Sir Richard Bourke and his Locality

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The paternal role played by local landlord Sir Richard Bourke in the parish of Castleconnell and surrounding areas is analysed and evaluated. In so far as his power, influence and personal resources permitted, it is argued that he made a significant contribution to the relief of distress and in the alleviation of poverty in his locality.

In a previous article in this journal the enlightened and benevolent approach to the management of his estate by Sir Richard Bourke has been outlined. Bourke however felt that he had responsibilities not just for his tenants, but also for those he termed his "fellow Irishmen," especially those in his locality. He said he would die happily if he thought he had improved the quality of life of some of his countrymen, and enabled them to lead independent responsible lives. His efforts to achieve this followed essentially the same two-pronged approach as he used in the management of his estate: the relief of distress caused by food shortages and crop failures, which were an integral part of the Irish agricultural cycle, and the alleviation of poverty by the remediation of structural obstacles to improvement. Whenever possible he tried to use permanent improvement schemes to relieve accidental distress, though his efforts to achieve this were not confined to this method.

The first major crisis that occurred after his settling in Thornfield was the famine of 1822. The government's response was the same as that in previous localised famines. A special commission was established to organise public works to enable the needy to work and earn money to buy food. This commission worked through local relief committees and contributed to the cost of relief works which were undertaken in their areas. Local chargeability and involvement were seen as essential to ensure that money was spent only in areas where distress was real, and to establish the temporary nature of government expenditure. Government and local contributions were bolstered by subscriptions from charitable organisations such as the British Society for Improving Conditions of the Irish Peasantry and the City of London Tavern Society. Their funds were also channelled through local associations.

In Bourke's area the distress was alarming. The people pawned their clothes and bedclothes, which they would never be able to redeem, in order to buy food. In Castleconnell there was a Ladies District Association affiliated to the British and Irish Society for improving the conditions and promoting the welfare of the female peasantry in Ireland. His wife, Elizabeth, was its secretary, and the committee raised £38 6s. 8d. in subscriptions at their initial meeting. But the main organisation for distributing government local and charitable funds to the parishes of the county was the Limerick Agricultural Association, of which Bourke was chairman. The Association received an initial grant of £500 from the Lord Lieutenant in May 1822 and distributed £15 to each parish, which had submitted a report on...
distress, 'as a present aid at the disposal of the local committee'. Only parishes which had set up a committee to manage the distribution of funds, and submitted a report on the distress in the parish, qualified to receive additional aid.\(^7\) Within three months the Association had distributed £15,777 18s 2d. to the parish committees for the support of 89, 258 persons.\(^8\) The fund included substantial sums from charitable committees in London. The Association sent £54 10s. to Newport, £36 6s 8d. to Abington, and £48 to Castleconnell.\(^9\) It also sent £28 16s. 3d. to the Ladies Committee there.\(^10\) The money was used to buy clothes for the clothes shop they had opened on 12 November 1822 in the village of Castleconnell.\(^11\) The clothes were sold to the poor and the money so raised was used to relieve other forms of distress. Each member of the committee received a roll of clothes from the shop for distribution gratuitously to those most in need. They visited the homes of the poor once a month to ascertain their needs, and they employed some of the women and children knitting socks. By the end of August 1822 the fear of famine was overcome.\(^12\)

Public works in the area, making and repairing roads, gave employment to the able-bodied poor. These works provided short-term relief of distress, and also contributed to permanent improvements. This approach was approved of by Bourke and implemented on his own estate. Further, the roads built and repaired under the supervision of local committees were executed efficiently and economically. In many cases they were completed at less than half the cost of grand jury presentments. This experience convinced Bourke of the need to reform the whole system of grand jury presentments, which he claimed led to loose and irregular practices in levying public money on work schemes it knew little about, introduced habitual perjury, and in the end the country was left with roads that were not standardised either in quality or design.\(^13\)

Bourke had a particular concern to ensure that the administration of the law did not add to the distress of the poor. As a magistrate, chairman of governors of the gaol, witness to official enquiries, and High Sheriff, he had some power and opportunity to do this. In the early 1820s there were two forms of civil force in Ireland, the police under the peace preservation act, and the constables under the constabulary act. The latter was a permanent force. The police predated the constables and many of them in the county were Orangemen.\(^14\) When they came to Castleconnell, an area described by Bourke as very peaceable, and where politics or religion rarely caused unrest they started to wear Orange insignia. This upset the people. That there was no breach of the peace then was due to the management of the magistrates, helped considerably by the prudent intervention of the catholic parish priest.\(^15\) Some members of the constabulary were recruited from the old police force and some of them, initially, were Orangemen. Bourke had one of these stationed in Castleconnell dismissed and fined several others, in order to keep them in order. In 1824 he and his fellow magistrates tried to have the police removed from the district altogether on the grounds that they were an expense from which they derived no benefit. The area was perfectly peaceful, and the magistrates and the constabulary were capable of maintaining law and order there. Their memorial was however refused.\(^16\)

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\(^7\) Minutes of meeting, 25 May 1822, (N.L.I., Bk. Ps., MS 8476 (1)).
\(^8\) First report from committee of the County of Limerick Agricultural Association, 5 March 1823, (N.L.I., Bk. Ps., MS 8476 (1)).
\(^9\) Receipts from parish committees of Newport, 24 June 1822; Abington, 25 May 1822, Castleconnell.
\(^10\) 1 June 1822, to Bourke, (N.L.I., Bk. Ps., MS 8477 (2)).
\(^11\) List of parishes, 21 Oct 1822, (N.L.I., Bk. Ps., MS 8474 (1)).
\(^12\) First report from committee of Agricultural Association.
\(^13\) Ibid.
\(^14\) Bourke's evidence to the select committee of the House of Lords appointed to enquire into the state of Ireland, 3 February -6 July 1825, in, pp 176-7, (hereafter cited as state of Ireland committee).
\(^15\) Bourke's evidence to the state of Ireland committee, p. 179.
\(^16\) Ibid., p. 180.
As chairman of the Board of Superintendence of Limerick Gaol he objected to the undignified and unchristian way of burying executed criminals. They were thrown into 'croppy holes' without religious ceremony, thereby adding greatly to the distress of their families. Bourke was instrumental in having the practice stopped and Christian burials instituted. He also tried to eliminate jobbery and corruption in the administration of the gaol while he was there, but as soon as he left it reverted to its old practices.

In his evidence to the House of Lords enquiry into disturbances in Ireland, he was outspoken in his criticism of the law. He pointed out that the secrecy surrounding the method of nominating magistrates sometimes resulted in very unsuitable persons being appointed, persons who accepted bribes and were open to solicitation. He also said that proceedings at quarter sessions was so chaotic that magistrates and prosecutors often got so tired of waiting for their case to be heard that they went home. The defendants were then discharged without trial. Such administration brought the law into disrepute especially amongst catholics. He had sympathy with their views. He added that he knew from personal experience that 'there were instances of partiality in the administration of the law by justices where favour has been shown to a protestant to the prejudice of a catholic'.

One of the last things he did towards the end of his life was to ensure compliance with a law which was being ignored to the detriment of the public, especially the poor. It concerned the sale of bread. Bread was sold in Limerick by the loaf, which could vary in weight, but did not vary in price. He thought this highly objectionable as it left the poor, in particular, vulnerable to abuse. He established that this was illegal and that bread should be sold by weight. He took the matter up with Watson, the mayor, who wanted to publish Bourke’s findings. But Bourke suggested that it would be better if the mayor spoke to the bakers and settled matters quietly, so that bread in future would be sold legally by weight. He ended his letter by saying: ‘If you can manage to accomplish quietly such a change as this, you will add one to the many benefits for which your mayoralty will, I am sure be distinguished’.

Bourke was critical of the poor law introduced in 1838. He objected both to the principle and to various details of the act. He did not consider it an appropriate measure to deal with either the relief of distress or the alleviation of poverty. It was, in his eyes, a system totally unsuited to Irish needs. It reflected English opinions and English ignorance of Irish affairs. It was, he felt, a response to English clamour to rid its society of Irish paupers as easily as possible. The system recommended by the poor law inquiry 1834 was rejected by the government, not because it was considered unsuitable, but because it would cost the imperial government too much. Bourke objected to the workhouses, and suggested in 1843 that they be removed. He advocated a system of outdoor relief run by local committees whose members would know personally the needs of the applicants for relief. He believed the old and infirm, that class of people for whom the workhouses were erected, should not be compelled to enter them, but should be looked after at home with local assistance. He tried to influence and change government policy in that direction, through Monteagle and Smith O’Brien, both of whom agreed with him, but to no avail.

The inadequacies of the poor law system shortly became tragically clear.

When blight struck again in 1845 relief was handled in the same way as in previous famines. Government and local funding of public works was supervised by a special Relief Commission.
organised by the Board of Works, which had been created in 1832, working through local relief committees. The funds were provided initially by the government, but half had to be repaid by local taxation. Works initiated by grand jury presentments had to be repaid in full by local taxes. Peel, who had been Chief Secretary for Ireland at the time of previous famines, was now Prime Minister. He ordered a shipment of maize meal to stabilise prices. It was sold at 1d. per lb. Bourke, at that stage, considered the action of the government both prudent and generous.

In the autumn of 1845 not many in County Limerick were unduly alarmed about the state of the potato crop. Watson, the High Sheriff, in a letter to the Lord Lieutenant quoting reports from Eyre Lloyd of Prospect and George Westropp, claimed the earlier predictions had been exaggerated, and that while about one-third of the crop had been ruined, he believed there would be enough food to avoid famine. Tracy, the resident magistrate of Castleconnell, on the other hand, was alarmed and in his reports stated that “in every field a large portion of the crop is totally ruined”. Castleconnell was one of the worst hit areas of the county. A relief committee, of which Bourke was a member, was quickly set up which met every Thursday. They enlisted the help of the Protestant and Catholic clergy to establish the extent of destitution in the district. By early March 1846, when they had gone over about two-thirds of the district, they reported that 381 families comprising 1,880 persons had not a single potato left. In response to this finding the committee wrote to the special commissary for immediate sanction of public works. This request was conceded and public works began in the area in April 1846. Roads were built in Gortavalla, and between Castleconnell and Montpelier, which gave employment.

The committee also raised funds by local subscription. By April 1846 it had collected £176. Howly explained the smallness of the contributions by the fact that so many of the resident gentry had their estates in other parishes, they had to contribute to relief schemes there as well as to Castleconnell where they lived. The committee bought five tons of maize at £11 per ton, and guaranteed the purchase of a further thirty-five tons at a cost in excess of £400. Government responded to this local effort by making a large contribution and Bourke wrote optimistically to Monteagle in May 1846:

I have good news from Thornfield as to the sustenance of the people. The able-bodied are employed either in public or private works and the people subsist on maize meal sold at cost price by the parochial committee who also have a fund at their disposal...for any future calamity.

Within a month however the situation had deteriorated: “Nothing can be worse than the reports I hear from many districts, including unfortunately my own, Castleconnell”. It was becoming evident that a second universal crop failure was at hand, and that the new Whig government intended to transfer the whole cost of outdoor relief to local taxes. The principal landed proprietors of the county met to consider the situation. The government’s proposals, dismissed by William Monsell, MP as

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27 Bourke to Spring Rice, 23 May 1846, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS A1736 (691-4)).
30 Howly to Lord Lieutenant, 1 May 1846, (N.A., RLFC, D1107).
31 Howly to Board of Works, March 1846, (N.A., RLFC 901).
32 Howly to Board of Works, March 1846, (N.A., RLFC 901).
33 Howly to CSO, (N.A., RLFC 3/2172).
34 Howly to Lord Lincoln, 1 May 1846, (N.A., RLFC D1107).
35 Bourke to Monteagle, 25 May 1846, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS A1736 (691-4)).
36 Bourke to Monteagle, June 1846, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS 403/8 (236)).
37 Limerick Chronicle, 26 August 1845.
‘unproductive work executed on borrowed money’, were unanimously agreed to be inadequate to meet the probable distress. They insisted that public works, for which they would have to pay, should contribute to permanent improvements rather than waste money on trifling schemes, and that the rate should be levied on parishes. The meeting also set up an agricultural association with Bourke as its chairman. Bourke was requested to go to Dublin at once to convey the views of the meeting to the administration before the bill was enacted.38 Their hopes of influencing government however were dashed. Bourke wrote ‘we are in for the Bill and must do what we can to avoid its mischief’.39

He drew up a memorandum for use by relief committees in an attempt to avoid the continuing confusion between the Board of Works and the relief committees and to try to ensure that the government’s proposed measures might work ‘even decently well’. The public works schemes were generally a failure. The winter of 1846 was very severe and work was sometimes interrupted. There was no adequate superintendence and no effective system of payment.40 Paymasters were sometimes robbed41 as happened in Castleconnell in 1847 when £380 was taken though most of it was recovered.42 Wages however did not keep pace with price increases. Indian meal was £21 per ton in Limerick so a man’s wage was only sufficient to buy one inadequate meal per day for his family.43 The government decided to end all public works, and provide outdoor relief in the form of soup. Half the cost of this relief was to be paid by local funds, and soup to be sold at cost price. Most places did not open soup kitchens until May 1847, months after the cessation of public works.44 This hiatus was responsible for many deaths. One of the reasons for the delay was the government’s insistence on new relief committees. The Castleconnell Relief Committee avoided this delay. Bourke proposed at its meeting in October 1846 that the existing committee should stay in operation until the new committee was established so as to avoid disruption of relief work, a decision that was sanctioned by the government.45 Thus their soup kitchen got underway in the winter of 1846. By early January 1847 134 quarts of soup were made daily at Thornfield from 30lbs. of beef, 8lbs. of peas, 3 stones of turnips, 5d. worth of leeks, greens and celery, and 8lbs. barley.46 The soup was sold at half of cost price, at one halfpenny per quart, on the grounds that if it were any dearer the labouring poor would not be able to afford it.47 Bourke devised a ticket system whereby tickets for soup could be bought from the treasurer of the soup shop at three-farthings each by persons in the neighbourhood interested in helping the poor. These then distributed them gratis to people in absolute necessity.48 Fifteen people in the neighbourhood of Thornfield were supplied with free soup daily for themselves and their families.49 The ticket system ensured that nobody presenting for soup had to suffer the indignity of having to admit publicly their inability to pay. In the spring of 1847 Bourke wrote to Montagle: ‘Thank God we have kept starvation from our neighbourhood and from every part of my estate. Our soup kitchen has been of the greatest service. As yet we are free from fever’.50 In August the government closed down the soup kitchens and transferred all further costs of relief to the poor law. In the eyes of the government the famine was over.51

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38 Monse to Bourke, 7 Sept 1846, (N.L.I., Bk. Ps., MS 8474 (9)).
39 Bourke to Monse, 10 October 1846, (N.L.I., Bk. Ps., MS 8474 (9)).
40 Montagle to Bourke, 1 November 1846, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MSS 4038 (246)).
42 Meall’s report to Dic, January 1847, (N.L.I., Bk. Ps., MS 8474 (4)).
44 Daly, The operations of famine relief, in Póirtéir (ed.), p. 133.
45 Howly to CSO, 1 October 1846, (N.A., RLFC 3/2/73).
46 Meall’s report to Dic, 23 January 1847, (N.L.I., Bk. Ps., MS 8474 (4)).
49 Meall’s report to Dic, 31 May 1847, (N.L.I., MS 8474 (4)).
50 Bourke to Monseagle, Feb. 1847, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS A1736 (714)).
51 Daly, ‘The operations of famine relief’ in Póirtéir’, (ed.), Famine, p.133.
But it was far from over in many places including Castleconnell. Bourke tried to borrow money under the land improvement act in order to create employment in a constructive way. By July 1848, ten months after he had applied, he had not received a penny. His experience was common.\(^{52}\) His poor rates soared also a common experience and he blamed the inefficiency of the Board of Works.\(^ {53}\)

The potato crop in 1848 and 1849 was poor in his area. It was sufficient only for distribution among the poor as charity, or in some cases it was used by farmers in lieu of wages. The people on outdoor relief were half-starved and there were visitations of cholera.\(^ {54}\) Bourke recommended the distribution of food and medicines at his local dispensary and the appointment of an extra doctor to visit the sick in their homes. A year later the situation was no better: He warned Monteagle, who was planning a visit to Ireland, to be prepared for the misery he would witness:

> The face of the country for the most part looks well but the human face as worn by the great majority of the people is indeed that of consummate wretchedness. I never before saw the poorer classes so naked and emaciated. It teems with beggars on the roads and at your door. You are overpowerd with mendicity.\(^ {55}\)

In his reply Monteagle wrote: 'We might as well believe that a sub-soil plough could be drawn through a drained field without making a furrow as that the mismanagement of recent years would pass away without a scar'.\(^ {56}\) Bourke, writing to him again in 1852, pointed out that in Castleconnell, a place that offers above normal levels of employment, the number unemployed was frightful, despite the reduction in population due to deaths, emigration, and admissions to workhouses.\(^ {57}\) It was not until May 1855, a few months before he died, that a note of hope and optimism became evident in his observations:

> 'Our parish news is on the whole rather favourable. There is not much sickness among the people, and employment is in request at good prices. The militia has taken away many of our indifferent hands'.\(^ {58}\)

He allowed himself to cherish the hope that Ireland might have purchased, at a terrible price, the prospect of a better future.

Bourke saw the recurrence of accidental distress as a symptom of the deeper malaise of poverty. In his view the remediation of poverty required the removal of structural obstacles to the improvement of the condition of the peasantry. He saw this as a long-term gradual process. 'You cannot at once raise a people from ignorance and misery to knowledge and comfort. The traces of centuries of misgovernment are not to be obliterated in a day.' It is implicit in this observation that government as well as individuals had a responsibility to undo past and present injuries. He considered the provision of general and agricultural education, the creation of employment, removal of legal obstacles to improvements, better management of estates and subsidised emigration, as important measures towards the alleviation of poverty to which both parties could contribute.\(^ {59}\)

Bourke was of the opinion that education was the responsibility of the state, which should be discharged through a salaried board operating through local management. Local management should

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\(^ {52}\) Bourke to Monteagle, 29 July 1848, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS A1736 (714)).

\(^ {53}\) Ibid.

\(^ {54}\) Bourke to Monteagle, 27 April 1849, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS A1736 (734-9)).

\(^ {55}\) Bourke to Monteagle, 13 June 1850, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS A1736 (746-9)).

\(^ {56}\) Monteagle to Bourke, 1850, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS 403/4 (274)).

\(^ {57}\) Bourke to Monteagle, November 1852, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS A 1736 (770-7)).

\(^ {58}\) Bourke to Monteagle, 1 May 1855, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS A 1736 (815-8)).

\(^ {59}\) Bourke to Spring- Rice, 1830, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS 403/7 (467-9)).
be, in his view, a representative body, to ensure that it did not fall into the hands of the clergy of the Established Church, or else the catholics would withdraw their children. He did not think that one religion should be allowed to stand in the way of general education. No structure of that kind existed when Bourke became actively involved in education in 1822. There were then protestant education societies such as the Kildare Place Society and the Lord Lieutenant’s Fund, which were established to aid schools founded by private subscription. Bourke did not approve of government funds being channelled through self-appointed societies, and it was probably for this reason that he applied in 1822 to the Lord Lieutenant’s Fund for a grant to aid him erect a school on his demesne in the townland of Ahane. In reply to his application he was told that he would receive a grant of £50 on condition that the management of the school was placed in the hands of the local protestant clergy who would also appoint the teachers. Bourke objected to these conditions. He pointed out that since he provided the land, beside his own house, so that he and his family could properly supervise the teachers and pupils, and contributed a higher proportion of the cost than anyone else, it would be ‘extremely unpleasant’ to him and to his family ‘and prejudicial to the success of the school’ to render their superintendence nugatory by placing the school under the management of the Established Church. Furthermore he considered that such an arrangement would drive away the catholics. It was particularly important to him too that he should appoint the teachers. There were but few protestants in his area, so the majority of the pupils would be catholics. Under these circumstances he thought it only right that catholic teachers should be appointed. He argued his case with Dr Mant, bishop of Killaloe, but they could not agree. He decided to refuse the grant offered to him by the Lord Lieutenant’s Fund rather that comply with its conditions. He then applied to the Kildare Place Society which he considered to be the best of such societies. He got a grant of £50 from it under conditions acceptable to him, and continued to work amicably with that organisation, which he grew to respect, until he placed his school under the National Board in 1832.

Bourke’s school in Ahane was built in 1822-3. In its first year it had seventy-five pupils, forty-eight boys and thirty-one girls. The Kildare Place Society paid the schoolmaster £7.10s. annually and the schoolmistress £5. Bourke supplemented these paying £8 and £6 respectively. He provided books and other requisites, and clothing for the children of the poor. Scripture was read without comment in accordance with the regulations of the Society, from the Duotai Testament. The catholic clergy sometimes came into school to read it. Bourke considered this system of religious instruction inefficient, and thought that for that reason the catholic clergy had little objection to it, at least in his area. Before leaving for Australia in 1831 he left instructions with his agent Barrington and his acting manager, friend and neighbour, Howly, to place his school under the newly established National Board. He hoped that the new system would educate the Irish poor on a greater scale, and reduce sectarian rivalry through its mixed schooling philosophy. He was not uncritical of the provisions for the new Board. He thought its demands on local contributions too heavy on the catholic population which was already burdened with church rates and tithes, and thought that a large proportion of the latter should in

80 Bourke to Spring, Rice, 25 May 1829, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS A1736 (221-5)).
81 Bourke to Dick, 12 March 1834, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS A1735 (403-7)).
82 Bourke to Spring, Rice, 25 May 1829, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS A1736 (221-5)).
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Bourke’s evidence to the state of Ireland committee, pp 183-4.
87 Report of commissioners of education in Ireland, 1825, Appendix No. 233.
88 Bourke’s application to the commissioners of education, 1832, (N.A., Register of National Schools, Ed 1/51).
89 Bourke’s application to commissioners, 1832.
90 Barrington to Bourke, 6 Jan. 1824, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MSS 401/7 (53)).
91 Memorandum to agent, p. 31, (MS in possession of Dan Lawless, Moher, Co. Tipperary - hereafter cited as Lawless).
92 Bourke to Barrington, 24 Oct 1838, (N.L.I., Bk. Ps., MS 8477 (2)).
93 Bourke’s evidence to the state of Ireland committee, pp 183-4.
94 Memorandum to agent, p. 32, (Lawless).
fairness be used for the education of the poor. But, as he himself said, he had no option but to do the best he could within the system prescribed. Under this system religious instruction was provided in Ahasan school on Saturdays and in the evenings after normal school hours, after five o'clock in summer, and after four in winter. The instruction was given by the clergy of the relevant denominations or such other persons approved by the parents or guardians of the children. Bourke did not allow his teachers to give religious instruction in place of the clergy.

His wife was also actively involved in education. In 1822, with help from the London Ladies Committee for the Improvement of the Irish Peasantry, she opened a work school for women in Ahasan, in a building leased by her husband and Lord Clare, called the factory. Part of the factory was used as a dispensary. The women were taught to make shawls, gloves, and doilies which were sold in London by the British and Irish Ladies' Society. Mrs. Bourke was critical of the regulations of this committee, which stipulated that funds allocated should only be given to the industrious poor, who could demonstrate their worthiness by the cleanliness and good condition of their cabins. In a harrowing letter she vividly described the living conditions of the poor in her area. She pointed out that the condition of the people in her neighbourhood was such that most of them could not meet the Society's requirements, and therefore the very people who needed help most would be left unaided. Her appeal for relaxation of the rules did not succeed. In any case the standard of the work was not high enough to compete successfully on the British market. In 1831 the work school premises were vacant. Bourke offered them to the parish for a school under the National Board and undertook to maintain the building at his own expense. His offer was not taken up, and his schoolmaster used it as living accommodation.

In the late 1840s Bourke had plans to establish an agricultural college in Limerick, similar to that at Cirencester in England or Templemoyle in Derry, to train professional agriculturalists. He enlisted the help of Lord Monteagle who had already established a private agricultural school on his estate. He advised Bourke him to settle for something less ambitious and in 1854 a model school was founded in Mungret. This was Bourke's last educational endeavour.

As a man of power and influence in his locality Bourke exercised both to relieve distress and alleviate poverty. He achieved considerable success in both objects by the generous and judicious use of the resources available to him as an officer of the law, member of relief committees, educationalist and adviser to members of government and men of property. He advocated an approach to both conditions that was essentially the same as that which he implemented on his own estate, i.e. the implementation of permanent improvement schemes to give employment, particularly in times of seasonal food shortages and famine. He recognised that the law both in its partial administration and in its non-enforcement aggravated both conditions.

The recurrent failures in the agricultural cycle were not, in Bourke's view, the only source of distress among the people. He considered the partial administration of the law to the detriment of catholics added to their vulnerability, and brought the law into disrepute. As a magistrate, chairman of the

75 Bourke to Spring Rice, 25 May 1829, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS A1736 (221-5)).
76 Bourke to Dick, 1835, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS 1735 (313)).
77 Ahasan School Rules, 1838, (copy in possession of Fr. Mark Tierney, Glenstal Abbey).
78 Regulations for Work School, 1822, (N.L.I., Bk. Ps., MS 8474 (2)).
79 Memorandum to agent, 1830, p. 33, (Lawless).
80 G. T. Downes to Mrs Bourke, 16 July 1824, Amelia Pardy to Mrs Bourke, 8 Feb 1825, (N. L. I., Bk. Ps., MS 8474 (2)).
81 F. J. Bourke to Henry Barnwell, 23 Oct 1823, (N.L.I., Bk. Ps., MS 8474 (2)).
82 Resolution of Society, n.d., to Mrs Bourke, (N.L.I., Bk. Ps., MS 8474 (2)).
83 Forster to Bourke, 13 July 1824, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS 4033 (215)).
84 Memorandum to agent, p.33, (Lawless).
85 Bourke to Monteagle, Jan 1849, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS A1736 (716-21)).
86 Bourke to Monteagle, 17 Oct 1854, (M.L., Bk. Ps., MS A1736 (798-9)).
board managing the gaol, high sheriff of the county, and witness to parliamentary enquiries he had the opportunity to do something about it. He was critical of the secrecy surrounding the appointment of magistrates which led to corruption. He tried to eliminate jobbery from the administration of the gaol, and he insisted that executed criminals should be given decent burials. The chaotic organisation of quarter sessions was improved by his persistent efforts. Where the law was ignored to the disadvantage of the poor, as in the sale of bread by loaf rather than by weight as legally required, he was instrumental in bringing the practice to an end.

Bourke saw accidental distress as a symptom of a deeper malaise, poverty. The alleviation of poverty required the removal of structural obstacles to the improvement of the condition of the people and this was a long-term process. He considered that the state as well as individual landlords had a responsibility to undo past and present injuries. He took initiatives in the provision of general and agricultural education, the creation of employment in areas other than agriculture, and the removal of legal obstacles to reclamation of waste. These activities, the better management of estates and aided emigration, he considered important measures in the alleviation of poverty.

Bourke was a unionist but his view of the union was not just political but economic and fiscal. He strongly rejected the subjugation of Irish interests to British. He urged the government to modify its laissez-faire philosophy in relation to Ireland. He recognised that the gap between the realities of Ireland's economy and the abstract ideas governing them could not be bridged by a people so destitute without direct government intervention. He lamented that government policy towards Ireland was more influenced by British public opinion than by the dictates of Ireland's needs.

His qualities as a person more than the power vested in him by virtue of his being a member of the protestant landed gentry, for he was but a small landowner, made him a man of influence in his locality with all classes of people. He was intolerant of all forms of discrimination whether racial or religious. He had an essentially pluralist view of society. He was incorruptible, a characteristic which probably made him a difficult, fastidious colleague. In the ideas which formed his moral and political judgements he was a disciple of his kinsman, Edmund Burke. He acknowledged as much himself for he frequently quoted him, edited and published his correspondence, and described himself as a Burkite. Bourke discharged his responsibilities to his tenants and to the people in his locality in a manner that made him, if not unique, an exception to the generality of Irish landlords. He was a good landlord and an advocate of the rights of the poor and oppressed. His conception of society, and his appreciation of the ambivalent nature of the basis of power in Ireland, made him a remarkable man in his time and place.