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The Owenite Community at Ralahine, County Clare, 1831-33: A Reassessment¹

by Cormac Ó Gráda

FROM a late twentieth-century vantage point, the notion that pre-Famine Ireland, with its backward and unstable economic structure, was no place for piecemeal social experiments, may seem quite reasonable. But, as is well known, both legislators and classical-minded economists took a rather passive, pessimistic attitude to a more drastic restructuring of the system. In general, little was done and the ruling ideology of the day made it difficult to do anything. So it is hardly surprising that there were well-meaning individuals in Ireland who attempted local intervention and experimentation. Two in particular stand out because they professed – and tried out – ideas which made them quite famous throughout the land. These are Jeremy Bentham's most prominent left-wing follower, William Thompson of Rosscarbery, and the Owenite landlord from County Clare, John Scott Vandeleur. Thompson's career has been discussed in several different places, most exhaustively in Pankhurst's monograph. He must have been an exceptional individual, at once respected, if not revered, by the London circle of utilitarian philosophers, and idolized by the labourers and smallholders of Glandore and Rosscarbery. However, while his works continue to be studied and reissued, his influence on later social thinking, particularly that of Karl Marx, has been somewhat exaggerated.² Thompson's friend, Vandeleur, was in great vogue early in the present century, when the rural co-operative movement was at its most dynamic. James Connolly, for instance, devoted an entire chapter of *Labour in Irish*

¹ I wish to thank Pól Ó Duibhir, Moore McDowell, Pádraig Ó Snodaigh, as well as several students at U.C.D. for their help and comments. I am particularly grateful to Dr Ronald Garnett for putting me right on several points. The conventional disclaimer naturally applies.

² R. K. P. Pankhurst *William Thompson, 1755-1833: Britain's Pioneer Socialist, Feminist, and Co-operator* (London, 1954); there is an interesting, if brief, account by Patrick Lynch in J. F. Boyle (ed.), *Leaders and Workers* (Cork, 1963), pp. 9-16. I am basing my view of Thompson's philosophy on a reading of *The Distribution of Wealth* (1825) and *Labour Rewarded* (1827). The latter is an attack on Hodgskin, who was closer in outlook to Marx than either Owenites or Benthamites.

History to the story of Vandeleur's agrarian 'commune', and Professor O'Brien also discussed it at some length in his *Economic History of Ireland*. Both heartily approved in their way: to Connolly it was a 'partial experiment in Socialism', to O'Brien, 'an unqualified success . . . (which) would have continued to succeed, had it not been broken up by causes completely outside the control of the members'.¹ Since then less has been heard about Vandeleur, but the comprehensive account in R. G. Garnett's recently published *Co-operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities* makes further detailed narratives of the experiment at Ralahine superfluous.² The story of how this Clare proprietor introduced a particular brand of communalism on part of his estate, and then lost all he possessed in a gambling bout in Dublin two years later, has by now been retold sufficiently often. As its title implies, this latest account discusses Vandeleur's 'new system' in the context of Owenite experimentation elsewhere; evidence is adduced for the same combination of paternalism, enlightened self-interest, and idealism, all essential elements of Robert Owen's schema. Under the agreement of association, Vandeleur was chairman of the committee of nine that administered the small community – fifty-two members were admitted in all – and the stock, equipment and land were held in common from him, on the understanding that gradually these would be purchased on a communal basis. Not only does Garnett provide a fine narrative; he also presents a definitive bibliography of previous versions. This article will not attempt yet another chronological account, though part of the story is told *en passant*. It will deal rather with a number of interpretative points arising mainly out of Garnett's description. It differs from other accounts in its emphasis on the economic basis of the agreement rather than on its political inspiration.

I

One deep-rooted misconception regarding the pre-Famine economy, which recent Irish historical scholarship has been correcting, is the notion that the countryside was populated almost exclusively by some ten thousand landlords and literally millions of tenants on miniscule holdings. Given that the Poor Inquiry and the Devon Report – the primary sources most often quoted – were concerned mainly with the problems of the labourers and cottiers, the error is easier to understand. In reality, however, there was a substantial farming community in between, largely

¹ J. Connolly, *Labour in Irish History* (Dublin, 1967), pp. 79–93; G. O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine* (London, 1921), pp. 115–121.

² Manchester, 1972, pp. 100–129.

overlooked by both contemporary commentators and historians. There were places too, especially in the west, where semi-proletarian status and small holdings predominated. Vandeleur's own Ralahine, a demesne townland on the Limerick-Ennis road, seems to have been one such place. The relations of production there before the experiment were probably typical of areas where medium-sized farms were relatively rare: labourers would work off the high rent of their conacre for a proprietor or large farmer dealing in labour-intensive produce. When tillage prices fell or when the potato crop failed, the position of the conacre-man was desperate; in such situations rural revolt and food riots reached a peak.

Why more trouble might have been expected in County Clare than elsewhere may be guessed from the figures presented in Table I. These, taken from a pamphlet of 1831 or 1832, seem reliable; and, by the way, they corroborate recent criticisms made of the agricultural statistics given in the Irish census report of 1841.¹ Bearing in mind that an English acre is slightly over six-tenths of the traditional Irish measure, it would seem that well over three quarters of the holdings in pre-Famine Clare were less than fifteen statute acres, while the national proportion was less than two-thirds. Vandeleur must not have been alone there in fearing hungry, rebellious labourers. Indeed, the assassination of the land steward at Ralahine seems to have provoked the proprietor into introducing the 'new system' earlier than he had intended: Owenism, long a fancy of Vandeleur's, in the end may have been brought in for largely practical reasons.

Ralahine was not Vandeleur's only property in County Clare; he also owned another nearby which was leased out to tenant farmers. For whatever reason, it played no part in this exercise in Owenite experimentation. It was surely no accident that Vandeleur set about introducing his ideas in a setting of demesne agriculture rather than one of leasehold farming. Vandeleur's other property was larger than Ralahine, but it never receives a mention in the context of the 'new system'. The reason was probably that the introduction of the 'system' on leased land would have been both difficult and unnecessary. Vandeleur's whole problem was with labourers rather than with tenants. In modern idiom, it was a

¹ 'Agricola', *Considerations addressed to the Landed Proprietors of the County of Clare* (Limerick, 1832 [?]), p. 44. Quite coincidentally, this pamphlet is addressed to a certain James Molony of Kiltanon, Mrs Vandeleur's brother. After Vandeleur's disappearance, Molony became guardian at Ralahine.

Both the population statistics and the aggregate acreage given are quite plausible. Indeed, the population estimate is probably closer to the truth than the 258,000 reported in the official census of 1831. The farm size breakdown, adjusted to statute acres, agrees quite well with P. M. A. Bourke's amended figures in 'The Agricultural Statistics of the 1841 Census of Ireland: A Critical Review', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. xviii (1965).

TABLE I

Land and Wealth Distribution in Pre-Famine Clare

	<i>Classes (by value of land)</i>	<i>No. of Families in each class</i>	<i>No. of persons, house servants included</i>	<i>Average quantity of land possessed by each family (Plantation acres)</i>	<i>Total quantity of land possessed by each class</i>
	I £100	1,000	12,000	120	120,000
39	II £20-100	3,000	21,000	30	90,000
	III £10-20	10,000	50,000	8	80,000
	IV Class possessing a little land	16,000	80,000	4	64,000
	V No possessions	16,000	80,000	waste lands	122,000
		<hr/> 46,000	<hr/> 243,000		<hr/> 476,000

Source: see text.

labour-management problem. The temporary success of Ralahine can hardly be regarded, therefore, as a 'triumph for fixity of tenure', as the late Professor George O'Brien would have it.¹ After all, the complaints of the cottier and labourer of the early 1830's were quite different from the demands of the Land League tenants forty or fifty years later. Besides, though the early ideologists of the Irish co-operative movement used the story to some effect, the context was also entirely different. AE knew this: 'conditions have changed in Ireland', he said. 'It would be impossible to use the rules devised by Craig in a co-operative community today'.² The reminder that both Vandeleur's troubles and the solution he proposed reflected the socio-economic conditions of the day is perhaps unnecessary. 'Utopian socialist' schemes are inevitably (and paradoxically) constrained in this way. This is not to deny the Ralahine version its purely Owenite trappings: the use of labour notes and the emphasis on education, discussed in almost all accounts of Ralahine, are taken straight from Owen's own blue-prints.

TABLE II
Produce to be raised for rent

<i>Item</i>	<i>Price per stone</i>	<i>Value</i>
6,400 stones of wheat at	1s 6d	£480
3,840 „ „ barley at	10d	£160
480 „ „ oats at	10d	£20
	<i>per cwt</i>	
70 cwt „ beef at	40s 0d	£140
30 „ „ pork at	40s 0d	£60
10 „ „ butter at	80s 0d	£40
Total:		£900

Source: Craig (1920), p.95.

Edward Thomas Craig, Vandeleur's faithful lieutenant and organiser at Ralahine, called the story 'a romance of facts and figures'. Fortunately

¹ O'Brien, op.cit. p.120. Prof. O'Brien's reference to Craig as 'one of Owen's collaborators in Scotland' is inaccurate, as is the claim (p.118) that 'wheat bread took the place of potatoes as the staple food of the people'. This is explained below.

On the full employment aspect of Ralahine, see W. Pare, *Co-operative Agriculture* (London, 1870), pp. xviii, 53-4. Ronald Garnett has informed me that after 1823 Vandeleur set about removing small tenants at Ralahine to holdings 'more distant from his residence until his own farm increased to 700 acres'.

² Foreword by AE (George Russell) to the 1920 edition of E. T. Craig, *An Irish Commune* (Dublin, 1920), p.v.

for us, Craig himself left behind in print several useful tables of figures. These are published in his own reliable, if highly eccentric, *History of Ralahine*, which he wrote when an old man.¹ The figures are informative in several respects. For one thing, they show how remarkably commercial was the character of agriculture at Ralahine. An examination of the crop acreages given by Craig and of Vandeleur's annual rental account shows this quite clearly. Taking the wheat crop first, Tables II and III show that

TABLE III
Land Allocation at Ralahine (English Acres)

	A	R	P
Wheat	65	2	0
Barley	24	1	0
Oats	32	3	8
Potatoes	38	3	0
Turnips	30	3	4
Mangel-Wurzel	6	1	36
Vetches	15	3	6
Clover & Rye Grass	30	0	24
Fallow	23	1	27
Pastures & Plantation	280	0	7
Bog	63	2	26
Orchard	3	3	30
Houses	2	1	28
Total:	<hr/> 618	<hr/> 0	<hr/> 26

Source: Craig (1920) pp. 85-6.

the acreage under wheat was over sixty-five statute acres, while Vandeleur's claim was 320 barrels a year. If P. M. A. Bourke's pre-Famine yield data are accepted, this quantity of wheat would have required sixty-four acres of average land at the time.² Similarly, the barley acreage at Ralahine was about twenty-four, and Vandeleur's annual share 480 hundred-weight. Bourke's yield information implies an acreage of twenty-eight acres. Assuming higher than average yields, the allotted fields at Ralahine must still have been hard put to produce the required quantities of grain. It seems only fair to conclude, then, that all the barley

¹ E. T. Craig, *The Irish Land and Labour Question, Illustrated in the History of Ralahine* (London, 1893).

This work was reissued in abridged form in Dublin in 1920 (see above).

² P. M. A. Bourke 'The Average Yields of Food Crops in Ireland on the Eve of the Great Famine', *Journal of the Department of Agriculture*, lxvi, 4.

and very nearly all the wheat at Ralahine was marketed. This accords well with the qualitative evidence. But barley and wheat alone accounted for almost half the annual value added at Ralahine, and for over two-thirds of the rent payable. The tenants also undertook to supply Vandeleur with definite quantities of oats, butter, pork, and beef, all of which was sold in Limerick or Britain.¹ The oats crop at Ralahine was only partly marketed; perhaps as little as a sixth of the total. But the eleven horses – assuming they required, say, a stone a day each for half the year, and grazing for the other half – would have accounted for the bulk of the crop, and the rest would have gone on seed, hens, and oatmeal. The potato crop, also very large, was entirely unmarketed.

Detailed breakdowns like that provided by Craig are rare for the pre-Famine period, and there is the understandable temptation to over-generalize from them. However, assuming crop proportions at Ralahine did not change much with the 'new system' – and there is no strong evidence that they did – the size of the marketed share makes it difficult to support the dual economy argument that posits rigidly separated subsistence and commodity farming sectors, at least in this instance. Ralahine was backward, rural, and most of the labourers were monoglot Irish speakers, but they still worked on land that was producing for the market. In this Ralahine was probably not very different from the rest of Clare.²

Secondly, Vandeleur demanded rent worth £900 at 1830/1 prices out of an estimated total annual output of £1,700. As explained by Garnett, the £900 was a mere accounting figure, since the labourers' obligations were to be met in kind (see Table II). Actually, Vandeleur's commodity bundle was probably worth less in 1832 and 1833 than it would have been in 1830 or 1831, grain prices having dropped in the meantime,³ but his share of the total was still greater than half. Craig tells us that 'one or two of the members thought the bargain somewhat too favourable for the landlord,' and well they might; the landlord, too, admitted that the rent was 'too high'.⁴ 'It must not be supposed', wrote

¹ For a contemporary account of Limerick and its port see H. D. Inglis, *Ireland in 1834* (London, 1834), I, pp. 296–7.

² The dual economy hypothesis is forcefully advanced in J. Lynch and P. Vaizey, *Guinness's Brewery in the Irish Economy* (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 9–36, 161–176.

³ B. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 488. While the agreement specified the quantities mentioned, it also read that 'in case Mr Vandeleur wishes, he may take labour notes in lieu of the above articles, which notes are to be received in the store for articles, at the same rate as they are sold to any of the members'. But William Pare suggests that 'if the quantity of any particular kind of produce should fall off, its equivalent might be given to the landlord in some other kind of goods . . . The fact was, however, that . . . the rent was paid in the six articles named'. See William Pare, *Co-operative Agriculture* (London, 1870).

⁴ Craig, (1893), p. 55.

Connolly, rather typically, 'that the landlord . . . had allowed his enthusiasm for Socialism to run away with his self-interest.'¹ I have calculated elsewhere that total rent payments for the whole of pre-Famine Ireland accounted for about £15 million out of an aggregate agricultural output of some £50 million; so it turns out that the proportion going to the proprietor at Ralahine substantially exceeded the national average.² Not only did the labourers undertake to supply the quantities specified; they also bore the cost of delivering the cereals to Limerick and the livestock to Liverpool. Craig tells of sixteen stall-fed cattle being brought all the way to Dublin 'at a considerable loss of fat' by two Ralahine drovers. The distribution costs involved here remain problematical; to take one instance, the labour-sheet for the work-week ending January 14, 1832, included ten shillings and eightpence for the expense of conveying wheat to Limerick.³

Taking all the above into account, the charge that Vandeleur may have milked the labourers for what he could seems plausible, if not proven. AE's 'flighty idealist'⁴ had a less appealing, hard-headed side to him as well. And there is a further possible reason for suspecting Vandeleur: why should the Terry Alts, the rural labourers' secret army, want to kill his steward in the first place? The Terry Alts were what E. P. Thompson would call 'an army of redressers',⁵ and generally selected their victim carefully. Surely this means that Vandeleur or his steward had antagonized and over-exploited the Ralahine workers before the experiment, in spite of the former's Owenite ideas?⁶ Vandeleur's early interest in reform seems to have been of no avail – more a dilettante's interest, perhaps?

II

A reading of all the data available on Ralahine suggests that neither rates of pay nor consumption patterns there differed much from those of similar

¹ Connolly, *op. cit.* p. 90.

² Craig (1920), pp. 61, 95. The aggregate figures are discussed in C. Ó Gráda, 'Pre-Famine and Post-Famine Agricultural Head Rents', *Economic and Social Review*, forthcoming.

³ Craig, (1920), p. 61.

⁴ AE in Craig, (1920), p. iv.

⁵ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), part 3.

⁶ According to Pare (*op. cit.* p. 13) Hastings, Vandeleur's steward, did treat the labourers cruelly. Sadistic acts, such as depriving them of water during heavy harvest work, 'an excuse for the reapers wasting their time', apparently drove the labourers into plotting his assassination. Why a supposedly humanitarian landlord stood idly by is difficult to explain.

It seems that Hastings had vigorously supported Vandeleur's efforts at introducing machinery in 1830/1, but was against any scheme along Owenite lines. Since the Terry Alts opposed the early moves towards mechanisation rather than the purely 'co-operative' side of Ralahine, the steward's assassination may well have been partly for 'luddite' reasons. The steward was killed in April 1831; the agreement was signed in November 1831. See Garnett, *op. cit.* pp. 105-6; Pare, *op. cit.* pp. 15-32; letter from R. G. Garnett to author.

areas in the west at the time. The daily pay was eightpence for a man and fivepence for a woman, and the hours were regulated by the seasons. A few skilled men were paid extra. Such rates were common in normal times in pre-Famine Ireland. The labourers' food continued to be largely potatoes and milk. The potato acreage at Ralahine, just less than forty statute, allowed a per capita consumption of the order usual for the poor in Ireland as a whole. Here again the detail on yields is lacking. If one assumes a level of six tons per acre, then a consumption level of twelve pounds per adult male per day, with comparable allowances for the women and the young, would have left well over one hundred tons for non-human consumption.¹ The Ralahine pigs presumably consumed most of this. Milk consumption at Ralahine was very high, certainly higher than the national average. However, nothing is known about milk consumption there before the 'new system'. True, some meat was sold to members: the records show a weekly sale of 9½lbs of mutton on one bill, and of sixty pounds of pork on another. But from Craig's own qualitative remarks, it is safe to assume that meat continued to be a luxury: 'our members lived chiefly on vegetables, consisting mainly of potatoes, which could not sustain the muscular vigour of the men without the milk . . . but scarcely any animal food'. Bread was non-existent in the everyday diet; at the harvest festival of 1832 'bread made under the directions of Mrs Craig (was) liberally supplied. . . . To the members the art of making their own bread was a novelty and a mystery'.²

What was so special then about Ralahine? Firstly, in spite of the high rent, the long hours, and the uninteresting diet, the 'new system' conferred one crucial benefit – work was plentiful and year-round. And while Vandeleur's terms were far from generous, they made the work less alienating than straightforward wage-labour. There was both the pressure to make the rent through co-operative effort, and the realization that any surplus above it would be the labourers' own. As Craig put it, 'the industry and skill of hitherto apathetic, sluggish, and sullenly silent labourers became manifest, affording a gratifying testimony to the beneficial influence of the plan which awakened the spirit of the workman, by giving him an impelling motive for exertion, by assuring him a share – although a small one – in the profits arising out of his increased exertions'.³ In this context, a famous Ralahine incident bears further

¹ The figures used here are based on P.M.A. Bourke, 'The Use of the Potato Crop in Pre-Famine Ireland', *Journal of the Social and Statistical Inquiry Society*, xxi (1967–8), pp. 72–96. Bourke estimates that the average small peasant family consumed over four tons annually. Pigs consumed on average twelve pounds daily for 10½ months of the year.

² Craig, (1893), p. 167.

³ Craig, (1920), p. 134.

retelling:¹

During the winter of 1832, a hunted fox crossed the millcourse near the rickyard and took across the orchard and over a seventy-acre field of young wheat, in the best state of tillage. The field of mounted huntsmen were seen galloping towards the farmyard gates, which were solid timber, some eight feet high, fixed on rollers running on rails. By a sudden impulse the members in the farmyard closed the gates, and brought the huntsmen abruptly to bay, and thereby put a stop to the chase for the day. The horsemen were astonished at the presumption of the men of the 'new system', who had thus dared to interfere with their sport. The men who composed this wild group, chasing a poor frightened animal, were farmers, tradesmen from the neighbouring towns, clergymen and 'squireens'. The latter were the younger sons of respectable or wealthy families, like the brother of the proprietor at Ralahine, having little or no patrimony of their own, but who scorned to demean themselves by any profitable occupation. Many of the huntsmen loudly expressed their disappointment and indignation at the rudeness of the labourers daring to talk to them about 'young crops' and 'damaged fences'! I had repeatedly heard some of the younger members express themselves strongly against the practice of hunting over tillage land. I had given no advice on the matter. Had Mr Vandeleur been on the spot he would, doubtless, have permitted the horsemen their gallop over the wheatfield after the hounds and poor Reynard, who, on that occasion carried his brush home in safety.

Finch, who scrutinized the 'system' at work, tells us that there were a few idlers about the place at first, but that the 'committee knew their characters, and appointed one of these idlers to work between two others

¹ Craig, (1893), 138-9. Craig's work follows very closely indeed Pare's *Co-operative Agriculture*. It is not clear, however, whether Craig is based on Pare, or *vice-versa*. Pare himself tells us (op. cit. p. xxiii) that 'by way of making my materials more full and accurate, I have, much to his gratification, put Mr Craig under a written cross-examination, so to speak, as to all the more important details in the course of which it has been pleasing to observe the great care and scrupulosity with which his answers have been given'. Compare Craig's account of the fox-hunt with the following from Pare:

During the winter of 1832, a hunted fox crossed the mill water course near the rick-yard, and took across the orchard . . . The mounted huntsmen - young squires, farmers, and tradesmen - to keep well up with the hounds on the wheat field, would have to pass through the farm-yard; but they found that, by a sudden and mutual impulse, the large high gates of the farm-yard had been locked against them by the 'New Systemites' . . . Many of the huntsmen seemed perfectly astounded at the daring and 'impudence' of the 'New System' men. Had Mr Vandeleur been at home, he would doubtless have allowed the huntsmen their gallop over the wheat field.

Perhaps Craig felt entitled, in old age, to re-use liberally the same information that he had previously passed on to Pare? A charge of straight plagiarism would be unfair, then. A biography of Pare by R. G. Garnett, to be issued as a *Loughborough Co-operative College Paper*, is due soon.

who were industrious – at digging, for instance: he was obliged to keep up with them, or he became the subject of laughter and ridicule to the whole society'.¹ In a limited way, then, Ralahine showed that a less hierarchical work structure *per se* did not necessarily affect the level of output. The system also meant that some agricultural improvement and building would proceed; subject to the rent constraint, the labourers, through an elected committee, could choose how to allocate their work-time on the demesne. From the evidence, the landlord invested nothing out of his annual rent on improvement in 1831–3, while the labourers spent several hundred pounds of their share on repairs, seed, and new investment. Actually, the commitment to full employment for all may have been responsible for the investment, since there was little scope for more labour-intensive cultivation or direct output-augmentation in the short run. Thus improvement had less to do with security of tenure – which was not part of the agreement in any case – than with full employment.

III

Finally, there is AE's verdict that 'when John Scott Vandeleur gambled at his club he gambled away not merely his own property, but what well may have been a happier destiny for his country'.² How should one treat this rather dramatic counterfactual statement? One can think of two plausible answers, the first rather sceptical, the second more optimistic. Let us deal first with the negative side. To begin with, despite the extent of subsequent documentation, Ralahine attracted little notice at the time of the experiment. There were, predictably, visits by Robert Owen, William Thompson, and others, and one or two landlords showed some interest, but the experiment was completely overlooked in the local and national press of the day. Needless to say, there were no permanent spread effects whatever. Perhaps contemporaries were inclined to regard the 'new system' as yet another 'farming improvement', and were blind to any wider social or political implications? Perhaps no one was interested enough to report on, far less to replicate, a largely untried 'new system' elsewhere?

Secondly, one can make the case that Ralahine itself would not have lasted long in the form set out by Vandeleur. 'Might-have-been' guesses are cheap, but the following may not seem too far fetched. The occasion for introducing the 'new system', as already pointed out, was rural revolt and widespread hunger in the immediate County Clare region. Thus Vandeleur's rental income was relatively low in 1829–31 because of the

¹ Pare, *op. cit.* p. 61.

² AE, *loc. cit.* p. iv.

miserable weather and the resultant bad harvests. 'The years from 1829 to 1831', we are told, 'were "famine years" in Ireland, complicated by the severe economic distress already prevailing in both England and Ireland. By August 1831, one observer could describe the condition of the peasants as "more wretched than I could possibly imagine had I not witnessed it"'.¹ Now the harvests of 1832 and 1833, the period of the experiment, were extremely good by comparison, and quite capable of yielding the surplus demanded by the landlord. There is no direct quantitative evidence on the

TABLE IV

**Grain and Malt Exported from Irish ports to Great Britain,
1828 - 1841**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Quarters</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Quarters</i>
1828	2826	1835	2679
1829	2306	1836	2908
1830	2216	1837	3030
1831	2429	1838	3474
1832	(299)	1839	2243
1833	(2737)	1840	2328
1834	2763	1841	2856

Source: A Statement of the Quantities of each kind of Grain and of Malt imported into Great Britain from Ireland, in each year from 1800 to 1841, both inclusive (Brit. Parl. Papers, 1842, XL).

bounty of the cereal crops at Ralahine in 1832-3, but the spirit of the harvest celebrations, and an indirect remark about the orchard, would suggest excellent results.² The members were not to experience the hardships of a bad harvest for as long as the 'system' lasted. However, 'new system' or no 'new system', it is doubtful whether Ralahine could have provided Vandeleur with his commodity bundle in another bad stretch like 1829-31. As shown earlier, Vandeleur's demands implied average, or better than

¹ G. Brocker, *Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland, 1812-1836* (London, 1970), p. 204.

² See Craig, (1920), p. 86; Craig, (1893), pp. 165-7; Pare, op. cit. pp. 112-14.

average, yields for corn crops. A bad summer, which could easily result in a twenty or thirty per cent decline in yields, would have made such claims absolutely impossible to meet. Nor is it likely that the labour force at Ralahine could have cushioned themselves against bad harvests rapidly enough, by cultivating the required extra acreage annually: they were sufficiently hard pressed at seasonal peaks as it was.

On the basis of Table IV, a plausible index of pre-Famine swings in Irish agricultural output, Ralahine might well have lasted through most of the thirties. However, the same table implies that, *given the proprietor's terms*, the experiment would have had difficulty in surviving the crisis of 1839-40. If this is so, AE's claim seems both misleading and exaggerated. Yet one might also maintain, in support of AE, that arrangements such as Ralahine, given time, create their own inward dynamic. Either sufficient pressure from the labourers, or resourcefulness on Vandeleur's part, might have carried the 'system' through such a crisis. The fragility of the 'system' was clearly shown in 1833, and the evidence seems against long-run stability. Nevertheless, it would be rash to reject entirely AE's counterfactual vision.

University College, Dublin