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**Stewart and Kincaid, Irish Land Agents in the 1840s**

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## Stewart and Kincaid, Irish land agents in the 1840s\*

by Desmond Norton

### *Abstract*

Drawing on a recently-discovered correspondence archive of the 1840s, this article describes activities of the then most important land agency in Ireland, Messrs Stewart and Kincaid. Several of the firm's clients resided in England. The partners supervised major agricultural improvements. They also implemented programmes of assisted emigration during the great Irish famine. The correspondence yields new insights into economic and social conditions in Ireland during the forties. It undermines popularly-held views of such conditions and suggests need for revision of findings of modern historians.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the author acquired about 30,000 letters written mainly in the 1840s. These pertained to estates throughout Ireland managed by J.R. Stewart and Joseph Kincaid. Their firm, hereafter denoted SK, was then the most important land agency in Ireland. Until the letters became the author's property, they had not been read since the 1840s. Addressed mainly to the firm's Dublin office, they were written by landlords, tenants, local agents, clergymen, civil servants, financiers, etc. The author has been researching them since 1994. It is intended to publish details on individual estates in book form. The title proposed is *Landlords, tenants, famine: business of an Irish land agency in the 1840s*. The first part of the present background article describes the evolution of the Dublin agency over a period of two hundred years. Part II indicates how the firm used family connections, membership of societies and 'influence' to generate business. Subsequent discussion is restricted to the famine decade of the 1840s. The third part examines the firm's administrative structure. Part IV indicates that SK was not only a manager of land. The fifth section outlines aspects of what was happening in the 1840s on some of the estates not considered in detail in the book under preparation. The final section provides a summary of overall conclusions from the larger project from which the present article is drawn.

The evolution of the land agency known from the 1830s to the 1880s as Stewart and Kincaid (SK) can be traced from Dublin directories over a period of two centuries. Those of the late eighteenth century indicate that Henry Stewart was called to the Bar in 1773. That for 1788 describes him as 'army agent'<sup>1</sup>. In June 1788 Edward Pakenham, second Baron Longford, wrote to the second Viscount Palmerston recommending his 'friend' Henry Stewart 'as a proper person to be employ'd as an agent'. Although the SK archive contains papers referring to rents on the Powerscourt estates in the west of Ireland from 1746 onwards, the first to mention Henry Stewart as Dublin agent for those lands is dated 1791<sup>2</sup>.

Stewart held the accounts of the Palmerston estates in Ireland (in both Sligo in the northwest and in Dublin) from circa 1790 onwards<sup>3</sup>. From 1799, the business was located at 6 Leinster St, Dublin. Until 1808 the listing in directories was 'Henry Stewart, Agent'. The directory for 1809 listed the firm as 'Stewart and Swan, Agents'<sup>4</sup>. Stewart's business partner was then G.C. Swan, a barrister. Stewart had entered partnership with him in 1805, when he wrote to the third Viscount Palmerston, then a student at Cambridge, that 'we are desirous of extending our business'<sup>5</sup>. Directories for 1809 to 1829 indicate that Swan was also treasurer to the Irish Post Office, which was then rife with abuse<sup>6</sup>. Swan died in 1829<sup>7</sup>.

Joseph Kincaid commenced employment at 6 Leinster St circa 1827, and in 1829 the name of the firm was changed to Stewart and Kincaid<sup>8</sup>. The Dublin directory for 1831 was the first to list the firm as '[Henry] Stewart and [Joseph] Kincaide'; also in the same year, the listing was changed from 'Agents' to 'Land Agents'. Until the 1880s, directories referred to 'Stewart [or Stewarts] and Kincaid'. Henry Stewart died in 1840. By the early 1840s the firm involved his son J.R. Stewart who had been born in 1805, and Joseph Kincaid.

The directory for 1883 lists 'Stewarts and Kincaid, Land Agents'<sup>9</sup>. However, the partner named Kincaid (Joseph's son James Stewart Kincaid) had left the firm at the end of 1882 to set up a rival business next door<sup>10</sup>. The directory for 1885 lists him as land agent at 7 Leinster St. His firm subsequently evolved into Kincaid and Matthews, which closed down in 1919.

Following the departure of J.S. Kincaid from the SK partnership, the firm at 6 Leinster St was known as J.R. Stewart & Sons, land agents. It remained at the same address until circa 1968. However, the directory for 1969 lists the offices of the Pakenham Estate at 6 Leinster St, and J.R. Stewart & Son elsewhere in Dublin. The location of the Pakenham offices in Leinster St is interesting: the Pakenhams had been important clients of SK in

the 1840s and the J.R. Stewart of that era was related to them by blood. Directories continued to list J.R. Stewart & Son, land agents, until 1984; however, the omission of any listing for the firm in *Thom's Directory* for 1986 indicates that it had ceased operations.

The foregoing has focused on the evolution of the firm in which Stewarts were principal partners for about 200 years. Much of the firm's correspondence of the 1840s refers to the potato crop. Some observations on the importance of that vegetable in early nineteenth century Ireland are appropriate.

The Irish peasant became more dependent on the potato in the early 1800s. A letter to London, written on HMS Sapphs, gives details of a voyage along the west coast in 1821. It indicates that by the early 1820s it was not inappropriate to refer to the southwest of Ireland as 'the land of the potatoes'<sup>11</sup>. It informed: 'We are running along the Land of the Potatoes .... We arrived at a small harbour three miles from Dingle .... I went on shore and was much surprised to see the lower orders ... in ... wretched condition, both sexes almost in a state of Nudity, more to be seen issuing from an aperture in a mud cabin that served ... for a chimney and a door'.

The great famine of the late 1840s was due to failures of the potato, upon which most of the population survived. In 1845 the country-wide failure was only partial. In 1846 it was complete. Production of edible potatoes in the autumn of 1847 was not much below that of years before the great famine. The potato partially failed in 1848. But 1845 and 1846 were not the first years in which the potato generally failed in Ireland<sup>12</sup>. There were in fact several cases of localised failure in the first half of the 1840s. Thus, it was presumably following a poor potato harvest in 1841 that Charles Gayer, a Church of Ireland clergyman at Dingle, wrote to SK in March 1842 confirming receipt of a gift of £50 [probably about £5,000 in present purchasing power] from Miss Coleman, one of SK's clients. Gayer again wrote to SK in May 1842, referring to 'the receipt of your favor containing nineteen pounds ten shillings from Miss Jane Coleman .... If you can collect anything for our Starving people pray do .... The people are really dying from want of food'. Finally, in August 1842 Gayer wrote to Kincaid 'to acknowledge the safe arrival of your note with the £20 from Miss Coleman .... The [localized] famine is nearly over'. Other examples of localized failures of the potato in the early 1840s could be cited from the SK correspondence.

## II

In the late 1840s Priscella Nugent resided in France and in England. Poor performance by her agent in Ireland induced her to seek a replacement. In September 1847 a clergyman congratulated her 'on the selection you have made .... Stewart & Kincaid is ... of ... the highest character & I anticipate for you great satisfaction in their management of y'r affairs'.

Some of SK's accounts originated from the firm's reputation. Others were obtained through family connections. Friendship and marriage links with the Pakenham family had far-reaching effects. In 1793 Henry Stewart married a daughter of his friend Lord Longford, whose family name was Pakenham. Such links may have been relevant to the fact that Henry Stewart was MP for the Borough of Longford from 1784 to 1799, which must have promoted his agency activities. It was presumably the same links which led to assignment of the Longford account to the firm which, in the 1840s, was known as Stewart and Kincaid. James Hamilton, an important landowner in Donegal in the northwest, also married a daughter of the same Lord Longford. In 1821 Hamilton's eldest son John, who through the Pakenham link was a cousin to J.R. Stewart, inherited about 20,000 acres in Donegal. The firm of Stewart and Swan was agent to Hamilton in the 1820s<sup>13</sup>. SK represented him in the 1840s and beyond. In the early 1840s Thomas, another of Henry Stewart's sons, was friendly with Mrs Fitzgerald of Whitegate House in Co Cork, who owned lands in Co Limerick in the southwest. It seems that this brought to SK the Mount Blakeney, Co Limerick, agency. J.R. Stewart married a daughter of R.B. Warren in 1835. A few years later SK obtained the account of Warren's estate in Co Limerick. Furthermore, it seems that a sister of Joseph Kincaid married a Church of Ireland clergyman named Edward Batty, who was a brother of the owner of the Batty estate in Co Westmeath in the midlands, and that it was this link which enabled SK to acquire the Batty account.

Kincaid had great influence in the commercial life of Ireland. He was a director of the Dublin and Kingstown Railway which operated Ireland's first passenger line opened in 1834. His presence on the board of directors meant that he could use influence to secure favours. For example, in 1841 Robert Corbet, of the Royal Exchange Insurance Office in Dublin, wrote to him 'recommending the bearer ... to be appointed as one of the servants or attendants on your railway'. Similarly, in 1843 John Vincent, a solicitor in Dublin and brother of SK's agent in Co Limerick, sent a note to Kincaid stating that 'the bearer ... is ... out of employment .... Use your influence to get him employed on the Railway'. Note that if Kincaid did agree to these requests, he was probably acting in SK's own interests: his co-operation may have brought business to SK.

A letter of June 1842 to Kincaid provides curious details. The

writer, a widow named Smith at Harold's Cross near Dublin City, explained that her father-in-law had arrived from Limerick (about 120 miles away) seeking financial aid, which she could not provide. She requested of Kincaid 'as chair man, & through your Interest with the Kingstown & Dublin railway company that you would get him the smallest relief to help him to return Home to Limerick, as he is not able to Walk it Back, as he walked coming up to Dublin'.

It was not only with the Dublin and Kingstown Railway that Kincaid swayed influence. For example, in September 1842 Henry Disney of Portobello in Dublin wrote to him stating that 'as it was by your means I obtained my present situation, I am induced to hope you will again grant me your influence with the Directors of the Grand Canal Co. in order that I may be promoted to the rank of full Boatman'.

Kincaid was a director of the Midland Great Western Railway of Ireland, incorporated in 1845 to connect Dublin to the midlands. He was asked to use his influence to secure appointments with this company also. For example, in 1846 a landlord named Harman in the midlands wrote to him seeking an appointment with that company for 'a Mr Evans'. Harman pointed out that 'Evans is very well connected'. In 1848 W. Woods of the Board of Works wrote to Kincaid on behalf of another job-seeker: 'The Bearer ... is a candidate for the Office of Station Keeper on the Midland Gr Western Railway. Any assistance you can render him in obtaining the appointment I shall esteem a personal favour'. Kincaid himself sought favours at the Board of Works during the famine years. (In the 1840s the Board of Works was responsible for public sector schemes giving employment, and for administration of loans to landlords for works of improvement.)

SK had influence within the Post Office administration. At the time of her death in 1846, Catherine Ellis was post mistress at Philipstown in the midlands. In September 1846 her daughter Martha wrote to SK that her mother was about to be buried. Martha begged SK to 'use your interest to have the Post Office continued to her children'. Three days later Robert Cornwall, who seems to have been a landlord, wrote to SK: 'I ... apply to you on behalf of a young man named Ellis, at present seeking the situation of Postmaster in ... Philipstown .... If you can in any way influence the powers that be with respect to the situation ... you will never ... regret it'. A listing prepared in 1849 indicates that Thomas Ellis, who was a tenant on the local Ponsonby estate which was managed by SK, was then the postmaster at Philipstown<sup>14</sup>.

It was above all during the famine that SK was asked to use influence to secure jobs. In 1846 the firm received many requests to use influence at the Board of Works in order to obtain employment on public works. On a few occasions SK were

asked to provide employment directly. Thus, in 1843 a barrister named Brooke wrote to Stewart: 'Is there any likelihood of an opening in your office for a ... good boy of 16 ...? He is a son of Edward Willson, who was Assistant Secretary to the Bible Society ... who left a ... family in great want'. Edward Wingfield, whose estates were managed by SK, sought a similar favour. In 1848 he requested of SK: 'You will know what a sincere regard I had for my lost ... friend Robert Sandys & having been applied to get a situation for his son Henry in your House [ie. firm] ... I do not hesitate at once to ask this favor'. Robert Sandys had acted on behalf of the Viscounts Powerscourt in the Enniskerry district of Co Wicklow near Dublin. SK managed some of the Powerscourt finances. The family name of the Powerscourts was Wingfield. The amount of business which the firm obtained through the Wingfield family suggests that it was in SK's interests to accede to Edward Wingfield's request.

Kincaid was a member of many societies. Some of them were charitable; others sought to promote agricultural knowledge. Indirectly, links with several of these bodies were good for business at Leinster St; however, it is hard to see how SK could have made commercial gains through links with some of the organisations with which Kincaid was connected.

In 1841 the owner of a coach factory in Dublin sent Kincaid money for the 'Special Coal Fund'. He wrote that he 'considers Mr Kincaid and the other Gentlemen composing the committee of the "Special Coal Fund" are entitled to the thanks of the public ... for their exertions in establishing so laudable ... an institution which has relieved such a large number of destitute individuals'. Another letter containing money, to Kincaid in 1843, indicated that Kincaid was treasurer of the Fund. The Nourishment and Clothing Society, of which Kincaid was a committee member, was similar. In 1842 it was stated that its objective was 'to relieve the wants of the Poor .... The number of families relieved last winter ... was 5,116. The food dispensed was ... 920 quartern loaves, 7,301 quarts of soup, 21 tons of potatoes, 20 cwt of oatmeal .... Also various articles of clothing, 18 tons of coal, and 202 bundles of straw'<sup>15</sup>. There is no presumption that Kincaid's associations with the aforementioned charities brought business to SK: they probably reflected genuine concern for humanity.

Although the SK correspondence suggests that neither Kincaid nor Stewart had strong religious zeal, both were associated with bodies which sought to promote Protestantism, the Established Church in particular. Kincaid was a committee member of the Hibernian District of the Church Missionary Society. Viscount Lorton, one of SK's clients, was president of this society, while two other SK clients, the Earl of Erne and Viscount De Vesci, were vice-presidents<sup>16</sup>.



Kincaid was auditor to the Church Education Society for several years in the 1840s. In 1846 its objectives were stated to be: 'To assist schools ... for ... instruction in the Holy Scriptures, in addition to an improved system of secular education ... under the tuition of Teachers who are members of the United Church of England and Ireland'<sup>17</sup>. The Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor (known as the Kildare Place Society) was more sectarian. According to a description of 1846, 'this Society was instituted ... for ... promoting the Scriptural and United Education of the Poor of Ireland, and is now entirely dependent for support on the benevolence of the Christian public of the United Kingdom'<sup>18</sup>. However, some decades later T. O'Rorke wrote: 'The Kildare Place Society, instituted in 1811 for the purpose of "promoting the education of the poor of Ireland" ... developed through time a passion for tampering with the faith of Catholics, and lost, in consequence, its parliamentary grants'<sup>19</sup>. J.R. Stewart was a committee member of that society.

Why Kincaid and Stewart were associated with the latter two bodies is a matter for conjecture. Considerations of business were probably of relevance. Some of the most important landowners in the country (including the Earl of Erne and Viscount Lorton) were vice-presidents of the Church Education Society. A similar remark applies in the case of the Kildare Place Society, which also included two SK clients (Viscounts De Vesce and Lorton) among its vice-presidents; furthermore, SK's client Sergeant Warren was a member of the committee of the same society<sup>20</sup>.

A Dublin directory of 1842 indicates that Stewart was a committee member of the Hibernian Bible Society, which sought 'to encourage a wider circulation of the Holy Scriptures .... Funds are ... employed ... in making grants of the Scriptures to necessitous districts, prisons, &c. .... From the commencement in 1806 ... there had been issued from the Depository, 391,767 Bibles'. The Earl of Roden, another of SK's clients, was the society's president, while Lorton and De Vesce were vice-presidents. The brewer Arthur Guinness, with whom SK sometimes engaged in financial intermediation (borrowing or lending funds on behalf of third parties) was also listed as a vice-president.

Stewart provided service to the Meath Street Savings Bank in Dublin, which encouraged thrift among the poor. It had two branch offices, and 'at each Office deposits are received from one shilling upwards, which may yearly amount to £30, until the whole shall amount to £150, which is the highest the law allows'<sup>21</sup>. The maximum on individual deposits reflected a view that people whose liquid assets exceeded that sum were not poor. A letter of 1841 from the cashier of the bank informed Stewart that it was his 'turn to attend as Manager' at Abbey St on 'Thursday morn'g the 4<sup>th</sup> Feby at Nine O'ck'. The trustees of the bank included Arthur Guinness and other leading businessmen.

Involvement of the SK partners in benevolent institutions may explain why some Dubliners, who seem to have had no links with SK's clients, applied to SK for assistance. The appeal from the widow Smith of Harold's Cross has been noted. Other examples could be cited from the SK correspondence.

Kincaid also sought improvements in farming. Apart from being a member of the Agricultural and Husbandry Committee of the Royal Dublin Society, he was active in the Royal Agricultural Improvement Society. Letters from the latter's secretary indicate that Kincaid was expected to assign a significant amount of time in service to the society, the objectives of which included 'improvement of Husbandry among the Farming Classes, holding under twenty-five acres Irish' and 'distribution of ... knowledge ... upon Agricultural ... subjects'<sup>22</sup>. A genuine desire to develop agriculture was probably one of Kincaid's motives in contributing to the society. But there were also issues of business. A list of the members included several important landowners. A glance at this list indicates that a rival land agent, John Ross Mahon, was active in the society.

The details outlined above suggest, although they were in part motivated by concern for fellow humans, that both Stewart and Kincaid participated in several bodies in order to attract business. They had contact with many of the most important people in the administrative and commercial life of Ireland, who could be helpful in SK's business affairs. But SK did not merely want clients: it wanted its dealings to be profitable. In SK's view, the personality of clients was not important. This practical approach is revealed in remarks by Stewart in regard to Viscount Frankfort, who he described as in some respects 'insane'. Thus, in 1841 Stewart wrote to Kincaid: 'You were quite right to accept Lord Frankfort [as a client]. I would far rather be agent to a Particular man or even an odd man than a distressed one'. Especially in the late years of the famine when much of the land under the firm's management lay idle, SK's attitude towards tenants was similar: conacre (the letting of land for the season until harvest) and other short-term agreements aside, SK did not merely want tenants; rather, the firm sought tenants who had good prospects of being viable over many years.

On matters of estate management, SK looked to the long term rather than the immediate future. Consistent with maximization of the firm's expected present value, SK regarded its day-to-day decision-making as part of a strategy over a lengthy horizon. Investment of time in nurture of personal connections and in enhancing the reputation of its partners for honest dealing, as well as in its selectivity in accepting new agencies and tenants, help explain why the firm perpetuated its operations until late in the twentieth century. By then (following the Land Acts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) most

of the land of Ireland belonged to descendants of former tenants and the days of traditional land agencies had ended.

A few further remarks on religion and business are appropriate. All or most of the religious organisations to which Stewart and Kincaid were attached promoted the Established Church. This did not reflect any obvious bigotry, or grudges against Catholics, by the partners in SK. Rather, it reflected the fact that most of the largest landowners in Ireland belonged to the Established Church.

### III

The manner in which SK managed estates was broadly as follows:

The firm acted under contract to clients, and these contracts usually involved the landlord giving Powers of Attorney to SK. In some cases SK operated under detailed instructions from the landlord; in others the firm had a great deal of discretion.

The SK correspondence contains only one reference to management fees. The context was that of a potential client who owned land producing an annual income of about £900. In this regard Stewart wrote to Kincaid in 1848: 'He wishes to know whether ... we would undertake the Agency at the Usual 5 pr. Ct.'. It seems that the structure of fees remained substantively unchanged for many years: a document in the Palmerston archive at Southampton, headed 'Mr [Henry] Stewarts Terms of Transacting Agency Business 1791'<sup>23</sup>, indicates that Stewart proposed to charge 5 percent on receipt of rent, 6 percent on all loans and further charges on other services. Thus, SK usually took 5 percent of rental income. But in addition to this the landlord paid the firm for its outlays on improvements, on hiring agricultural advisers, etc.

The 1840s were years of improvement on most of the estates managed by SK. In some cases detailed directions came from the landlord and SK were merely responsible for implementation. However, the SK correspondence clearly indicates that the firm's partners favoured rationalisation in the structure of land tenure in Ireland, improvements in husbandry and projects such as drainage. Commitment to spend monies on improvements was probably stipulated in SK's contracts with clients. This may have reflected humane feelings on the part of SK towards the tenantry; to a greater extent, however, it probably reflected a long-term view on estate management.

SK appointed local agents for collection of rents and for supervision of improvements. In some cases a local agent received a fixed annual salary; in at least one instance his remuneration was a specific percentage of the rent which he collected. The receipts of local agents were usually remitted to SK in Dublin through the post in the form of cash, bill of exchange (akin to a post-dated cheque) or letter of credit (a mechanism for transfer from one bank account to another). Use of financial instruments in payment of rent was the norm on the SK client estates. Thus, the financial system was more sophisticated than has often been assumed by writers in the twentieth century. When cash was sent through the post, it was as half notes. This was to secure against loss or theft: the local agent would initially send first halves; then, following acknowledgement of receipt at Leinster St, the local agent would send second halves. Hence, transfer of rents to Dublin involved

intensive use of the newly-reformed postal system.

The rent-collection role of local agents notwithstanding, it seems that the bulk of rent was received on estates by Kincaid, J.R. Stewart, or Stewart Maxwell who appears to have been 'third in command' at Leinster St. The usual practice was for one of them to visit each estate twice annually. The local agent was instructed to 'notice' the tenants to have their rents ready by a certain date, and to pay on that date at a specific location. Kincaid, Stewart or Maxwell would be present at that date to receive the rents. Maxwell once referred to such a visit as a 'raid'. The 'raids' were sequential: they involved itineraries for visiting several estates in a given tour. They required careful planning, which imposed strict demands on the postal and transportation systems. Thus, Kincaid might depart from Dublin early in the morning; collect rents at specific places and at specified times in, say, the midlands and then visit specified locations at appointed times in the northwest. His return journey to Dublin might involve another presence on an estate which he had already visited some days earlier, or it might involve visits to other estates. When on such tours, the person from Leinster St usually slept at the landlord's residence, at a lodge owned by the landlord, at the residence of a local agent if he were a man of comfort, or at an inn.

Smooth implementation of the rent-gathering itineraries presumed an efficient transportation system. Given that passenger railways were not yet in operation outside the Dublin and Belfast districts in the early 1840s, such travel was occasionally by canal, but more generally by coach. Following the development of the mail coach system in Ireland by Anderson and others from 1789 onwards<sup>24</sup>, and the expansion of Bianconi's passenger and mail-delivery network in the decades immediately before the famine, Ireland's internal transport system was well suited to SK's needs. Although one letter from Maxwell refers to delay due to the canal being frozen, the correspondence contains no references to inability to get from A to B due to deficiencies in transport.

Most of the SK letters which refer to internal transport are relaxed in mood. Thus, on 26 November 1843 (a Sunday) Kincaid wrote to Stewart from Longford town in the midlands:

I left Clonteam [the lodge of the Marquess of Westmeath on the western (Roscommon) side of the River Shannon] yesterday morn'g for Strokestown & there met Ja's Nolan [SK agent in Co Roscommon] who ... assisted me in the Collection of Lord Westmeaths Rents. We were busy till half past 6. We then dined & at 7 I started by Bianconi for Longford .... During the two hours I was on the Road ... the Car was so Comfortable & the air so mild that I did not feel it .... I will go tomorrow Morn'g by Bianconi to Drumsna [on the eastern bank of

the Shannon, opposite Clontem] & remain with his Lordship at Clontem tomorrow [Monday] Night after which I go over to the Kilglass property [south of Clontem]. On Tuesday I hope to get into Longford in good time that Ev'g & perhaps go up to Dublin that Night by the Mail ... I will not leave Clontem on Tuesday Morning till after post hour so that if you write on Monday you may address me there.

Passenger transport aside, this letter reveals complete confidence in the postal system.

A letter from Maxwell in the northwest to Kincaid in Dublin, 11 October 1845 (a Saturday), provides further details on transport links:

I ... send you ... my R/A [rent account] together with sundry Bills [promissory notes and/or bills of exchange] amounting to £458-10-10 .... Your instructions regarding the collecting at Scurmore & [the Wingfield estate in west Sligo] are very clear and I shall attend to them and shall hope to see you on Saturday. Your best way there [from Dublin] will be by Mail [Coach] and Mail car .... Go about 8 miles p[er] Coach beyond Boyle where you will find a Mail car on the Road side which will take you to Tubbercurry [in Sligo].

SK managed the Stratford estates on both sides of the Shannon estuary - in west Limerick and a few miles to the north of Ennistimon in Clare. Until recent years (when a car ferry across the estuary was initiated) travel by automobile between these districts took many hours. With rent collection in mind, Stewart proposed to visit the two estates in 1845. In this context Arthur Vincent, SK agent in Co Limerick, informed him on 31 May: 'As to crossing [the Shannon estuary] from Foynes [close to Stratford's Limerick estate] to Clare it can easily be accomplished ... by taking boat at Foynes at ½ past 6 o'clock in the morning so as to meet the day Car at Kildysart by 8 o'clock at which hour it regularly starts for Ennis and arrives in time to proceed by the Miltown Mail Car to Ennistymon'.

Apart from collecting rents, SK were expected to respond to those tenants who were paying no rent. It might be thought that ejectment was the norm in such circumstances. This, however, was not the case: ejectment was a measure of last resort on the estates managed by SK. Besides, neither the landlord nor his agents could quickly get rid of tenants simply because they were in arrears. It is true that at any time in the 1840s ejectment decrees were outstanding, but many of them were not executed. Ejectment was an expensive and time-consuming process which normally suited neither landlord nor tenant. Undertenants and

cottiers aside, usually the formal procedure was as follows: First, a notice to quit had to be served. If the tenant did not settle arrears over some months which followed, the landlord or his agents could then arrange for a summons to be issued against the tenant. After further delays and legal expenses incurred by the landlord, the parties would go to Court, the case would be heard and an ejectment decree might be issued. But this was not the end of the matter: if a decree was obtained, it next had to be executed, as confirmed by a legal document called a Habere.

Service of a notice to quit, or (months later) issue of an ejectment decree, might induce defaulting tenants to settle. In many cases SK served notices to quit, or subsequently obtained ejectment decrees, against a targeted group of tenants hoping that the 'demonstration effect' of such measures would induce payment from others in arrears. For example, in October 1848 Stewart wrote to Kincaid that he did not like 'the wholesale noticing to Quit unless we can really execute some of the proceedings already taken to show an example'.

In the 1840s, when SK sought to get rid of a tenant who was seriously in arrears, it usually sought 'voluntary' surrender of land rather than opting for formal legal procedures. This saved SK time and money and averted bad publicity. Tenants in difficulties who 'voluntarily' surrendered their holdings usually received compensation, for example, part or the whole of their families' fares to America, and sometimes a contribution for clothing. Of course such tenants knew that if they did not agree to surrender, then the landlord could probably get rid of them in time through the Courts and execution of a decree; furthermore, because in such cases the landlord would have incurred trouble and legal costs, such tenants who refused to surrender could not expect to receive much financial compensation if they were ultimately forced to leave an estate. Thus, 'voluntary' surrender rather than the route toward an ejectment decree was an alternative which could be deemed to have been simultaneously in the interests of both landlord and tenant. This observation must be qualified by noting the analogy that agreement to do something when one has a gun to one's head is hardly voluntary in any accepted sense of the word. Nevertheless, the SK correspondence indicates that there were many examples in which the initiative to surrender land and seek compensation came entirely or mainly from the tenant.

Although rent collection was SK's primary function, the firm was also involved in other aspects of estate management. Programmes of 'squaring the land' (rationalisation in the structure of holdings), drainage, sub-soiling and road-building were among the most important of these tasks. They involved hire of surveyors and agriculturalists. SK had links with Templemoyle Agricultural Seminary in Co Derry and the firm seems to have assisted in arranging enrolment of some of the sons of tenants at that

college. SK's agriculturalists, who were paid from £50 to £60 a year<sup>25</sup> each, did not merely supervise infrastructural projects; they sought to induce tenants to improve their husbandry. They usually urged them to grow clover - in order to improve the nitrogen content of the soil - and to plant turnips instead of potatoes. The correspondence includes many letters from agriculturalists requesting SK to arrange for supply of seed, fertiliser, and equipment such as turnip-sowing barrows.

The firm's management was correspondence-intensive. Historians have pointed to advances in transport in facilitating economic development in Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; however, they have tended to overlook the role of the postal system. The following observations are important in this context.

First, there was the development of the mail coach system from 1789 onwards: 'In the year 1801, there were but four mail-coaches in Ireland .... By the 1830s ... there were ... forty coaches leaving Dublin every day'<sup>26</sup>.

Second, there was the development of the so-called cross routes for the mail. In the early 1800s letters written in Ireland for delivery in Ireland usually passed through the General Post Office in Dublin. Bianconi first carried mail in 1815. The subsequent expansion of his passenger network led to the development of cross routes of postage, by which the sending of mail to Dublin for delivery in the provinces could be avoided.

Third, there was the cost, payable to a State monopoly (the Post Office), of having letters delivered. The two sets of developments mentioned above did not reduce the cost to business of postal communication within Ireland; rather, the opposite applied in the early nineteenth century. Irish postal rates were in Irish pence based on distances travelled in Irish miles<sup>27</sup>. (Until 1826, 13 Irish pence equalled 12 British. The Irish mile equalled approximately 1 1/4 English miles.) In 1796 a single-sheet letter travelling over 80 miles within Ireland cost 6 pence, but in 1811 it cost 8 pence. The year 1814 brought major change under which the charge for a single sheet was calculated by the distance between post towns instead of adding the charges to and from Dublin. Under the new scheme, a single sheet cost 9 pence for 65 to 95 miles, rising to 15 pence for over 300 miles within Ireland. A letter of three sheets travelling over 300 miles within Ireland cost 45 pence. This was about as much as it would have cost to hire a labourer for a week; however, given the State's monopoly in the mails, it would have been illegal to send such a person to deliver the letter. Subject to minor modifications, the revisions of 1814 applied until 1839.

Postal reform in 1839-40 was extensive. The uniform penny post began in January 1840, when half an ounce prepaid to anywhere



within the United Kingdom now cost a penny. Payment by the recipient had previously been the norm.

SK sent and/or received hundreds of letters each week in the 1840s. If the postal rates of the 1830s had then applied, and if the volume of mail to and from the firm had been the same as it actually was in the 1840s, then SK's postal charges in the 1840s would have been equivalent to the cost of full-time employment of several unskilled workers. SK's business greatly expanded in the 1840s. The postal reforms of 1839-40 probably influenced this expansion. The cheaper postage also facilitated efficiency in management of already existing agencies. Thus, the cheapening of information technology (through reform of the postal system) was probably as important as recent advances in transport in explaining the growth of SK's business in the 1840s. However, long-term forces were also relevant. The few decades after the Napoleonic Wars saw the emergence of several land agency businesses. As Donnelly has reported: 'During the eighteenth century, the most common method of managing large estates in Ireland was to split them into considerable tracts of from 100 to 1,000 acres or more, and then to give them to middlemen on long leases'. But 'the two decades before the famine were marked by the expiration of a great number of old leases held by middlemen' and progressively more landlords replaced the middleman system of management (or mis-management) by employing professional land agents to administer their estates<sup>28</sup>.

#### IV

The firm of SK was not only a manager of land. It borrowed and lent money and acted as a financial intermediary. In 1844 SK may have arranged a loan from the Dublin brewers Guinness to a firm in England: in May a London solicitor inquired of Kincaid whether 'Guinness will lend the £13,000 [old] Irish [currency] ... at 4 per C.'. On at least one occasion Guinness borrowed from SK; on another occasion the borrowing was in the reverse direction. Thus, on 19 October 1846 Guinness wrote to SK that 'on a former occasion we had the mutual advantage in your having some money for us. Now we write to say, that we could let you have 5 or 6000 for 3 or 4 months'. SK responded immediately: on 21 October, Guinness informed SK that the brewers 'can let you have £2000 ... say 4 p. c. for 4 mo'.

The SK correspondence contains several references to efforts to arrange loans for clients. Among them was the Earl of Howth, who seems to have been in financial difficulties throughout the 1840s. Another client for whom SK tried to arrange large loans was the Roscommon landlord Daniel Ferrall, who was in endless financial difficulties throughout the 1840s. SK also granted some small loans to Ferrall from its own resources. In one case the firm was asked to lend to a client's son. Thus, at a time when SK's own resources must have been severely stretched due to dearth of rental incomes, in August 1848 Lord Lorton wrote to SK requesting a loan of £1,000 for his son.

In 1847-8 SK applied to the Board of Works for many loans under the Landed Property Improvement Act. Almost every important landlord for whom SK managed affairs obtained one or more of such loans. This suggests, with long-term considerations (as well as short-term employment-creation) in mind, that SK urged its clients to seek these loans.

Stewart's cousin John Hamilton borrowed probably more under the Landed Property Improvement Act than any other proprietor among SK's clients. The SK files for 1848 record loans of about £12,000 - probably about £1 million in present purchasing power - for improvements on his Donegal estate<sup>29</sup>.

SK arranged insurances for several of its clients. For example, the correspondence contains letters on these topics pertaining to Lords Howth, Lorton and Powerscourt. In one case, a client could not complete an application form for life insurance because he could not remember his birth date. Sending the form to SK, he requested SK to fill in the blank on this point. However, on some occasions SK assisted on matters much more personal: SK tried to manage the consequences of the sexual activities of one client, and those of excess alcohol consumption by another.

In a few cases SK assisted in transfer of funds between America

and Ireland. One of the letters on such transfers, written in October 1846 by a person named James Ward, was addressed to 'Stuwards and Kincade ... Bankers'. Ward wrote another letter to SK ten days later: 'I received a letter from my Brother Francis Ward dated 28<sup>th</sup> of September stating that he paid the honorable Mr Packingham [Sir Richard Pakenham, Envoy Extraordinary to the US<sup>30</sup>] British Council ... at Washington Sity DC ... £20-12-10 to be paid to James Ward of Ardaghey Parrish .... Send the letter of Credit to Mr Sleat in Company provential Banke monaghan for James Ward'. Francis Ward had paid the money to Pakenham, who sent a bank draft for the same sum to SK. SK were being asked to use a letter of credit to transfer the money to William Slate, manager of the Provincial Bank in Monaghan town<sup>31</sup>, in favour of James Ward, brother of Francis in the US. Note that the Wards thought that SK were bankers. The reason why Francis had paid the money to Pakenham was presumably that he was aware that Richard was a family relative of J.R. Stewart: Stewart was a grandson of the second Earl of Longford, and Richard Pakenham was a cousin of that earl<sup>32</sup>.

Before the famine, SK assisted in emigration to America of several tenants from estates under the firm's management. This was on a small scale in relative terms (compared to what was soon to come). The SK correspondence contains few hints about how individual emigrants fared in America. It does reveal sad details on the fate of one emigrant, Richard Sherlock (brother of the owner of an estate near Dublin managed by SK). In the years before the famine, emigrants to America rarely returned to Ireland. Sherlock did visit Ireland, from Canada, in 1840, but the correspondence records this event only in passing. However, a letter from a young man who emigrated circa 1840 from Co Westmeath outlines some of his experiences during a visit to Ireland, and indicates some of his intentions for the future. The letter was sent from Mullingar near the end of 1843 by Christopher Cavanagh, and the cover was addressed to himself at Brooklyn, New York. But the enclosure was to his 'Beloved Ellen', as follows:

I am now in the midst of my family, with the green fields around me .... I write this moment from the window of my room wide open inhaling the aromatic fragrance of the green fields .... Neither the change of clime, nor the distance of space has caused the slightest alteration ... in me since I left you in the land I love .... It is my intention to be out [to America] early [in 1844]. I cannot say what I shall be able to do till I land .... My Mother ... has my sisters ... making linen shirts and knitting worsted socks of her own spinning for me .... They did not know of my engagements in America .... I have told them of the faithful one who resides there .... My occupation since I landed has been visiting my friends

.... A tea party at one friend's house tonight, and a dancing party at another's tomorrow night. A ride through the country on one day, and a hare hunt on another.

This author knows nothing more of young Cavanagh. The letter indicates that he came from a comfortable family in the Mullingar district, but Slater's *Directory* of 1846 mentions no Cavanagh under its listings for Mullingar. The letter indicates that he came from outside the town. In the 1840s SK was agent on the lands of Edward Pakenham, Earl of Longford, to the north and east of Mullingar. It is conceivable that Cavanagh spent his youth on those lands. However, his family was better off than most of the emigrants from Pakenham properties during the great famine.

During the famine, SK organised several programmes of emigration. The partners felt that such schemes should have been implemented by government. Thus, in July 1847 Stewart wrote to Kincaid: 'I see Lord John [Russell, prime minister] will do little or nothing for Emigration & with out-door relief Mullaghmore Estate [lands in Co Sligo owned by the third Viscount Palmerston, future prime minister] will be a trying property' (in terms of the implications of outdoor relief for taxation of local property). In September he informed Kincaid that he intended 'to bring some cases before the Boards of Guardians [who were responsible for local administration of the Poor Law] .... It would cost less to pay 1/3rd of a passage [to America] say 30/- than keep a pauper for a year in the Country .... We might bring the matter before Government'. However, on the matter of organised programmes of emigration, the government remained virtually passive.

The foregoing has reviewed some aspects of SK's role as manager of client affairs. However, tenants sometimes asked SK to intervene in settlement of family disputes or in quarrels with neighbours. Such requests reflect the fact that the tenantry regarded Stewart and Kincaid as paternal figures.

Because SK dealt in substantial sums of money, it is not surprising that the SK correspondence contains allegations of mis-use of funds by employees. A few of these claims were directed against local agents: in some cases they may have reflected grudges. However, the correspondence contains references to embezzlement at Leinster St. Thus, on 5 November 1841 Margaret Ormsby wrote to SK that she 'need scarcely mention with what sorrow I heard of the cause of my son Charles having left your office .... I hope to be able to discharge his debt to you, as I am about to receive the money for which I have sold my place .... You proposed to take the £541 by degrees .... I would venture to ask if any part of the sum could be rescinded on my settling the account at once'. Mrs Ormsby again wrote to SK on 18 November: 'I ... feel obliged by ... your offered reduction of £100-0-0. I am ... surprised to find the sum in which my Son

Charles is deficient amounts to £577-7-5 .... I hope in a few days to settle'. The sum for which Charles was 'deficient' was huge. By his mother and brothers becoming the real victims, it seems that he avoided prison.

*Landlords, tenants, famine* will provide a detailed examination of estates managed in the 1840s by SK in twelve of the thirty two counties in Ireland. In at least five of them SK managed lands of more than one proprietor. The choice of estates to be investigated in detail reflects the fact that the correspondence includes a sufficient amount of material to create a broad picture of what was happening on those lands in the 1840s. However, during the same decade SK had many clients whose affairs will not be described in detail in the book. The reason for their exclusion is that in such cases the letters which survive fail to yield a clear indication of developments on their estates, considered individually, in the 1840s. The impression emerging from the material on the estates which are not investigated in detail is that, taken as a group, developments on such lands were similar to those on the estates which are investigated in detail. Comments on some SK clients, excluded from detailed investigation, are as follows:

It can be argued that 'the recklessly generous landlord'<sup>33</sup> John Hamilton of Donegal 'probably did more for his tenants ... than any other landlord before, during and after the Famine'<sup>34</sup>. Although Hamilton's son James was employed at the SK office at some stage in the 1840s in order to learn more about estate management, only a small amount of documentation on Hamilton's estate could be found among the SK files. This reflects the fact that Hamilton's estate was managed mainly by himself.

The material on Viscount De Vesce contains a few letters referring to his properties in Co Dublin and in Co Cork, to his annual subscriptions to the Horticultural Society in London and to a benevolent institution in Cork. A letter from Kincaid to Stewart in September 1846 indicates that De Vesce provided food for his tenants at an early stage during the famine. Thus, Kincaid wrote to Stewart: 'Lord De Vesce did write to us to allow Mr Lyster [of Cork City?] to draw on us for a Sum due for Indian meal .... Pay the amount'.

The Viscounts Powerscourt owned about 45,000 statute acres in Wicklow and Tyrone. In 1848 William Wingfield and the Earl of Roden, as guardians to the young Powerscourt, obtained a loan of £1,800 under the Landed Property Improvement Act, for the Tyrone estate. The SK files on Lord Lorton refer to subscriptions to the Queens County Protestant Orphan Society and to the Royal Agricultural Improvement Society of Ireland. They also include letters of 1843-5 from Mrs Renetta Murphy at a school in London: each of these concerns a quarterly pension of £3-15-0 which SK sent to her on Lorton's behalf.

A Dr O'Grady was associated with the dispensary at Swords in Co Dublin, one of the subscribers to which was Sir Thomas Staples,

a client of SK. Staples owned land in the district, where distress was acute during the winter of 1842-3. A letter of January 1843 from Robert Bowden of Swords reported and solicited: '100 unemployed Labourers of Swords ... presented a Memorial ... to the Landowners ... requesting Relief .... Nearly 70 men were allotted to various Landowners, to provide employment for them .... A great number of men still remaining for Relief, the following resolutions were agreed to: ... That, in order to afford those whose circumstances do not admit of their giving employment, an opportunity to assist us in providing it for the Labourers, a Subscription List be opened .... Unless Subscriptions come in ... men cannot be kept on [in employment by the local relief committee] beyond the present week'.

Patrick Bowden, who was probably related to the person who wrote the above letter, was in trouble in 1846 when, on 8 July, he wrote to SK that he was 'under Dr O'Grady's care' and that the 'total loss of my potato crop was much against me this year'. Given that the failure of the potato in the autumn of 1846 was worse than in 1845, it is likely that Bowden's position deteriorated further in the months ahead. A letter dated May 1848 to SK from the Board of Works indicates that although Staples sought a loan of £600 for improvements on his lands near Swords, only £300 was approved.

Jane Coleman's lands were in the Kilcullen district of Co Kildare, contiguous to Co Dublin. In the 1840s she resided in England. One of her tenants, Richard Doyle, wrote to SK in January 1843: 'Was it not for the deplorable change that has taken place in the price of Cattle Corn &c I would now be able to pay the May [1842] Rents'. He was still in the red in October, when he informed SK that 'for the May half year I must beg your kind indulgence until the 1<sup>st</sup> of next May [1844]'. Some of Miss Coleman's tenants were in difficulty in the autumn of 1844 when one of them wrote to SK: 'We have been noticed [to meet a representative of SK] for the rent .... If ... you would forbear a Month longer it would ... be a great acquisition [acquisition] to the Tenantry for if the[y] be compelled to sell the Corn at this time they will sustain a great loss as markets ... is remarkably bad and the people thinks the[y] can not remain so much longer'. In the same hand, this letter was signed in the names of four tenants. Stewart entered on it the manuscript instruction: 'These may be put off for a few weeks'.

John Burtchell was perhaps the most prosperous of Miss Coleman's tenants. In June 1846 he wrote to SK as Secretary of the recently established relief committee at Kilcullen: 'It was resolved that [I] should solicit Subscriptions from the Landlords and Gentry of the Neighbourhood to enable the Committee to purchase Indian ... Meal to sell to the poor deserving labourer at first cost price, & to distribute gratuitously to those who are totally destitute and for whom there is no room at the Work

House. In transmitting the above resolution may I take the liberty of requesting you will be so kind as to have it laid before Miss Coleman who has ... subscribed on former occasions'.

Jane Coleman was a subscriber to the Irish Trinitarian Bible Society, the objectives of which included 'salvation ... by circulating ... Holy Scriptures'<sup>35</sup>. She was benevolent. Her donations to relieve famine distress in the Dingle district during 1842 have already been noted. There is no evidence that she owned property near Dingle and it is unlikely that she ever visited that place. A letter of June 1842 from Rev Sherrard of Old Kilcullen Glebe, to SK 'for the Misses Coleman', refers to destitution in his own district. Sherrard was then Treasurer of the relief committee at Kilcullen, and he sought a contribution from the Colemans in order to abate distress.

Letters from Sherrard to SK, December 1842 and December 1843, refer to Jane Coleman's subscriptions to the fever hospital at Kilcullen. Another letter to SK from the same writer, December 1846, refers to her 'liberal donation of Five pounds in addition to her annual subscription' to the fever hospital. A letter from Dr William Shaw, March 1846, refers to her annual subscription to a dispensary some miles to the south of Kilcullen, while a further communication from Sherrard, December 1848, confirms receipt of a donation from Miss Coleman to the Kilcullen dispensary. A letter of May 1846 indicates that she contributed £3 towards building a school.

Jane Coleman left management of her affairs largely to SK's discretion. The correspondence indicates no threats of ejection from her lands; but note that the sample of letters which refer to her property is relatively small. Similar observations apply to letters on other estates, not investigated in detail, for which SK were agents.

Why do the letters contain a great deal of material on some of the estates managed by SK in the 1840s but little on others? An answer must surely lie in the probability that some files were consigned to the families of proprietors after SK (or the firm's successors) ceased to be their agents, and the firm itself may have destroyed files on extinct agencies. One would expect that in such cases only stray items would remain in the present archive. Note also that when Joseph Kincaid's son severed his connection with the firm at 6 Leinster St in order to set up a rival agency, he took some of the SK business (including that of Palmerston's heirs<sup>36</sup>) with him. He may have left only stray items on some of those agencies behind. It is known, shortly after Messrs Stewart & Son ceased operations in the 1980s, that some De Vesci material was consigned to the Pakenham residence, Tullyally Castle in Westmeath; that this material was transferred by the Pakenhams to the De Vescis; that those De Vesci files may have been acquired by the National Library of



Ireland (but if so, they remain uncatalogued) since that family moved residence to England; that Pakenham material was also consigned to Tullynally Castle around the time at which the De Vesci documents were brought there and, finally, that some of the Pakenham files, previously in the possession of Messrs Stewart & Son, were stolen from Tullynally in recent years<sup>37</sup>.

Other sources of omission should be noted. The chapters in *Landlords, tenants, famine* will rely mainly on the SK correspondence in the author's possession, but although these are comprehensive for the 1840s up to and including 1846, they are relatively sparse for 1847-49. This led me to suspect that either the letters for those years went astray after Messrs Stewart & Son closed down or (as I thought more likely) SK were so overwhelmed with work in those years that they failed to keep good records of incoming correspondence. The latter view is reinforced by the fact that the correspondence for 1847-8 was often filed by SK only by year rather than (as was earlier the case) by exact date; furthermore, several letters of 1847 were filed as having been written in 1848 and vice versa. The same view was effectively confirmed when I consulted the archives at Tullynally Castle:

(i) The Pakenham archive contains 253 volumes (a complete run from 1841 to 1946) containing copies of SK's, or Stewarts', outgoing letters to or on behalf of all clients<sup>38</sup>. The earliest of these volumes spans 1841 to 1852. Most of those early copies are unfortunately not now legible. However, the dates of those copies are very revealing: The earliest letter-book (1841-52) contains about 1,500 pages, the first 600 of which pertain to 1841-46, inclusive, while the remaining 900 pages pertain to 1851-2. Thus, it seems that the firm of SK did not usually make copies of its outgoing mail in the late 1840s.

(ii) The Tullynally archive contains a couple of hundred original letters to SK dated 1841-46 pertaining to the Pakenham estates<sup>39</sup>; however, in that archive I could detect no such letters dated 1847 and only one for each of 1848 and 1849.

The Broadlands (Palmerston) papers at Southampton contain important information on SK's activities in the 1840s which would otherwise be missing; these papers have been incorporated in the larger research project from which the present article is drawn.

Finally on the matter of omissions, it seems that practically all account books of the 1840s, on the estates investigated in *Landlords, tenants, famine*, have been destroyed by now. Only one such ledger could be found.

The foregoing sections seem to be inconsistent with the popular belief that during the 1840s the owners of large estates in Ireland, and the agents who managed such properties, were generally heartless individuals who had little regard for tenant welfare. The principal chapters of *Landlords, tenants, famine*, now near completion, substantively generalise and extend the conclusions from the survey outlined above. Recall that the sketches in the foregoing section V pertained to estates for which the SK correspondence does not facilitate detailed investigation. On the other hand, the primary focus in the draft book is on estates for which the SK correspondence does enable detailed investigation. The survey outlined above, combined with the findings on estates which have been investigated in detail, calls for revision not only of popular views of landlord and land agency behaviour during the famine decade, but also for revisions of some of the interpretations of modern historians. The following are among the conclusions of the larger study from which the present article is drawn<sup>40</sup>:

First, contrary to the views of some modern historians<sup>41</sup>, it seems that it was not the case, outside the few large urban concentrations, that Ireland in the 1840s was basically a barter economy without money (in which goods were usually exchanged directly for goods, and in which labour services were usually provided in lieu of rent). In fact, the financial system in regard to payment of rents from the estates managed by SK, and in the context of other transactions on those estates, was surprisingly sophisticated.

A second set of conclusions refers to evictions. Eviction (the legal term was 'ejectment') is here defined as involuntary (on the part of a tenant) termination of tenancy, usually following Court action. As has been indicated in section III above, formal eviction was a measure of last resort on estates managed by SK. Many of the tenants against whom ejectment decrees were threatened or obtained in the 1840s were still on the estates after the famine, in the 1850s. Historians of the famine era in Ireland have referred to 'evictions', but it seems that none of them have explained what they meant by that word. It is probably the case, in Irish folk memory, that a great many of those who 'voluntarily' surrendered land are deemed to have been 'evicted'. But even when notices to quit and summonses to Court had been served, such surrenders did not necessarily constitute eviction, as the term has been defined above. It is of course acknowledged here that 'voluntary surrender' of land was not always 'voluntary' in any accepted sense of the word. But given that initiatives for surrender of land often came from tenants themselves, the question of interpretation remains. Surrender of land in return for compensation often constituted mild to strong cases of 'quasi-eviction' rather than 'eviction'.

Especially during the famine years, SK's response to tenants in arrears tended to differ depending on whether they had assets or were deemed hopelessly insolvent. In the case of tenants in arrears who had assets, and who in SK's opinion were viable in the long run, SK preferred to distrain (ie. seize property in lieu of rent) rather than lose those tenants. There was little point in replacing them by insolvent tenants. Hence, even when they were in arrears during the famine years when viable tenants were very hard to find, SK sought to keep those tenants considered viable in the long run. Distraint meant some income for SK. In many cases during the late 1840s, a decision to eject would have been tantamount to a decision to leave land untenanted, or occupied by new tenants who had no assets which could have been distrained and who could not afford to pay any rent at all. But during the famine years there were a great many tenants who SK deemed non-viable in the long run, and hence SK wanted to get rid of them, usually in return for compensation. *This was the optimal solution from SK's point of view: the firm thereby avoided waste of time and legal expenses, as well as adverse publicity, in getting rid of a tenant who was paying no rent. It was also arguably optimal from the tenants' point of view.* Many of them must have recognised that they were probably doomed if they forced on the landlord the implicit and explicit costs of waiting to go to Court and of Court proceedings, and they could not have expected much in compensation on their departure under such circumstances. Many of them therefore regarded it as optimal to surrender the land without Court proceedings, in return for financial assistance. This reasoning reflects simple economic calculus: it is therefore surprising that these points appear to have remained unnoticed by economic historians. Recall that cases in which all or much of the initiative to surrender came from a tenant rather than the landlord's agent were not rare.

Tim P. O'Neill has provided a convenient summary of the estimates of historians in regard to the number of evictions during the famine years<sup>42</sup>. Although some researchers have presented numbers as though they were quite accurate, the estimates vary hugely from one author to another. The real problems in the works of those who have tried to estimate levels and trends of eviction in Ireland during the famine years - whether using official statistics, or estimates of the number of houses and cabins abandoned, or literary evidence - are, first, that they have generally failed to define what they meant by eviction; secondly (and this is an insuperable problem) there is the difficulty of assigning numbers on a spectrum, from 'mainly voluntary' departures, to 'mild forms of quasi-eviction', to 'severe forms of quasi-eviction', to terminal execution of ejection decrees. In referring to evictions during the famine years, hopefully historians will be more cautious in future.

A third set of conclusions pertains to landlord-assisted

emigration (as distinct from migration to Britain) during the famine years. That Viscount Palmerston assisted about 2,000 of his Sligo tenants (including their dependents) to emigrate to British North America in 1847 is well known. Historians are also aware that certain other landlords implemented programmes of assisted emigration during and shortly after the famine. But the SK correspondence suggests that historians have seriously understated the extent of such assisted emigration. It indicates, on behalf of their clients, that SK assisted in emigration of tenants from most of the estates which have been investigated in detail by this author. The approximate numbers involved are indeterminate, partly because the distinction between 'assistance to emigrate' and 'compensation' to leave an estate is nebulous. It is difficult to see how one can sensibly attach confidence to estimates of 'assisted emigration' presented by some modern historians. In her book on the great famine published in 1994, Kinealy wrote with apparent certainty that 'landlord-assisted emigration accounted for only about 5 per cent of the total'<sup>43</sup>. In 1999 O Grada referred to 'emigrants whose passages were paid by landlords or by the state' and he added: 'Only a small share of all passages overseas [meaning beyond Britain] were so financed, certainly no more than 4 or 5 per cent'<sup>44</sup>. O Grada cites research by Fitzpatrick among his principal sources. Fitzpatrick had reported in 1989 that 'references were found to about 175 cases of assistance by individuals (usually landlords) or groups, who probably aided at least 22,000 [emigrants] between 1846 and 1850'<sup>45</sup>. It is thought here, if the SK correspondence had been available to him at the times at which he revealed his research results, that examination of its contents would have induced Fitzpatrick to raise his lower bound estimate, and that this consideration would have led those who wrote on the subject in the 1990s to express less of a sense of precision. (The emphasis in the present paragraph has been added by this author.)

A fourth set of conclusions refers to improvements implemented in the 1840s on estates managed by SK. A popular view is that the landlords of Ireland neglected their estates. But the 1840s saw very major improvements on most of the large estates managed by SK. First, there was rationalisation in the structure of holdings, under which tenants were assigned individual plots to be farmed by themselves alone (in replacement of the earlier system of communal occupation called rundale). This 'squaring of the land' facilitated and required further improvements, such as road building and construction of new houses. Rationalisation in the structure of holdings did not make sense unless the tenants were sufficiently skilled in husbandry. SK employed 'agriculturalists' who sought to induce the tenants to plant clover, and turnips instead of potatoes. They also assisted in provision of seed, fertilisers, and equipment such as ploughs and turnip-sowing barrows. Throughout most of the 1840s they organised sub-soiling and drainage works.

Taken as a group, it seems that those landlords who were SK's clients in the 1840s were a progressive set of people who were keen to develop their estates. But this view should be qualified by noting that initiatives behind many of the improvements must have come from SK. It was hardly coincidental that 'squaring of lands' was implemented on several estates very shortly after SK had been appointed as agents; indeed, the partners seem to have regarded such rationalisation as a precondition for further progress. Nor was it coincidental that a large majority of the firm's major clients obtained government loans in 1848 in order to finance improvements. As has been indicated earlier, SK took a long-term view on matters of estate management, and commitment to incur expenditures on improvements may have been embodied in SK's contracts with client proprietors. But it was up to the landlords to accept or reject whatever proposals for improvements which emanated from SK.

It is probably accurate to state, at the beginning of the twenty first century, that a majority of Irish people believe that the landlords of Ireland, and their agents also, were generally uncaring and inhumane in their treatment of the tenantry during the famine years. Allegations by nationalist politicians, publications by some individuals who have written about the famine, and the Irish educational system from 1922 until recent decades, are presumably in part responsible for such perceptions. But the SK correspondence creates a very different view of reality. Letters internal to the firm were not written for purposes of propoganda. In several of their references to tenants and former tenants, the very choice of words by Stewart and by Kincaid indicate much about their true feelings towards those in distress. In many cases, such words indicate feelings of compassion. None of the letters between Stewart and Kincaid express sentiments of disrespect towards the tenantry. Those letters indicate that very many of the tenants were extremely poor, but none of them express a view that they were an inferior breed which did not deserve respect.

In regard to SK's local agents, it seems on balance, and taken as a group, that they were reasonable people. Some of them held tenant welfare high in their priorities. As in most other professions, some of them were humane, while others were less caring. Of course they were not particularly popular among people who did not enjoy having to pay rent.

On the landlords themselves, the overall impression from the SK correspondence is that although they pursued mainly their own long-term economic interests, many of them indicated genuinely good feelings towards their tenants. Paternalistic views of tenants on some estates towards their landlords, as well as the choice of words in letters from proprietors to SK, indicate some of the thinking of landlords and tenants vis-a-vis one another. On several occasions tenants wrote to their landlords expressing

grievances (often complaints about other tenants) and requesting appropriate action, or seeking a favour (such as acquisition of employment). It seems that the recipients usually forwarded such letters to SK, often adding a note suggesting how the agency might respond. Some tenants adopted a more direct approach by travelling many miles to their landlord's residence where, in most of the recorded cases, their arrival was unexpected. The fact that some tenants went to such trouble indicates that they did not regard their landlords as uncaring despots.

It is concluded that taken together, Stewart and Kincaid and the group of landlords which their firm represented, were both progressive and humane in the 1840s. However, the dangers of drawing inferences from the particular to the general should be kept in mind. In the 1840s SK was only one of many land agencies in Ireland. There is no presumption, just because SK acted in such-and-such a manner, that other land agencies acted likewise. But note that SK had more large and medium-sized estates on its books than had any other agency in the country. Apart from a huge quantity of tenant letters in the SK correspondence, surviving letters from tenants in Ireland during the 1840s are extremely rare. In its geographic coverage, its varied composition and in its extent, the SK correspondence is unique. Thus, we have no definite way of knowing whether SK was representative of Irish land agencies during the 1840s. Similar observations apply to the landlords themselves. Perhaps the attitudes of landlords on SK's books were not representative of those of landlords in general. It was not necessarily the case that the criteria applied by SK in accepting agency work were roughly the same as those of other land agencies. For example, SK may have insisted that its clients must commit themselves to improvements; other agencies may have been less demanding in this respect, and they may therefore have attracted business from less progressive owners. For similar reasons, the attitude of SK's landlords on the question of ejection may have differed from those of owners of estates managed by other firms.

The existence of the SK archive has hitherto been unknown to historians. In spite of the qualifications mentioned immediately above, the content of that archive will have to be taken into account in revised interpretations of Ireland in the 1840s.

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School of Business at University College Dublin for financial support in the larger project from which this article is drawn. Unless otherwise indicated, the letters to which reference is made are in my possession, and may be inspected by researchers.

1. *Wilson's Dublin directory ... 1788*, p. 85.
2. James O'Donnell to Lord Powerscourt, 24 April 1791.
3. BR 141/20.
4. *Wilson's Dublin directory ... 1809*, p. 92.
5. BR 144/1/1.
6. James Watson Stewart, *Gentleman's and citizen's almanack*, published annually in Dublin. See also Beatrice Butler, 'John and Edward Lees, secretaries of the Irish Post Office, 1774-1831', *Dublin Historical Record*, vol. III (1952-54), pp. 138-150.
7. See Rob Goodbody, 'Obelisk Park', *Blackrock Society*, vol. 7 (1999), pp. 24-33.
8. BR 144/7/41 and 149/10/29.
9. *Thom's official directory ... 1883*, Dublin, p. 1430.
10. BR 148/7/11 and *Thom's ... 1884*, pp. 1433 and 1711.
11. Written 20-30 July 1821 and posted at Coleraine.
12. In fact, a manual of the early forties observed that 'great failures have taken place in the potato crops within the last few years in every part of the united kingdom': See *The farmer's guide*, second edition (Dublin 1842), p. 95.
13. Dermot James, *John Hamilton of Donegal, 1800-1884*, (Dublin 1998), p. 22.
14. *Kings County and County Westmeath, valuation ... Union of Tullamore* (Dublin 1854), p. 24; *Thom's ... 1850*, p. 422.
15. Pettigrew and Oulton, *The Dublin almanac ... 1842*, p. 335.
16. Pettigrew and Oulton, *Almanac ... 1846*, p. 316.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 320.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 321.
19. T. O'Rorke, *History of Sligo* (Dublin n. d.), vol. II, p. 441.
20. Pettigrew and Oulton, *Almanac ... 1846*, pp. 320-1.
21. Pettigrew and Oulton, *Almanac ... 1842*, p. 291.
22. Edward Bullen to Kincaid, 3 January, 13 February and 18 October 1843; 19 December 1846; Pettigrew and Oulton, *Almanac ... 1846*, p. 185.
23. BR 141/26/1.
24. See Niall Brunicardi, *John Anderson, Entrepreneur* (Fermoy, Co Cork, 1987).
25. SK to Col. Stratford, 21 February 1842, in PAK M/33.
26. Brunicardi, *John Anderson ...*, p. 151.
27. The postal rates applicable in each year can be found in James Watson Stewart, *Gentleman's and citizen's almanack*. F. Dixon, *Irish postal rates before 1840* (Munich 1986), provides a compendium of rates until the uniform penny post came into operation.
28. James S. Donnelly, *The Land and people of nineteenth century Cork* (1975), pp. 9 and 52. See also R.B. MacCarthy, *The Trinity College estates, 1800-1923* (Dundalk 1992), chapters 3-5.
29. Office of Public Works to SK, 18 February, 12 and 13 April, 17 May, 7 June, 15 July, 10 August, 26 September and (?) September 1848.
30. Edward Walford, *The county families of the United Kingdom* (1860), p. 490.
31. I Slater, *National Commercial Directory of Ireland* (1846),



section on Ulster, p. 497.

32. Walford, *County families ...*, p. 490.

33. This is the subtitle of the study on Hamilton by Dermot James, cited in note 13 above.

34. James, *John Hamilton ...*, ix.

35. Pettigrew and Oulton, *Almanac ... 1843*, p. 289.

36. BR 148/11/20.

37. Some of the information in this paragraph draws on oral communications of Thomas Pakenham.

38. PAK M/33-286.

39. PAK H/2.

40. This text cannot sensibly list the individual source items from which the conclusions are drawn. They are listed in detail in the draft of *Landlords, tenants, famine*, chapters 2 to 14.

41. See Patrick Lynch and John Vaizey, *Guinness's brewery in the Irish economy 1759-1876* (1960), pp. 10-27; E.D. Steele, *Irish land and British politics* (1974), p. 6.

42. Tim P. O'Neill, 'Famine evictions', Chapter 2 in Carla King, ed., *Famine, land and culture in Ireland* (2000).

43. Christine Kinealy, *This great calamity* (1994), p. 304.

44. Cormac O Grada, *Black '47 and beyond* (1999), p. 115.

45. David Fitzpatrick, 'Emigration, 1801-70', Chapter XXVII in W.E. Vaughan, ed., *A new history of Ireland, vol. V* (1989), pp. 592-3.