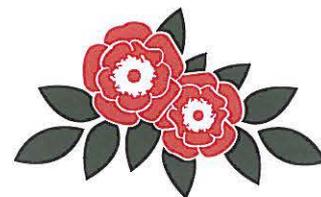


# NEWS RELEASE

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## PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# IRISH AND BRITISH MERCHANTS STOOD BY WHILE IRISH PEOPLE STARVED

*“Human life was sacrificed to ideology and more importantly, high profits,” - Christine Kinealy, Author and Irish Historian, University of Central Lancashire.*

IRISH and British merchants who exported vast quantities of food to Britain during the Great famine of 1845-51 indirectly contributed to the deaths of one million Irish citizens and prompted the immigration of a further two million people.

Historian Christine Kinealy makes the startling claim -which is bound to provoke controversy in both Ireland and Britain - in her new book entitled *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Rebellion and Ideology*.

Christine, a lecturer in Irish History at the University of Central Lancashire, debunks the popular myth that the terrible suffering of the Irish people was unavoidable after blight devastated the potato crop in 1845, or that the British Government was largely to blame for the tragedy.

She also underlines the importance of the ‘class’ division between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ within Ireland, which exacerbated the problem.

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For further information please contact **Maureen Dearden** or **Pam Culley**

Tel 01772 892403 · Fax 01772 892934

<http://www.uclan.ac.uk>

“Even allowing for a massive shortfall in potatoes - which accounted for only 20 per cent of agricultural produce - immense quantities of foodstuffs left Ireland between 1845 and 1851,” she says.

But Irish merchants - in alliance with British counterparts - ruthlessly applied the commercial ideology of the time, eerily echoed by senior Government figures in Britain during the 1980s, that you mustn't buck the market.

“The Irish merchant class was extremely powerful and the ideology of the time meant that you don't intervene in the market place. Some people in Ireland actually viewed the famine as God's will,” claims Christine, who has already written several books on the subject.

“In short, human life was sacrificed to ideology and, more importantly, high profits.”

After months of painstaking research examining the records of ship cargoes stored at Liverpool, Christine uncovered the staggering truth behind exports of food from Ireland.

For example, in 1846 186,000 oxen, 6,000 calves, 259,000 sheep and lambs and 480,000 pigs were shipped to Britain.

And in 1846 and 1847 430,000 tons of grain was exported - a quantity that would have fed two million people in Ireland for 16 months.

“The trade in eggs was also massive and remained buoyant throughout the 1840s,” reveals Christine.

“By 1850, an estimated 90 million eggs were being imported into Liverpool each year from Ireland.”

Christine argues that Irish historians have deliberately downplayed the significance of Irish food exports during 1845-51 and the actually famine itself as a major historical event because they didn't want to fuel republicanism.

However, the famine did set a precedent for international aid. The Sultan of Turkey, the Tsar of Russia, ex-slaves in the Caribbean, native Americans, the Pope and even Queen Victoria - still remembered as the 'Famine Queen' in Ireland - donated money for famine relief.

### Ends

#### Notes to editors:

- Christine Kinealy is available for interview and/or photograph. Please contact Alan Air on Mobile: 07974 765870 for further details.
- Christine completed a PhD in Modern Irish History at Trinity College, Dublin, and has lectured extensively around the world, including India and the United States.

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