a chronicle of sorrow and regret. It is also a powerful story of contribution and adaptation.

Hunger, Work, Community

We emigrate because we cannot stay, because we want to go, or a mixture of both. Three elements are strong in the Irish story of emigration: Hunger, Work and Community. Hunger is a powerfully emotional subject in Ireland, where waves of dispossession have pushed people off the land they relied on to feed themselves. When Ireland went through periods of intense poverty, the need to travel to survive and find work was pressing, in particular during the Great Famine of 1845-1849. At other times, it may have simply been that more interesting or better paid opportunities beckoned elsewhere. Even community can push or pull migrants. Many Irish people would travel to particular areas where others from their home town had settled, or women might travel in hope of meeting a husband; but others left under pressure from families, often in disgrace.