

AN EXAMINATION OF THE CHANGING EXPERIENCE OF
IRISH FEMALE MIGRANTS IN LIVERPOOL, FROM THE
GREAT FAMINE TO POST-WORLD WAR TWO
RE-DEVELOPMENT

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the
University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by

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October 2014

Acknowledgements

This PhD research project was funded by a bursary from the University of Liverpool, for which I am most thankful. I owe a considerable debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Diane Urquhart, for her patient guidance and encouragement throughout the research process and preparation of this thesis. The staff of the Archives and Special Collections Department of the Sydney Jones Library, The National Archives in London and the Liverpool Record Office were most courteous and helpful, and I gratefully acknowledge their assistance. Similarly, the photocopying of documents by those at the Irish National Archives and Trinity College, Dublin was much appreciated.

I offer my sincere thanks to the women who shared their stories with me, and hope that I have done them justice.

And finally, like many researchers, I am grateful to my family and friends who provided understanding and support throughout this project.

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Introduction

This study seeks to reclaim the history of Irish women in Liverpool who formed part of a migrant community undergoing transition and change in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It also aims to contribute towards a more comparative study of Irish migrant women in port cities, such as Boston, New York, London and Sydney.

From the outset it was clear that research in this field might prove problematic since working-class migrant women left very few records of their lives, especially during the nineteenth century. The causes of this gap in the records are several, not least being that the pressures of family, along with work within and outside the home, meant that women had very little time for committing their thoughts and experiences to paper. Even if they found the time and inclination, literacy levels might have limited their ability.¹ Furthermore, when faced with the daily struggle to put bread in the mouths of their children, paper and ink must have represented a dispensable luxury.

Liverpool represented an appropriate focus for this study due to its long tradition as a key receiver of Ireland's migrants. By the first quarter of the nineteenth century Liverpool was already established as the primary point of entry into Britain and gateway to the rest of the world. The introduction of a steamship service between Dublin and Liverpool in 1819 was the first of many from other Irish ports, ensuring that Merseyside experienced

¹ In 1831 the National Irish education system was introduced. In 1901 95 *per cent* of Irish females and 93 *per cent* of Irish males had basic literacy.

the full impact of mass migration from Ireland in the years that followed.² Some arrived intent on making the most of the opportunities presented by a port massively reliant upon casual unskilled male labour and where little experience of industrialised processes was necessary. Some were temporary visitors, *en route* to the manufacturing towns of Lancashire, the industrial centres of the midlands, or London, whilst others set their sights further afield aiming to explore the possibilities offered by the United States, British North America (Canada) or Australia. And there were those whose plans were never realised; who came thus far and found, for any number of reasons, they could go no further. But whatever the rationale for their arrival in Liverpool, the impact of their presence coloured local and national attitudes towards Irish people - attitudes which frequently erupted in expressions of resentment and hostility.

The period of this study spans the mid-nineteenth century to mid-twentieth century and was chosen because it encompassed several major surges in the flow of Irish migration to Britain, including those arising from the Great Famine of 1845-51 and its aftermath, the economic depression of the 1930s, the First and Second World Wars, and the 1950s which saw the last sustained Irish migration of the twentieth century.³ This period also encompasses the rise and decline of the British Empire and with it the fortunes of the port of Liverpool, bringing enormous social and economic changes which were to impact

² Patrick Fitzgerald and Brian Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History, 1607-2007* (Basingstoke and New York, 2008), p. 163.

³ In 1996 the Republic of Ireland became a 'country of net immigration' for the first time due to rapid economic growth creating demand for labour across many sectors. In 2006-2007 the flow peaked at more than 100,000 immigrants per year. However, this figure declined rapidly in 2008 when world-wide economic downturn began to take affect. See Martin Ruhs and Emma Quinn, 'Ireland: From Rapid Immigration to Recession' in *Migration Information Source*, an online journal of the Migration Policy Institute, 1 September 2009, accessed on <http://Ireland From Rapid Immigration to Recession migrationpolicy.org.htm> (6 October 2014).

hugely on its people. The first half of this period saw the growth of Liverpool's importance as Britain's second port, as trade with the Baltic States, the Americas, the West-Indies, China and Australia - as well as within the Irish Sea - increased dramatically. Difficulties arising from the River Mersey's huge tidal range⁴ - which made the loading and unloading of cargo precarious - were addressed through the development of many acres of enclosed docks.⁵ The excavation and construction of these facilities, along with the vast warehouse complexes which served them, took several decades to complete and provided employment on a large scale for unskilled and semi-skilled male labour. Once operational, Liverpool's extensive docklands presented ongoing work opportunities not merely on the quayside but in the warehouses, refineries, and transport networks. Nevertheless, the casual nature of employment on the docks, and the large number of men available for such work, meant that competition was keen and underemployment a constant menace. As a result, high levels of poverty and social deprivation for both native-born and migrant residents persisted.

The second half of this era marked the beginning of Liverpool's decline in fortune as an international economic depression saw traffic through her docks wane. During the Second World War the city became a primary target for enemy bombing raids due to its strategic position, not merely as Britain's main port for vital trans-Atlantic supplies, but as home to the Atlantic naval fleet and its command headquarters. The effects of the devastation suffered would be felt for several decades after.

⁴ The River Mersey's tidal range is the second highest in the UK, the difference between high and low water levels ranging from 4m at neap tide to 10m at spring tide.

⁵ The docks would eventually span seven miles of waterfront from Bootle lying to the north of the city to Garston in the south.

However, throughout this entire era, the range of opportunities available to women was more limited. In contrast to the textile mills of Lancashire's manufacturing towns which provided ample work for large numbers of women, Liverpool concentrated on its maritime commerce where the import, export and processing of raw materials offered few openings for female employment. It is Liverpool's divergence from more usual patterns of female employment which prompts a consideration of to what extent, if any, the massive social and economic changes which took place between the Great Famine and the rebuilding of Britain after World War II affected the experience of Irish women. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess changes in the circumstances and attitudes which influenced lay women's decisions to migrate to Liverpool, to examine the conditions, opportunities and restrictions encountered upon arrival, and consider the bearing these factors had on their experience as Irish women. In this way a greater appreciation of the diversity of experience of migrant women can be gained which adds to the knowledge of the history of the Irish in Britain, thereby contributing to the understanding of the Irish Diaspora as a whole.

A THEORETICAL BASE

In an attempt to understand and explain the concept of international migration, anthropologists, sociologists, economists and other social scientists developed a number of theories. Early in the 1930s Hicks devised neo-classical theory which attributed population movement primarily to economic factors.⁶ In its basic form, this approach

⁶ J. R. Hicks, *The Theory of Wages* (London, 1932); W. A. Lewis, 'Economic development with unlimited supplies of labour' in *The Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies*, vol. 22 (1954), pp 139-191;

cited wage differentials - arising from variances in labour supply and demand in home and host countries - as all important, though later proponents extended this to include expected earnings and the probability of employment.⁷

Although, at first glance, this approach might appear to adequately describe the causes of migration as essentially economics-led, critics point to its homogenization of migrants and its over-simplification of complex determining factors. Thus, in assuming that circumstances affect all members of a population in the same way, and that all individuals respond in an identical fashion, this approach disregards the complicated mingling of economics with political and social factors - what Massey *et al* have termed 'the interplay of individuals, motivations and contexts'.⁸ Speaking of the difficulties of reconciling migration theory with the complex diversity of individual experience, Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland, further asserted:

We need [...] to correct the suggestion that there was a single homogenised experience of our migrant Irish either in Britain or North America. Perhaps it is just as well that such a general theory did not emerge as would contain the fallacious myth of a common experience, be it at the destination, the origin, or the process itself.⁹

J. Harris and M. P. Todaro, 'Migration, unemployment and development: A two-sector analysis' in *American Economic Review*, vol. 60 (1970), pp 126-142.

⁷ T. Bauer and K. F. Zimmerman, 'Assessment of possible migration pressure and its labor market impact following EU enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe', a study for the Department of Education and Employment, U.K. in *IZA Research Report*, no. 3 (July 1999); D. Massey, J. Arango, G. Hugo, A. Kouaouci, A. Pellegrino and J. E. Taylor, 'Theories of international migration: a review and appraisal' in *Population and Development Review*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1993), pp 431-466.

⁸ Massey *et al*, 'Theories of international migration', p. 16.

⁹ Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland, 'Reflecting on Irish Migration: Some issues for the Social Sciences', lecture given at N.Y.C. Gluksman Ireland House, U.S.A., 3rd May 2012, accessed on <http://www.president.ie/speeches/reflecting-on-irish-migrations-some-issues-for-the-social-sciences/> on 20 May 2014.

Furthermore, in placing emphasis on the autonomy of the individual as a voluntary agent, neo-classical theory does not take into account the role of family or community in decision-making surrounding who should migrate and when, and ignores the importance of established support networks in determining destination, which may not necessarily equate with where wages are highest. Nor does it address questions as to whether an escape from poverty should be considered choice or necessity and the resultant migration termed 'voluntary' or 'forced'.

In response to these and other criticisms, subsequent theories elaborate or challenge the neo-classical model. In addition, they reflect changes in patterns of international migration as, from the middle of the twentieth century, the developing world began to supersede Europe as the main source of migrants. Firstly, in adjusting the focus of neo-classical theory from a 'macro' to a 'micro' level, Sjaardstad facilitated a consideration of individual choice as a significant determinant of migration, acknowledging the impact of factors such as age, gender, marital status and skill level - an approach later described as 'human capital theory' by Todaro.¹⁰ Critics of this approach point to its overly optimistic view of migration which, they argue, is not always a process undertaken voluntarily.¹¹ In

¹⁰ Larry Sjaadstad, 'The costs and returns of human migration' in *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 70 (1962), pp 80-93; Michael P. Todaro, 'A model of labor migration and urban unemployment in less-developed countries' in *American Economic Review*, vol. 59 (1969), pp 138-148.

¹¹ Human Capital theory is criticized for ignoring the breakdown of traditional village communities and their economies which leads to passive, non-productive and remittance-dependent communities. See Geoffrey Hayes, 'Migration, metascience, and development policy in Island Polynesia' in *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1991), pp 1-58; Massey *et al*, 'Theories of international migration'. Durand *et al* assert that overdependence on remittances discourages autonomous economic growth in migrant-sending countries. See J. Durand, W. Kandel, E. A. Parrado and S. D. Massey, 'Migradollars and Development: a reconsideration of the Mexican case' in *International Migration Review*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1996), pp 423-44. Adams points to the 'brain drain' - loss of the brightest and best - and Penninx looks at the 'brawn drain', each of which rob societies of their most able and productive members. See Walter Adams, *The Brain Drain* (New York, 1969); Rinus Penninx, 'A Critical Review of Theory and Practice: The case of Turkey' in *International Migration Review*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1982), pp 781-818; J. R. Lewis,

addition, the 'push-pull' framework - also linked to neo-classical theory - perpetuates the view that migration is primarily an economics-led process. Here, the comparison of circumstances in the sending and receiving societies highlights their relational nature and suggests each forms a mirror image of the other.¹² However, this 'mirroring' can be problematic in the identification of primary determining factors.¹³

By comparison, new economics theory approaches migration from the viewpoint of mutual interdependence rather than individual independence, regarding the decision to migrate as the response of a family or community rather than the action of a lone individual.¹⁴ In addition, it presents migration as a risk-aversion strategy adopted in the face of a whole range of variables arising in the home country.¹⁵ Whilst this approach recognises the importance of mutual dependence and support structures - typically represented in the form of migrants' remittances - it is rightly criticised for its failure to acknowledge the significance of family dynamics, particularly with regard to gender roles.¹⁶

'International Labour Migration and Uneven Regional Development in Labour Exporting Countries' in *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, vol. 77, no. 1 (1986), pp 27-41. Lipton asserts that Human Capital theory overlooks the imbalance created amongst providers and dependents in the home community. See Michael Lipton, 'Migration from the Rural Areas of Poor Countries: The impact on rural productivity and income distribution' in *World Development*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1980), pp 1-24.

¹² Bauer and Zimmerman, 'Assessment of possible migration pressure'.

¹³ Hein de Haas, 'Migration and development: A theoretical perspective' in *International Migration Institute Working Paper no. 9*, University of Oxford, (2008).

¹⁴ Oded Stark, *The Migration of Labour* (Cambridge, 1991).

¹⁵ *Ibid*; O. Stark, 'Tales of Migration Without Wage Differentials: Individual, Family, and Community Contexts', Paper prepared for Conference on African Migration in Comparative Perspective, Johannesburg, South Africa, 4-7 June 2003.

¹⁶ Thomas Faist, *The Volumes and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces* (Oxford, 2000).

A wider consideration of factors shaping migration emerged in world systems theory which links determinants of migration to structural changes in world markets, regarding migration as a result of globalisation brought about by the increasing interdependence of economies and the emergence of new forms of production.¹⁷ It considers migration as an inevitable part of the disruption of traditional work patterns in the homeland brought about by capitalist growth and development, the individual pressured by structural forces rather than exercising free-choice.¹⁸ This might be viewed as particularly relevant to Ireland in the immediate post-Famine era, when subsistence plots and labour-intensive arable farming were giving way to large-scale grazing, creating a surplus population.

Similarly, dual labour market theory regards migration as a product of changes in the structure of the economy, but examines migration from the perspective of the host country. Seeking to explain the continual flow of migrants to areas of unemployment, it describes a two-layered economic structure within which migrant labour is required to undertake low-skilled or low-status work rejected by the local labour force. This need for low-skilled labour may result in the formulation of official recruitment policies and managed immigration schemes. Certainly, Britain's industrial and urban development created a demand for low-skilled male labour which was frequently met by Irish migrants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But it also meant growth in the lower reaches of the service sector - domestic service, laundries and hotels - which created openings which were accessible to Irish women.

¹⁷ Massey *et al*, 'Theories of international migration'; Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labour and Capital. A Study of international investment and labor flows* (Cambridge, 1998); Ronald Skeldon, *Migration and Development: A Global Perspective* (Harlow, 1997); Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization Since 1870* (Cambridge, 2003).

¹⁸ de Haas, 'Migration and development'.

The network theory approach is less concerned with determining contributing factors than with identifying those that perpetuate migration.¹⁹ Examining personal relationships between migrants and non-migrants from sociological and anthropological perspectives, its proponents suggest that as migrants' support networks develop they become broader frameworks, aiding the continuation of migration even when forces such as wage differentials or recruitment policies cease to feature. These diaspora networks thus help to maintain a culture of migration in the home country and influence migrants in their choice of destination.²⁰ In addition, they impact on patterns of migrant settlement, producing areas of higher concentration or 'migration regimes' rather than even distribution across an entire country.²¹ Evidence for a culture of emigration in Ireland emerged in the nineteenth century especially in the post-famine period and perpetuated so that during the 1950s more than one in three of the population were expected to leave their homeland.²² Chain migration proved an important factor in Irish migration patterns, particularly amongst women, the advice and financial assistance of earlier migrants frequently determining who followed them and when. Furthermore, the influence of migrants' networks was clearly exhibited in variations in the concentration of Irish settlement in Britain, not merely regionally but in certain towns, and even districts within those towns, which was another long-lived feature of Irish migrant residency.

¹⁹ Massey *et al*, 'Theories of international migration'.

²⁰ Steven Vertovec, 'Transnational networks and skilled labor migration', Paper given at the conference: Ladenburger Diskurs "Migration" Gottlieb Daimler- und Karl Benz-Stiftung, Ladenburg, 14-15 February 2002; Chritian Dustmann and Albrecht Glitz, *Immigration, Jobs and Wages: Theory, Evidence and Opinion*, Centre for Research and Analysis of Migration, CCPR (London, 2005).

²¹ Faist, *The Volumes and Dynamics*.

²² Contribution by Donald Nevin, *Symposium on the Report of the Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems* (Dublin, 1956), p. 113.

Alternatively, migration systems theory views the subject from a geographical standpoint.²³ It asserts that migration develops between spaces with existing connections - for example, colonial or trade links - and affects the entire development structure in both home and host societies.²⁴ Linked to this is the concept of cumulative causation which argues that migration is self-perpetuating and self-sustaining. It cites support networks as an important feature of this, but also views a culture of migration, uneven distribution of human capital and the stigmatisation of work usually undertaken by migrants as contributing factors.²⁵ Each of these elements might be cited as important contributors to the high levels of Irish migration evident throughout the period covered by this study. The existence of support networks is visible in the proliferation of Liverpool's Irish societies and charities which existed alongside the informal support afforded by kinship, creed and community channels. A culture of migration was fostered in Ireland through the sending of remittances which simultaneously advertised the possible benefits of migration and created a degree of dependence upon migrant incomes. As world systems theory also highlights, an uneven distribution of human capital resulted from developments in post-Famine social structure which saw the adoption of impartible inheritance create a surplus rural population unlikely to marry and form independent households.²⁶ At the same time, a demand for low-skilled labour in the industrial and urban centres of nearby Britain provided alternative opportunities in fields of

²³ Akin Magobunje, 'Systems approach to the theory of rural-urban migration' in *Geographical Analysis*, vol. 2 (1970), pp 1-18.

²⁴ de Haas, 'Migration and development'.

²⁵ Joachim Arango, 'Explaining migration: a critical view' in *International Social Science Journal*, vol. 52 (2000), pp 283-96; Douglas S. Massey, 'Why does migration occur? A theoretical synthesis' in Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz and Josh DeWind (eds), *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience* (New York, 1999), pp 34-52.

²⁶ This is discussed further in Parts Two and Three of this thesis.

employment less attractive to native workers (which was also evident in the United States).

Network theory, migration systems theory and cumulative causation have expanded into the theory of transnational social spaces which is concerned with the phenomenon of migrants who maintain economic, cultural, political and social connections in both home and host countries.²⁷ Through an examination of these transnational ties it seeks to facilitate a better understanding of adaptation amongst migrants, but also the impact of migration on home and host societies. The maintenance of dense networks of transnational involvement is particularly evident amongst women migrants in their sending of remittances (often more regularly and over a more sustained timeframe than their male counterparts), their involvement in chain migration, and their provision of care and support across national boundaries. Examples of this are found amongst Irish women migrants whose remittances paid the rent on the family farm, provided dowries for sisters and financed the migration of siblings. They are also seen in the practical assistance afforded to new arrivals in the host society in the form of accommodation and employment contacts, and in emotional support for those struggling as strangers in a new land. They are further evident in the family relationships maintained across the Irish Sea by female kinship networks, providing practical, financial and emotional support.

²⁷ Caroline Bretell and J. F. Hollifield, *Migration Theory* (New York, 2008); A. Portes, 'Introduction: The debates and significance of immigrant transnationalism' in *Global Networks*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2001), pp 181-94; Faist, 'Volumes and dynamics'; Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc, 'From Migrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration' in *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 1 (January 1995), pp 48-63.

In short, some theorists concentrate on circumstances within the home society whilst others focus on conditions in the host society. Some stress the plight of the individual and others highlight the wider social structures within which they exist and operate. Such a fragmented approach - where independent theories are embraced by different disciplines or schools of research - has been rightly criticised as, ‘a string of separate, generally unconnected theories, models or frameworks, rather than a cumulative sequence of contributions that build upon previous blocks.’²⁸ In advancing perspectives which appear to be ‘competing and mutually exclusive’, the formulation of a unifying theoretical model has been rendered unfeasible.²⁹ However, recent years have witnessed efforts to synthesise theories as steps are taken towards the intellectual coherence of migration studies as a field of research. In the words of Irish President Michael D. Higgins:

No one academic discipline is going to tell us everything we want to know about the Irish Diaspora. The study of migration, emigration, immigration, population movements, flight scattering, networks, transnational communities, diaspora - this study demands an interdisciplinary approach.³⁰

Furthermore, migration theories have failed to explain changes in migration patterns, or to adequately describe migration process over an extended timeframe. These problems are particularly relevant within the context of Irish migration which has witnessed changes in destination as well as in the number and gender distribution of migrants over

²⁸ Arango, ‘Explaining migration’, p. 283.

²⁹ ‘Introduction to Part I: Theories and Concepts of International Migration’, C. Hirschman, P. Kasinitz and J. De Wind (eds), *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience* (New York, 1999), p. 13 and p. 14.

³⁰ Higgins, ‘Reflecting on Irish Migration’.

its long history. The sheer longevity of Irish migration mitigates against the ‘simple patterns or relationships’ promoted by a single-strand theory approach, demanding instead a more open and considered multidisciplinary engagement with its complex issues.³¹

Thus, several migration theories possess elements or points of contact compatible with the case of Irish female migration. Broadly speaking, the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ model linked to neo-classical theory - in which reported conditions in one society are viewed as attractions when compared with less favourable conditions in another - might be most readily applied. Here, the limited employment opportunities, low wages or restrictive social practices encountered at home became ‘push’ factors, whilst greater opportunities, higher wages or better living conditions reported in the new society became ‘pull’ factors, stimulating migration. However, other elements are also identifiable. Migration as a community response to adversity - where the benefit to the individual migrant is of secondary importance to the good of the community as a whole - is evident in Ireland’s immediate post-Famine era, and might be said to correspond with new economics theory. In utilising migration as a means of diversification through the receiving of remittances, communities reduced their vulnerability to local risk factors, thereby increasing their chances of survival. Meanwhile, human capital theory’s acknowledgement of age, gender and marital status, for example, as important determining factors in the decision to migrate correlates with patterns of female migration from Ireland throughout the era covered by this study, as large numbers of single women with few marketable skills and

³¹ Patrick Fitzgerald and Brian Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History, 1607-2007* (Basingstoke and New York, 2008), p. 9.

marriage prospects set out in search of wages and opportunities unavailable at home. Ireland's gradual abandonment of subsistence farming in favour of large-scale grazing during the late nineteenth century, and its role as supplier of raw materials and labour for Britain's industrialising process, might be viewed in terms of world systems theory. Similarly, dual labour market theory describes Britain's demand for low-skilled and low-status labour unattractive to the native-born workforce, which was met by Irish-born migrants. Evidence for the influence of relationship networks both at home and in the host country, outlined in network theory, is found in Ireland's long-standing culture of migration, and also in the enclaves of high migrant settlement in the host country. Finally, migration systems theory adequately describes the colonial and trade links operating between Ireland and Britain which influenced both societies, establishing networks of communication and settlement to perpetuate the flow of migration.

One aspect of the interdisciplinary approach of recent years has been engagement with issues surrounding gender, with the aim of creating a better understanding of the social processes of migration. Given the unusually high levels of sustained Irish female migration this is especially significant. Joan Wallach Scott makes the assertion that:

Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.³²

³² Joan Wallach Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', in Joan Wallach Scott (ed.), *Feminism and History* (New York, 1996), pp 167-169.

Therefore, migration cannot be regarded as gender-neutral since gender difference - in relations and identities - is a contributing factor in both the conditions which bring about migration, and those encountered within the host nations. Yet, despite the household being acknowledged as the social unit engaged in decision processes regarding whether migration took place, who would go and when³³ - and recognition of the gendered nature of hierarchies of power within that social unit³⁴ - the importance of gender to migration was long overlooked.³⁵ Here the parallels with the broader women's historical frame are striking; women's history only emerged as an academic discipline in the 1970s.³⁶

In Silvia Pedraza's examination of the interaction of ethnicity, gender and class in the process of migration and settlement, she asserted that the representation of migrants as young, economically-motivated males 'overshadowed the reality of migration streams that were dominated by women.'³⁷ In those instances where female migration was acknowledged, it was frequently attributed merely to the movement of wives accompanying their husbands, or joining their spouses in order to re-unite families.³⁸ For example, within the context of Irish migration, the years immediately after the Great Famine - and again towards the end of the nineteenth century - saw the number of women

³³ S. Grasmuck and P. R. Pessar, *Between Two Islands: Dominican International Migration* (Berkeley, 1991).

³⁴ Pierrette Hondagnau-Sotelo, 'Family and community in the migration of Mexican undocumented immigrant women' in M. T. Segal and V. Demos (eds), *Ethnic Women: A Multiple Status Reality* (New York, 1991), pp 173-185.

³⁵ M. Boyd, 'Family and personal networks in international migration: recent developments and new agendas' in *International Migration Review*, vol. 23 (1989), pp 638-70, p. 656.

³⁶ This is discussed further in the Literature Review, pp 31-42.

³⁷ Silvia Pedraza, 'Women and Migration: The Social Consequences of Gender' in *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 17 (1991), pp 303-325, pp 303-304.

³⁸ See Everett S. Lee 'A Theory of Migration' in *Demography*, vol. 3 (1966), pp 309-31, p. 51; M. F. Houstoun, R. G. Kramer and J. M. Barrett, 'Female predominance of immigration to the United States since 1930: a first look' in *International Migration Review*, vol. 18 (1984), pp 908-63, p. 919.

migrants exceed that of men.³⁹ Yet, despite their greater numbers, for many years women were excluded from the emigration narrative. This androcentric focus meant that many aspects of the migration and settlement process were neglected so that the image of Irish migration became distorted, the Irish navy becoming the iconic figure of the Diaspora at the expense of female representations. Examples are found in works ranging from John Denvir's *The Irish in Britain from the Earliest Times to the Fall and Death of Parnell* (1892) to Donald M. MacRaid's *The Irish in Modern Britain, 1750-1922* (1999).⁴⁰ In the first, Denvir's assessment of the achievements of the Irish in Liverpool records that, 'Irishmen are gradually emerging from the ranks of unskilled labour and becoming more numerous among the artisans, shopkeepers, merchants, and professional classes.'⁴¹ He makes no mention of the efforts or achievements of Irish women. In the second MacRaid asserts that for Irish migrants, '...in England - where Liverpool and south Lancashire dominate our perceptions - dock work, portering and general labouring were dominant.'⁴² Since, even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women were not generally employed in these fields it would seem that MacRaid's perceptions - like Denvir's a century earlier - are limited to trends in male employment. As a consequence, the contribution made by more than half the group supposedly under consideration is totally overlooked.

³⁹ David Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration 1801-1921*, volume 1 in the series 'Studies in Irish Economic and Social History' (Dublin, 1984), pp 7-8.

⁴⁰ John Denvir, *The Irish in Britain from the Earliest Times to the Fall and Death of Parnell* (London, 1892); Donald M. MacRaid, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain, 1750-1922* (Basingstoke, 1999).

⁴¹ Denvir, *The Irish in Britain*, p. 435.

⁴² MacRaid, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain*, p. 66.

Paradoxically, Margaret Kelleher has noted the prevalence of the female form or character in literary depictions of the Great Famine - 'so that tears might be shed and the inexpressible expressed' - directing attention towards John Banville's *Birchwood* and Eavan Boland's *The Making of an Irish Goddess*.⁴³ Similarly, the feminisation of Famine is evident in the works of nineteenth-century contemporary commentators since the majority of visual representations of the starving Irish - whether at home in Ireland or newly arrived on the streets of Britain - concentrated on the plight of women and children.⁴⁴ These feminised representations of want and suffering were clearly intended to shock the sensibilities of the viewer, but were also an expression of Victorian ideas concerning which sectors of the teeming masses of paupers were deserving of sympathy and charity, and which were not. As such, their message is one of woman's helplessness rather than of her resilience in the face of adversity.

Moreover, this depiction of female migrants as passive victims rather than active participants is not confined to representations of those fleeing the Great Famine, but is a recurring theme employed by different factions for various purposes over many decades. For example, when, in the late nineteenth century, Liverpool journalists wished to expose the great disparity between the affluent and the needy of the town, the primary image they presented was that of the Irish female street vendor.⁴⁵ And when, during the 1930s, the Irish authorities wished to deter young women from leaving their homeland, a booklet

⁴³ Margaret Kelleher, 'Irish Famine in Literature' in Cathal Poirier (ed.), *The Great Irish Famine*, part of the Thomas Davis Lecture Series, Michael Littleton (gen. ed.), (Cork, 1995), pp 246-7. The nature of migration literature is further discussed in the Literature Review, pp 31-42.

⁴⁴ Examples such as those entitled 'Bridget O'Donnel and Children' and 'Woman Begging at Clonakilty' are amongst those reproduced in John Killen (ed.), *The Famine Decade: Contemporary Accounts, 1841-1851* (Belfast, 1995), p. 111 and p. 232.

⁴⁵ 'Squalid Liverpool', *Liverpool Daily Post*, 5-10 Nov, 1883.

was produced featuring cautionary tales of impressionable young women from rural areas dazzled by the attractions of city life in Britain and ‘led astray’ by predatory men.⁴⁶ Most importantly, their voice is notably absent; nowhere are their thoughts, feelings or words recorded first hand. Rather, their representation is at the hands of middle-class commentators with an alternative agenda.

The inclusion of women into migration history since the 1980s has resulted in a shift in focus, not merely away from the exclusive study of the ‘public’ sphere towards the ‘private’, but in encompassing the conjunction between the two.⁴⁷ Concern with definitions of masculinity and femininity, the separation of ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres of life, and the assignment of women to the latter, were not confined to Victorian society; examples are found in other locations and at other times. For example, Partha Chatterjee describes how India’s anticolonial nationalist struggle saw middle-class Bengali men draw similar distinctions as a way of resolving tensions surrounding modernisation along European lines and the attempt to maintain a traditional cultural identity as the foundation for assertions of national independence.⁴⁸ Here, conflicting cultural ideologies regarding family and the status of women were reconciled through the separation of the ‘world’ and

⁴⁶ Gertrude Gaffney, *Emigration to England: What You Should Know About It - Advice to Irish Girls* (Dublin, 1937).

⁴⁷ For examples of early works exploring Irish women’s engagement with migration see H. R. Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America* (Baltimore, 1983); P. Jackson, ‘Women in Nineteenth Century Irish Emigration’ in *International Migration Review*, vol. 18, no. 4 (1984), pp 1004-20; M. Lennon *et al*, *Across the Water: Irish Women’s Lives in Britain* (London, 1988); J. Rudd, ‘Invisible Exports: The Emigration of Irish Women this Century’ in *Women’s Studies International Forum*, vol. 11 (1988), pp 307-11; J. R. Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women’s Emigration from Ireland, 1885-1920* (Lexington, 1989); B. Walter, *Gender and Irish Migration to Britain* (Cambridge, 1989); M. Boyd, ‘Family and Personal Networks in International Migration: recent developments and new agendas’ in *International Migration Review*, vol. 23 (1989), pp 638-70.

⁴⁸ See Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (Delhi, 1986). Also P. Chatterjee, ‘Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India’ in *American Ethnologist*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1989), pp 622-33.

the 'home', the 'material' and the 'spiritual'. Central to this was the preservation of the home as an 'uncolonized space'; a place apart where traditional identities might be retained and reinforced and where women, shielded from outside influence, might become the custodians of traditional culture.⁴⁹ Likewise, Judith Brown presents thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Tuscany as a place where female mobility and opportunities were restricted through the portrayal of women as 'not merely caretakers of the material welfare of their home, but also as the guardians of its religious and moral values.'⁵⁰ This emphasis on the role of women as mother, and its elevation at the expense of all other roles, is also noted by Elena Cabazali *et al* in representations of women during the Spanish Civil War:

It is always linked to characteristics such as abnegation, sacrifice, and protection. In general, it is a passive role, fundamentally governed by the needs of men.⁵¹

Parallels might be drawn between these responses and those displayed in Ireland - particularly in the years immediately after independence - where the home was increasingly idealised as the nurturing centre of the nation's cultural and spiritual identity. Within this hallowed domestic space women were charged with the

⁴⁹ See Mrinalini Sinha, 'Gender in the Critiques of Colonialism and Nationalism: Locating the 'Indian Woman'' in Joan Wallach Scott (ed.), *Feminism and History* (New York, 1996), pp 477-504, p. 482; Margaret Strobel and Marjorie Bingham, 'The Theory and Practice of Women's History and Gender History in Global Perspective', Appendix B. 'Comparative World History: Women and Nationalism in Nationalist Movements and Discourse' in Bonnie G. Smith (ed.), *Women's History in Global Perspective*, vol. 1 (Illinois and Chicago, 2004), pp 9-39, p. 37.

⁵⁰ Judith Brown, 'A Woman's Place Was in the Home: Women's Work in Renaissance Tuscany' in Margaret Ferguson, Maureen W. Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers (eds), *Rewriting the Renaissance* (Chicago, 1986), pp 215-16.

⁵¹ Elena Cabezali, Matilde Cuevas, and Maria Teresa Chicote, 'Myth as Suppression: Motherhood and the historical consciousness of the Women of Madrid, 1936-9' in Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (eds), *The Myths We Live By*, part of the 'History Workshop' series (London and New York, 1990), p. 162.

preservation of the nation's moral and religious values, and their transmission to the next generation. Therefore, although Ireland's national identity was associated with the 'public' and 'political' domain from which women were excluded, and women were firmly assigned to the 'private' and 'domestic' domain, the contribution made by women to the construction and continuation of national identity cannot be overlooked.⁵²

Bearing this in mind, it is not the intention of this study to suggest the existence of an homogenous group termed 'Irish women migrants', nor to imply that all Irish women's experience of migration was identical. Rather, it seeks to acknowledge the fact that at least half of those who left Ireland during this period were female, and that constructs surrounding gender had a bearing on both the causes of their leaving their homeland and the challenges they faced as migrants in a maritime metropolis. It also seeks to reclaim some of the Irish female migrant voice.

Naturally, there was a time when all history was oral history. Even when these ancient sagas and genealogies began to be gathered together and committed to writing, it was the information gleaned from the mouths of those who knew or remembered rather than from documents which was considered the most reliable.⁵³ This view was to prevail for many centuries, so that in 1773 Samuel Johnson suggested the compilation of an accurate and impartial history of the 1745 Highland Scottish Rebellion should be based upon eye

⁵² See Mrinalina Sinha, 'Gender and Nation' in Bonnie G. Smith (ed.), *Women's History in Global Perspective Vol. 1* (Urbana and Chicago, 2004), pp 229-274 for a full discussion of gender difference in relation to representations of nationhood.

⁵³ Bede, Preface to *History of the English Church and People*, translated by L. Shirley-Price (London, 1955), p. 34.

witness accounts.⁵⁴ However, by the late nineteenth century the status of documentary evidence began to take precedence in historical research, perhaps best illustrated by the assertion made by Langlois and Seignobos: ‘The historian works with documents.... There is no substitute for documents: no documents, no history.’⁵⁵ Yet, even then, the field-work approach of social historians such as Engles, Mayhew, Booth and Rowntree continued to treat the recorded experiences of ordinary people as an important resource.⁵⁶

During the twentieth century researchers of history and the social sciences rediscovered the value of oral sources, although different disciplines utilised various terms to describe them; ‘oral histories’, ‘life (hi)stories’, ‘life narratives’ and so forth.⁵⁷ Indeed, the development of interdisciplinary approaches to social history saw their use alongside stories, ballads and children’s street games to capture a vast range of material previously deemed unworthy of formal documentation.⁵⁸ Of particular note is the establishment of the Irish Folklore Commission in the 1930s and its engagement in the collection of oral histories, especially with regards to memories of the Great Famine.⁵⁹ The value of these and similar sources lies in the access they provide to ‘hidden, undocumented worlds’,⁶⁰ in the human context they bring in affording ‘flesh’ to the ‘bare bones’ of demographic

⁵⁴ James Boswell, *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson* (London, 1785), pp 425-6.

⁵⁵ C. V. Langlois and C. Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History*, translated by G. G. Berry (1898), p. 17.

⁵⁶ Friedrich Engles, *Condition of the Working Class in England* (London, 1844); Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London, 1851); Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1889); B. S. Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (London, 1902).

⁵⁷ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Preface to the third edition (Oxford and New York, 1978, 1988, 2000), pp xi-xii.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁹ The Irish Folklore Commission instituted the collection of ‘folk memory’ relating to the Great Famine, including *Bailiuchan na Scol* (The Schools Collection) collected from school children in 1937-8, as well as interviews and questionnaires conducted by fieldworkers in 1945-6. Material is held in the Archives of the Irish Folklore Commission, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin.

⁶⁰ Robert Perks, *Oral History: Talking About The Past* (London, 1992, second edition 1995), p. 27.

statistics, and in the voice they give to those marginalised members of society for whom there are no formal avenues of discourse.

As already discussed, the absence of the female voice from discourse surrounding Irish migration formed an important part of the (non)representation of women migrants. Reports of Irish women's presence in Liverpool, their actions and the treatment they received came for the most part from the viewpoint of doctors, clergymen, police and charity officials - whose opinions were often coloured by the moral sensibilities, political bias and racial prejudice of British middle-class men of some social standing occupying positions of authority. These men recorded and commented on the lives of those who were alien to them in every way - as women, as migrants, as Irish, and as working-class. Consequently, we find their image frequently drawn with a male hand from a male perspective; nowhere do we find a female self portrait.⁶¹

Because of this it was considered important to attempt to include, where possible, personal narratives in this study. This was accomplished through face-to-face interviews with women who had migrated to Liverpool from various parts of Ireland during the 1950s, conducted by the author. This formed a small case study involving six respondents contacted through an oral history project at an Irish community centre in Liverpool.⁶² In addition, recollections of the migration experience of the author's great-

⁶¹ An exception to this overwhelmingly male perspective was that of social reformer Eleanor F. Rathbone. Her work is discussed in Part Two of this thesis.

⁶² Material gathered from these interviews is discussed in Part Three of this thesis. The selection of participants is discussed in the Appendix, 'Liverpool Case Study - Female Irish Migrants of the 1940s and 1950s, Methodology and Biographical Notes'. The interviews were conducted under the guidance and approval of the University of Liverpool Ethics Committee.

grandmother and her sisters, handed down orally from mother to daughter and passing into family tradition, allowed access to details of female chain migration and kin networks at the turn of the twentieth century. Its recording was conducted through informal interviews with the author's aunt. However, far from suggesting that this oral material provided a 'purer', 'unadulterated' version of migration history, it was included with the recognition and acknowledgement that memory is a complex process, and that the collection of oral histories raises questions surrounding memory, its recollection, and its telling.⁶³ In the words of Rosalind Thomas:

People do not just remember what happened to them. Deep and intricate processes of recall involve selection, formation, and re-formation of the original experiences. Our memories are complicated products of later alteration, structuring selection, and improvement: they can be subtly changed by our later preoccupations. Memories of feelings and opinions are particularly unreliable.⁶⁴

Therefore, what is recalled, what is omitted, and the reasons for this must be weighed. But whilst sceptics might dismiss individual oral evidence as too subjective, it must be remembered that all historical sources - oral or documentary - are 'subject to the same processes of selectivity, interpretation and partiality'.⁶⁵ As Donald A. Ritchie points out: 'A statement is not necessarily truer if written down at the time than if recalled later in testimony. Whether written or oral, evidence must be convincing and verifiable.'⁶⁶

⁶³ See Joan Sangster, 'Telling our Stories: Feminist debates and the use of oral history' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London and New York, 1998, reprinted 2000), pp 87-100, p. 88.

⁶⁴ Rosalind Thomas, 'Ancient Greek family tradition and democracy: from oral history to myth' in R. Samuel and P. Thompson (eds), *The Myth We Live By*, (London and New York, 1990), p. 204.

⁶⁵ Perks, *Oral History*, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (New York, 1995), p. 92.

The role of the interviewer is also important, whether the approach be as ‘neutral questioner’ or ‘active agent’.⁶⁷ Michael Frisch promoted the idea of ‘shared authorship’, envisioning both interviewer and interviewee as jointly responsible for the material created.⁶⁸ And, since the questions asked, how they are asked, and the way in which answers are later interpreted each impact upon the nature of the material produced, to some extent at least the oral history might be said to be a joint venture. However, since the aim is to record the respondent’s account, the interviewer must be aware that too much interjection risks distortion.

With this in mind, a formal question and answer session was considered too rigid for this case study since it might inhibit full responses. Conversely, a free-ranging narrative approach was rejected on the grounds that it might lack focus. Therefore a semi-structured approach was favoured for interviews conducted as part of this study. Before interviews commenced, respondents were asked to consider their experience with regards to such issues as family background, decision to migrate, the attitude of family towards migration, work opportunities, the response of migrants to a new society and the response of the host society to migrants. In interview, opening questions were used to introduce the respondent and establish their birthplace and family background, before allowing them to talk freely and thus ‘tell their story’ in their own way. As far as possible, further questions were only interjected to encourage greater detail or clarify a point.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 8.

⁶⁸ See Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany, 1990), pp xx-xxiii.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Primary sources used in this study range from parliamentary papers, which indicate official attitudes and concerns at a national level, to the annual reports of philanthropic and charitable institutions, which reveal the voluntary response to local conditions of poverty and sickness, but can also present a narrative intended to evoke sympathy and philanthropic donation. The records of police and court proceedings allow a glimpse at the conflict between official and 'street' attitudes to justice and morality, whilst contemporary press reports provide a window on prevailing viewpoints amongst the reading public. Each of these sources goes some way to revealing the chauvinism and prejudices - based on race, politics, sex, class and religion - prevalent at the time since the vast majority present the voice of authority; middle-class men who wielded social or political influence. Writing from the outside, they perceived the Irish as a social problem requiring a solution. The voice of those commented upon - female, immigrant and working class - is absent, particularly in sources pertaining to the earlier years covered by this study.

One example is found in the 1836 government enquiry into the state of the Irish poor in Britain, where witness statements were gathered from local officials and businessmen in Liverpool; no one sought the opinions or concerns of the Irish migrants themselves, least of all migrant women. Indeed, the only woman invited to give evidence was the matron of a charitable maternity hospital, which speaks of the prevailing opinion of the day that the only aspect of life in which a woman might possess any level of expertise was

childbearing. Moreover, the fact that the matron was clearly hostile to Irish applicants for charity reflects the multiple layers of prejudice and discrimination endured by Irish women.⁶⁹

Throughout the following century numerous surveys were conducted to assess levels of poverty in Liverpool, ranging from Finch's *Statistics of the Vauxhall Ward* (1842) to Caradog Jones's *Social Survey of Merseyside* series (1931-36).⁷⁰ Rates of prostitution and infant mortality were also measured and recorded, each report seemingly intent on perpetuating the belief that such problems would not exist if the poor would cease their deviant behaviour and instead conform to the norms of polite English society.⁷¹ In this they betray a failure on behalf of commentators to relate to or engage with those under scrutiny.

In addition to contending with bias and prejudice, there are gaps in available data arising from several causes. On a national scale, census records for the nineteenth century tend to underestimate the number of working women as enumerators did not record multiple jobs or part-time work. Also, although the compilers of the 1861 census noted birthplace of migrants entering Britain, and carefully calculated the proportion aged above and below twenty years, the number of female migrants was not recorded. Similarly, in some

⁶⁹ Parliamentary Papers, *Report of the Commission for Inquiry into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland, 1836*, Appendix G, The State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, no. II, State of the Irish Poor in Liverpool, Minutes of Evidence, pp 8-41.

⁷⁰ J. Finch, *Statistics of the Vauxhall Ward: the Conditions of the Working Class in Liverpool, 1842* (facsimile edition with introduction by Harold Hikins, Liverpool, 1986); D. Caradog Jones, *Social Survey of Merseyside* series (Liverpool, 1931-36).

⁷¹ W. Bevan, *Prostitution in the Borough of Liverpool: A Lecture Delivered in the Music Hall, 3 June 1843* (Liverpool, London, Glasgow and Leeds, 1843); A. Newsholme, 'Second Report on Infant and Child Mortality' in *42nd Annual Report of Local Government Board, 1812-13, Supplement in Continuation of Report of the Medical Officer of the Board* (London, 1913).

instances data on Irish migrants is included is included under such general headings as ‘Immigrants from Commonwealth’, making an accurate breakdown of statistics impossible.⁷² Further difficulties in tracing second and third generation Irish migrants arise from the national census only recording those born in Ireland. The scope of the 1931 census was also limited due to the county’s economic situation; since the frequency with which data was collected was to be increased from ten to five yearly intervals, it was envisioned that a far more in-depth examination of the population would be undertaken in 1936. But in December 1942, fire broke out at the warehouse in which the 1931 records were stored and they were destroyed. Although a preliminary report had been published in July 1931 further analysis of the material had not been made before it was lost. Plans for the 1936 census were set aside due to the country’s continuing economic difficulties, and the Second World War prevented enumeration in 1941. Preparations for the census of 1946 were cancelled for two reasons; firstly, it was felt that the population had not sufficiently settled after the upheaval of war. Secondly, central and local government offices were in no position to undertake its organisation, two years’ preparation being required in advance. Consequently, the first census held after that of 1931 was in 1951. This resulted in a dearth of information over this protracted period. Plans to increase the frequency at which the census was held were abandoned, and proceeded at ten yearly intervals thereafter.⁷³

On a local level, World War Two bombing raids on Liverpool - during which the Record Office, Library and Museum complex on William Brown Street received several direct

⁷² The Irish Free State, established in 1922, remained within the British Commonwealth, only leaving upon declaration of the Irish Republic in 1948.

⁷³ *1951 Census of England and Wales, Preliminary Report, Part I - Introduction* (London, 1951).

hits - resulted in losses from the city's archives, amongst them court and police records as well as those of local charities and societies. Subsequent rebuilding schemes, and even floods, also took their toll on the archives.

But, as the study moves into the twentieth century, publications arising from women's oral history projects conducted during the 1980s and 1990s provided a valuable insight into working-class women's lives in Liverpool at a grass-roots level.⁷⁴

A wide spectrum of secondary sources was also consulted. The study of migration has experienced growth in interest in recent decades, resulting in its development as an academic discipline and the production of a wealth of literature. In particular, Irish migration stands out due to both its longevity and the sheer volume of people movement. Some studies have taken a broad view and considered the experience and influence of the Irish worldwide, such as those by D. H. Akenson and A. Bielenberg.⁷⁵ However, Fitzgerald and Lambkin's *Migration in Irish History, 1607-2007* is unique in its scope, not merely because of its vast timeframe but because the authors take the unusual step of approaching the subject from three perspectives - immigration, internal migration, and emigration - making the assertion that each can only be understood in relation to the other two.⁷⁶ In the process they remind us that 'immigration' and 'emigration' are merely two

⁷⁴ For example, *Born to Serve: Domestic Service in Liverpool, 1850-1950*, 'Women's History - Women's Lives' Oral History Group, Second Chance to Learn Project (Liverpool, 1986); *Faith, Hope, No Charity: Personal Accounts of Catholic/Protestant Marriages in Liverpool*, Women's History Group, Liverpool Community College, (Liverpool, 1990); *Liverpool Women at War: An Anthology of Personal Memories* (Liverpool, 1991); *Help Your Mam All You Can!: Memories of Eldest Daughters in Large Families, 1920s-1990s*, Liverpool Women's Oral History Group, (Liverpool, 1992), all held at Liverpool Record Office.

⁷⁵ D. H. Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer* (Belfast, 1996); A. Bielenberg (ed.), *The Irish Diaspora* (Harlow, 2000).

⁷⁶ Fitzgerald and Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History*.

views of the same process, that internal migration is often a preliminary step towards emigration, and that what one person thinks of as ‘internal migration’ might appear as ‘emigration’ to another. An example is the move from Ireland to England which, until Irish independence, was actually internal migration within Great Britain though it was often viewed as emigration/immigration by Irish and English communities.⁷⁷ In this way Fitzgerald and Lambkin broaden the base of Irish migration history, showing it to be far more complex and diverse than it is sometimes portrayed.

The impact destination had on migrants’ experience has been acknowledged in a number of studies; with those bordering the Atlantic featuring in the works of J. A. Jackson, *The Irish in Britain*, and K. A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*. But whilst these examine the attractions and difficulties on a national scale, J. M. Gallman makes a more specific study - in both time and geographic space - in comparing the response in Liverpool and Philadelphia to the massive influx of migrants each received during the time of the Great Famine.⁷⁸ Conversely, W. J. Lowe’s *The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire: the Shaping of a Working-Class Community*, and J. Belchem’s *Irish, Catholic and Scouse: The History of the Liverpool Irish, 1800-1939*, focus on the response of migrants themselves to their new surroundings, examining the processes of settlement and assimilation in a region where rapid industrialisation and urbanisation attracted the greater proportion of Irish migrants travelling to Britain.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 297.

⁷⁸ J. A. Jackson, *The Irish in Britain* (London and Cleveland, 1963); K. A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (1985); J. M. Gallman, *Receiving Erin’s Children: Philadelphia, Liverpool and the Irish Famine Migration, 1845-55* (Chapel Hill and London, 2000).

However, despite the high incidence of female migration to the North West of England at that time, these works contain comparatively little on the experience of female migrants.

Within European migration history, the movement of men dominated, their ratio to women being approximately two one.⁷⁹ In particular, single young men led the trend, an example being found in the case of Swedish migrants.⁸⁰ This renders the pattern of Irish migration all the more noteworthy since, during the second half of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth, young single women were just as likely as men to migrate - frequently more so. Indeed, Page Moch's research reveals that only amongst Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe was the proportion of women comparable with that amongst the Irish, and then only during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.⁸¹ Despite this, the enduring popular image of the Irish migrant has been that of 'Paddy', the hardworking, hard-drinking 'navvy', builder of the world's canals, railways, motorways and tower blocks.⁸² Moreover, this migration myth invariably imagines the male protagonist leaving behind a grieving mother or sweetheart, creating a masculine, active, Diaspora and a feminine, passive, home society.

Importantly, this gender bias was also reflected in the academic field where, for many years, female migration remained a neglected area, leading to a misrepresentation of both the nature of migration and of the society migrants left behind. Indeed, although E. J.

⁷⁹ J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 376.

⁸⁰ K. Bade, *Migration in European History*, translation by Allison Brown (Oxford, 2003), pp 255-6.

⁸¹ L. Page Moch, *Moving Europeans: Migration in Western Europe since 1650* (Bloomington, 2003), p. 153.

⁸² D. MacAmhlaigh, *Irish Navvy: The Diary of an Exile* (Cork, 1964); *Arise You Gallant Sweeneys* (documentary video collaboratively produced and owned by all participants in The Long Distance Gang, Nottingham, 2009).

Hobsbawm first used the term ‘the invisible Irish’ to describe the low profile of Irish migrants in Britain, how much more appropriate that term seems when used more specifically in connection with Irish migrant women.⁸³

As previously noted, shifts in political, social and economic forces in the late twentieth century saw the emergence of women’s history and gender history in the 1970s which considered factors such as class and race as influencing factors, as well as gender. This led to the emergence of gender theory which challenged previous perceptions of masculinity and femininity as fixed biological categories, but rather as constructed concepts with multiple layers of symbol and meaning. Rejecting the dominance of European and North American priorities in favour of a global perspective, women’s and gender history entailed a more inclusive, comparative approach to transnational aspects such as trade, cultural exchange, slavery and migration. In the words of Maria Luddy, this ‘ask[ed] new questions of old sources’ and ‘querie[d] the very nature of historical study’.⁸⁴

Within the realm of Irish women’s history, groundbreaking work was undertaken in the 1980s by Hasia Diner (1983) and Janet Nolan (1989), each exploring the motivation behind female migration to America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their opposing theories sparked debate, for whilst Diner proposed that Irish women left home in order to become financially self-supporting, thereby elevating their

⁸³ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: An Economic Account of Britain since 1750* (New York, 1968). Ann Rossiter makes a similar point, ‘Bringing the Margins into the Centre: A Review of Aspects of Irish Women’s Emigration from a British Perspective’ in Ailbhe Smyth (ed.), *Irish Women’s Studies Reader* (Dublin, 1993), p. 177.

⁸⁴ Maria Luddy, *Women in Ireland, 1800-1918: A Documentary History* (Cork, 1995), p. xxv.

status within the family and removing their dependence upon marriage, Nolan asserted that their primary aim was to improve their marriage prospects.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the traditional gender bias remained evident, being reflected in the 1990 publication *Migrations: the Irish at Home and Abroad*, a collection of essays with an all-male authorship which drew criticism for its 'indirect censorship'.⁸⁶ The need for a new approach to this area of study was highlighted by Pauric Travers who argued that although the roles played by ethnicity and class had been acknowledged, that of gender had been overlooked, resulting not only in an inaccurate picture but a flawed understanding of migration as a whole.⁸⁷ This was echoed in Akenson's observation that little was known of the part played by women in the Irish Diaspora during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, either at home or abroad.⁸⁸

The intervening years have witnessed a 'remarkable flowering',⁸⁹ producing a wealth of material on aspects of life previously hidden. In *Women in Ireland: A Century of Change* Myrtle Hill explores the 'dramatic transformations' which women's lives underwent during the twentieth century, yet concludes that the interpretation of these changes as 'straightforward linear progression' is misleading in its oversimplification.⁹⁰ This statement is equally true of the changes experienced by the women who left Ireland for,

⁸⁵ Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America*; Nolan, *Ourselves Alone*.

⁸⁶ R. Kearney (ed.), *Migrations: The Irish at Home and Abroad* (Dublin, 1990); I. B. O'Carroll, 'Breaking the Silence from a Distance: Irish Women Speak on Sexual Abuse' in P. O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish World Wide: History, Heritage, Identity*, vol. 4, *Irish Women and Irish Migration* (Leicester, 1995), pp 192-200, pp192-3.

⁸⁷ Pauric Travers. 'There was nothing for me there': Irish female emigration, 1922-1971' in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish World Wide: History, Heritage, Identity*, vol. 4, *Irish Women and Irish Migration* (London and Washington, 1995, reprinted 1997), p. 147.

⁸⁸ Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer*, p. 157.

⁸⁹ Bielenberg, *The Irish Diaspora*, p. 2.

⁹⁰ Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland: A Century of Change* (Belfast, 2003), p. 244.

although many went in search of greater opportunities or freedoms, in the host societies they encountered some of the old familiar obstacles along with new ones.

Perhaps because of this notion of great social, economic and political progress having been accomplished by women during the twentieth century - along with the influence of those early works of the 1980s which speculated on the aspirations behind female migration - aims and ambitions have become a recurring theme in Diaspora research. The long tradition of Irish women's recruitment into nursing provided access to careers with professional status at a time when few other avenues were available, yet studies produced by Mary Daniels,⁹¹ Louise Ryan,⁹² and Nichola Yeates⁹³ reveal how this often required the negotiation of complex issues surrounding the construction and representation of ethnicity and identity. Similarly, domestic service formed an important field of employment for Irish women in Britain and in America throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, frequently presenting a window on lifestyles higher up the social ladder and sometimes providing sufficient means to attain considerable upward mobility. Correspondingly, the works of Bronwen Walter explore the interplay of class and racial identity in the establishment and expression of the servant/mistress

⁹¹ Mary Daniels, 'Exile or Opportunity?: Irish Nurses and Wirral Midwives' in *Irish Studies Review*, vol. 2, no. 5 (Winter 1993), pp 4-8.

⁹² Louise Ryan, 'Who Do You Think You Are?: Irish nurses encountering ethnicity and constructing identity in Britain' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 30, no. 3 (May 2007), pp 416-438; 'Becoming Nurses: Irish Women, Migration and Identity Through the Life Course' in Louise Ryan and Wendy Webster (eds), *Gendering Migration: Masculinity, Femininity and Ethnicity in Post-War Britain* (Aldershot, 2008), pp 121-136.

⁹³ Nichola Yeates, 'Migration and Nursing in Ireland: An Internationalist History' in *Translocations: Migration and Social Change*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2009), an Inter-disciplinary Open Access Journal, accessed on http://oro.open.ac.uk/19007/Translocations_Vol_5_Issue_1_d_p_df.pdf, (12 October 2012).

relationship, and the impact of these household hierarchies on the perception and representation of national identities.⁹⁴

Alongside, and linked to, the theme of female aspirations as a catalyst for migration is that of women's response to restrictive socio-political structures within Ireland. Louise Ryan's work explores responses in the Irish press to escalating rates of female emigration. She argues that the depiction of Ireland as a virtuous homeland, contrasting sharply with representations of Britain as a materialistic and secular society, allowed the 'myth of exile' to be exchanged for the 'myth of holy Ireland' in the post-independence era.⁹⁵ In this way the rising number of young women leaving Ireland in search of greater freedom was dismissed as silly girls dazzled by glitz and glamour. Moving into the closing decades of the twentieth century, Ann Rossiter has considered the experience of women faced with unwanted pregnancy in a society still very much influenced by the old Church-State combination, and explored their response in developing transnational support networks.⁹⁶

With each of these themes the focus was on why women left Ireland, and what they achieved in leaving; the impact of socio-political and economic developments on their chosen destination, and the influence this had on their migration experience, was not a

⁹⁴ Bronwen Walter, 'Strangers on the Inside: Irish Women Servants in England, 1881' in *Immigrants and Minorities*, vol. 27, nos. 2/3 (July/November 2009), pp 279-299; 'Irish Domestic Servants and English National Identity' in A. Fauce-Chamoux and R. Sarti (eds), *Domestic Service and the Formation of European Identity: Understanding the Globalization of Domestic Work, 16th-21st Centuries* (Bern, 2004), pp 428-48.

⁹⁵ Louise Ryan, 'Female Emigration in 1930s Ireland: Transgressing place and culture' in *Gender, Place and Culture*, vol. 8, no. 3, (September 2001), pp 271-282.

⁹⁶ Ann Rossiter, *Ireland's Hidden Diaspora: The 'abortion trail' and the making of a London-Irish underground, 1980-2000* (London, 2009).

primary feature. Although John Belchem's study of the Liverpool Irish focuses squarely on the influence exerted by the changing fortunes of a common migration destination, the experience of female migrants is frequently overlooked in favour of male labour relations, effectively denying their role in building and sustaining the Irish community in Liverpool.⁹⁷ On the other hand, the lives of female migrants in Liverpool form the central subject of Linda Letford and Colin G. Pooley's study and of Martha Kanya-Forstner's work.⁹⁸ However, these studies place heavy emphasis on the influence of the Catholic Church on Irish women's lives in the town, leaving other aspects unexplored. Therefore, in concentrating on socio-economic factors and their consequences for several generations of working-class women in Liverpool, this study aims to fill in some of the gaps left by earlier research.

CHRONOLOGY

This entire era - from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century - is generally regarded as a time of significant social and economic change for women, witnessing shifts in trends in female employment, the rise of the female suffrage movement, and the long campaign for women's equality. Clearly, assessing the processes of continuity and change for Irish women in Liverpool could not be achieved within a constricted timeframe. On the other hand, a one hundred year study seemed too sweeping.

⁹⁷ Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse: The History of the Liverpool Irish, 1800-1939*, (Liverpool, 2007).

⁹⁸ Linda Letford and Colin G. Pooley, 'Geographies of Migration and Religion: Irish Women in Mid Nineteenth-Century Liverpool' in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *Irish Women and Irish Migration*, vol. 4, pp 89-112; Martha Kanya-Forstner, 'Defining Womanhood: Irish Women and the Catholic Church in Victorian Liverpool' in D. M. McRaid (ed.), *The Great Famine and Beyond: Irish Migration in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Dublin and Portland, Oregon, 2000), pp 668-87.

Therefore, it was decided that whilst the era bounded by the Great Famine and Post-Second World War redevelopment would form the broad framework of this study, several periods of particular interest would be focussed upon within that timeframe. This would facilitate an identification of changes and developments on an international, a national and a local scale, and an assessment of the implications those changes held for different generations of female migrants. It would thus provide an opportunity for a comparison of factors influencing migration such as employment opportunities, wage differentials, living conditions, and kinship networks. In particular, it would allow a consideration of the extent to which wide-sweeping changes were experienced by Irish women in Liverpool - a place where employment opportunities and gender divisions did not always run along the same lines as those experienced in Britain generally - and an examination of the ways in which the city's exceptional circumstances impacted upon the everyday lives of Irish female migrants.

Initial research suggested that the Great Famine and its immediate aftermath should form the first period of investigation. The second centred on the turn of the twentieth century, and the third spanned the Second World War and subsequent years of reconstruction. In each of these periods there occurred shifts in the number of female migrants leaving Ireland for Britain, and in the relation of their number to that of male migrants. In the first period, the tendency for women to migrate as part of a family group gave way to their movement as individuals. In the second, this trend developed as the ratio of female migrants rose to exceed that of males. The third period witnessed a resurgence in the

number of young women leaving Ireland to take advantage of work and lifestyle opportunities unavailable at home.

In addition, all three periods saw alterations in female employment opportunities in Britain. The first is often considered the ‘golden age’ of domestic service, whilst the second witnessed the decline of this in favour of employment in other fields such as manufacturing, retail and clerical work. The third saw war-time recruitment of women into sectors previously considered the preserve of men, such as engineering, the railways, and the armed forces. Widely assumed to have been a uniformly liberating experience for women, wartime employment is often depicted as allowing their escape from the confines of domesticity and paving the way for the greater freedoms which came later.

Therefore, Part One of this study concentrates on the mid nineteenth century, examining the way in which the massive influx of Famine migrants affected attitudes towards the Irish in Liverpool and how this, combined with more general attitudes towards women, impacted upon the treatment of Irish female migrants there. Part Two takes in the period straddling the turn of the twentieth century and considers shifts in Irish migration patterns, changes in female employment opportunities, and the effects of Liverpool’s ‘otherness’ on Irish women’s experience. Part Three focuses on the period encompassing the Great Depression, the Second World War, and the immediate Post-War years, allowing exploration of changing attitudes and responses in Britain towards Irish migrants, and in Ireland towards escalating levels of female migration.

For the purposes of clarification, the partition of Ireland in 1921 ultimately resulted in the creation of the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland. In 1937 the Free State became known as Eire, and then the Republic of Ireland in 1948. Since these changes in terminology denote changing perceptions and attitudes, contemporary usage has been maintained as far as possible.⁹⁹ In addition, the term ‘women’ is used throughout this study to encompass females from school-leaving age (12 or 13 years throughout much of the period covered) until old age. The focus is on lay women of all religious denominations, and includes the single, married, deserted, and the widowed, with and without children and other dependents. Whilst it is true that Irish migrants occupied all levels and divisions within Liverpool’s socio-economic framework, the vast majority occupied the lower strata of the scale. Since the paucity of opportunities for women’s employment made this particularly true for female migrants, this is reflected in our area of focus. This thesis thus aims to provide an evidence-based multi-generational study of a long-overlooked portion of a significant migrant community.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Gabriel Doherty, ‘Modern Ireland’ in (Sean Duffy (general ed.), *Atlas of Irish History* (Dublin, 1997, second edition, 2000), pp 96-130, and ‘Chronology’, pp 134 -135.

¹⁰⁰ See John Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, p. 23.

PART ONE

‘OVERRUN BY A PAUPER HORDE’:

POVERTY, HUNGER AND FLIGHT, 1830s-60s

INTRODUCTION

This opening section of this thesis covers the timeframe from the 1830s to the 1860s, a period encompassing the establishment of the Irish Poor Law, the Great Famine migration and, in its wake, the development of a culture of migration. All these factors shaped not only the scale and nature of Irish migration, but reactions in the host country. The aim is to better understand the factors which influenced Irish women's migration from Ireland to Liverpool during this period, the challenges encountered in the host society, and the response to those challenges. National and local attitudes towards the Irish in the mid-nineteenth century, and the ways in which these attitudes influenced responses to Irish migrants in Britain, will therefore be examined. In particular, Liverpool's response to the huge influx of migrants it received during the Great Famine of 1845-51 and in its aftermath will be considered. Victorian ideology surrounding gender, its relation to the workplace and the home, and the social and economic constraints this ideal set on women's lives will also form a key part of this analysis. This will also inform an examination of the employment opportunities and limitations encountered by working-class women in a maritime economy. Through the reports of doctors, clergymen and corporation engineers, along with contemporary journalism, living conditions in those districts associated with Irish migrants and their affect on the health of the population will be addressed as will public and private responses to poverty in Liverpool, the extent to which Poor Law provision and the assistance of charitable institutions were available to migrants, and the development of self-help networks. Finally, we will determine how, in combination, these factors impacted upon the

everyday lives of Irish female migrants operating within Liverpool, and how the women's responses shaped the character of the Liverpool Irish community.

There were few in positions of authority who championed the cause of Liverpool's Irish community, though they did have some supporters. Amongst them was journalist Hugh Shimmin (1819-1879), a man who regarded Liverpool's poor - Irish migrants amongst them - with more benevolence than most of his contemporaries. Born in Castletown, Isle of Man, he spent his childhood in Liverpool where his father found work as a stonemason. Apprenticed to a stationer and bookbinder, he was eventually presented with the opportunity to buy his employer's business but, never having saved a single penny, he found himself without sufficient funds. His wife, however, upon hearing his plight, revealed that she had secretly saved a substantial sum, and Shimmin was able to proceed with the business deal.

In 1860 he and several friends established the *Porcupine* journal, which he edited until his death in 1879. Through its pages Shimmin used humour to highlight social injustice and poverty, and to point the finger of conscience at those he believed to be responsible. In particular, he championed the cause of poor children, urging the public's support of local charitable organisations such as the Children's Infirmary and the Seamen's Orphan Institution. In a summary of his life and work, it was said that he, 'revolutionised the condition of Liverpool'¹⁰¹ and whilst this is an exaggeration, Shimmin's relatively humble beginnings and shared 'outsider' status enabled him to sympathise with migrants.

¹⁰¹ A. W. Moore, *Manx Worthies* (Douglas, Isle of Man, 1901), pp 107-8.

Despite Shimmin's importance, perhaps the most prolific champion of the poor Irish in Liverpool was the Roman Catholic cleric Father James Nugent (1822-1905). Born in Liverpool of Irish parents, he was ordained to the priesthood in 1846, working in parishes in Blackburn and Wigan before returning to St Nicholas' in Liverpool as curate and working close to areas of high migrant residency. He was never sentimental about his flock - indeed, he is noted for referring to them as 'the dregs'.¹⁰² Nevertheless, his concern for their condition prompted his involvement in a considerable number of projects combatting poverty, sickness, hunger and homelessness, amongst them the establishment of a night shelter for homeless boys (1849), the Catholic Institute, Hope Street (later, St Edward's College) (1863), the Boys' Refuge Industrial School (1869), St Saviour's Refuge for women newly released from prison (1891) and the House of Providence home for unmarried mothers and their babies (1897) in the suburb of Aigburth. Appointed the first Roman Catholic Prison Minister for Walton Prison in 1860, he held the post for twenty two years. In partnership with Bishop O'Reilly, he also founded the Liverpool Catholic Children's Protection Society (1881). In 1892 he was made domestic prelate with the title of Monsignor by Pope Leo XIII, though he remained 'Father Nugent' to his flock.¹⁰³ His life is commemorated with a statue in St John's Gardens, Liverpool, with the inscription:

Apostle of Temperance, Protector of the Orphan Child, Consoler of the Prisoner, Reformer of the Criminal, Saviour of Fallen Womanhood, Friend of all in Poverty and Affliction, An Eye to the Blind, A Foot to the Lame, the Father of the Poor.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Patricia Runaghan, *Father Nugent's Liverpool, 1849-1905* (Birkenhead, 2003), p. 5.

¹⁰³ His ideals are continued in the work of the Nugent Care Society. See 'History of Nugent Care Society', accessed on <http://www.nugentcare.org/about-us/history> (on 24 February 2014).

¹⁰⁴ See 'Liverpool Lives', National Museums Liverpool, accessed on http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mol/exhibitions/liverpoolives/father_nugent (on 24 February 2014).

The scale of poverty during that period was so vast that no individual could tackle it, but in attempting to alleviate suffering Father Nugent made his mark.

1.1 'THE PLAY OF THE PRINCE OF DENMARK LEAVING OUT THE PART OF HAMLET': A SOLUTION TO IRISH POVERTY?

Those fleeing the Great Famine of 1845-51 were by no means the first Irish migrants to arrive in Liverpool; as early as 1378 Irish surnames appeared amongst those of the town's residents.¹⁰⁵ By the early nineteenth century London and many of the larger British industrial towns possessed long-established Irish populations, and large numbers of their countrymen regularly crossed the Irish Sea as seasonal harvesters.¹⁰⁶ Nor was poverty amongst the Irish - at home or in Britain - a new phenomenon, rather it was the subject of many years' contentious debate.

Throughout the 1820s and 1830s the problem of poverty in Ireland, and how it might be dealt with, produced much discussion in parliament. In November 1830, for example, the MP Grattan reminded the House of Commons that during the previous decade there had been no fewer than ten committees appointed to enquire into the state of Ireland and the distress existing there, producing 'reports so voluminous that very few Gentlemen could read them.' Yet he went on to remark that the last report - which had amounted to fifty seven pages and, along with appendices of evidence, filled four large volumes - contained only sixteen lines referring to poor law relief so that the MP was 'reminded [...] of the

¹⁰⁵ Ramsay Muir, *A History of Liverpool* (London, 1907), p. 304.

¹⁰⁶ 'It was as the beginning of July when the *Highlander* was in port; and the Irish labourers were daily coming over by thousands, to help harvest the English crops.' Herman Melville, *Redburn: His First Voyage Being the Sailor-Boy Confessions and Reminiscences of the Son-of-a-Gentleman in the Merchant Service* (1849) (cited in David Seed (ed.) *American Travellers in Liverpool* (Liverpool, 2005), p. 109).

company of actors who undertook to perform the play of the Prince of Denmark, leaving out the part of Hamlet'.¹⁰⁷

In 1833 the British government established yet another Royal Commission, under the chairmanship of Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin, to enquire once more into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland. After three years of investigations they produced a volume even more extensive than its predecessors, reporting once more on the crippling poverty endured by large numbers of Irish labourers:

...the earnings of the labourers come, on average of the whole class, to from 2s to 2s 6d a-week, or thereabouts, for the year round. Thus circumstanced, it is impossible for the able-bodied, in general, to provide against sickness or the temporary absence of employment, or against old age or the destitution of their widows and children in the contingent even to their own premature decease. A great portion of them are insufficiently provided at any time with the commonest necessaries of life... Some go in search of employment to Great Britain during the harvest, others wander through Ireland with the same view. The wives and children of many are occasionally obliged to beg: they do so reluctantly, and with shame, and in general go to a distance from home that they may not be known... Mendicancy too is the sole resource of the aged and impotent of the poorer classes in general, when children or relations are unable to support them. To it, therefore, crowds are driven for the means of existence, and the knowledge that such is the fact leads to an indiscriminate giving of alms, which encourages idleness, imposture and general crime.¹⁰⁸

The commission thus found that whilst in some districts Ireland's existing system of private charity was extensive, in others it was 'utterly inadequate'¹⁰⁹ and declared the introduction of some level of public provision an essential element of the 'remedial

¹⁰⁷ Parliamentary Papers [hereafter PP], *State of the Poorer Classes (Ireland)*, House of Commons Debates, 11 November 1830, vol. 1 cc. 409-20.

¹⁰⁸ PP, *Third Report of Commissioners for Inquiry into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland*, 1836, pp. 3-4.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 25.

measures requisite to ameliorate the condition of the Irish Poor'.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, they stressed that the English workhouse system, introduced in 1834, was unsuited to Ireland's circumstances since such large numbers were in need due to a lack of opportunity for employment rather than unwillingness to work. As a result of this chronic underemployment, the usual intention of such a system - that the austerity of the workhouse would discourage malingerers and turn them back on their own resources - was thwarted, the standard of living for many being so low that the harshest of regimes was better than what was available at home. Thus, the commission concluded, alternative solutions were needed. Their suggestions included the establishment of an Irish Poor Law, the provision of employment through large-scale public works, and a lessening of the burden through publicly funded emigrations:

While we feel that relief should be provided for the impotent, we consider it due to the whole community, and to the labouring class in particular, that such of the able-bodied as may still be unable to find free and profitable employment in Ireland, should be secured support only through emigration or as a preliminary to it. In saying this, we mean that those who desire to emigrate should be furnished with the means of doing so in safety, and with immediate support when they stand in need of it, at emigration depots. It is thus, and only thus, that the market of labour in Ireland can be relieved from the weight that is now upon it, or the labourer be raised from his present prostrate state.¹¹¹

However, to their recommendations they added the following:

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹¹¹ 'Abstract of the Final Report of the Commissioners of Irish Poor Inquiry; and also of the Letters Written to Ministers by Messrs N. W. Senior, and G. C. Lewis, in Consequence of Applications from Government for their Opinions on that Report. With Remarks Thereon, and upon the Measures now Before Parliament for the Relief of the Destitute in Ireland' (London, second edition, 1837), p. 14, in *Knowsley Pamphlets*, vol. 565 (Special Collections and Archives, University of Liverpool).

We must here observe, that we do not look to emigration as an object to be permanently pursued upon any extensive scale, nor by any means as the main relief for the evils of Ireland, but we do look to it for the present as an auxiliary essential to a commencing course of amelioration.¹¹²

Clearly, emigration appeared to be one of the main remedies - at least in the short term - to Ireland's pauper problem. Yet the commissioners envisioned removal to the far flung reaches of Empire or to the United States;¹¹³ they did not intend that significant numbers of the Irish poor should descend upon the shores of Great Britain. This was demonstrated in the proposal of schemes for the mass colonisation of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and British North America, serving the double purpose of populating British territories overseas whilst alleviating Ireland's difficulties. Although these proposed large-scale government-funded emigration schemes to the colonies did not materialise, some schemes - such as those which removed female workhouse inmates to Australia and Canada - were later put into action.¹¹⁴ Similarly, estate clearances organised by private landlords and farmers provided tenants with passage to the US, Canada and Australia, and not to the factories, mills and mines of England, Scotland and Wales. Nevertheless, for many, the commission's report merely confirmed long-standing, yet growing

¹¹² *Ibid*, p. 15.

¹¹³ Edward Gibbon Wakefield proposed the state-regulated colonisation of South Australia through the sale of land to capitalists, the revenue thus raised funding assisted migration of labourers and their families. He envisioned that this would remove surplus population from the British Isles and, in establishing a free workforce in the colonies, remove the need for convict labour. Charles Buller, President of the Poor Law Board in 1847, maintained that any government funds expended on similar emigration schemes would increase the value of overseas territories, thereby securing a return on the outlay.

¹¹⁴ In 1847 one subsidised emigration scheme, supported by Lord Grey, removed young women from Union workhouses to Australia, where there was a shortage of women. The following year a similar scheme carried approximately 2,000 young women to Australia. See Pauline Jackson, 'Women in 19th Century Irish Emigration' in *International Migration Review*, vol. xviii, no. 4 (1984), pp 1004-1020, p. 1015. During the early 1850s powers granted under the Poor Law Relief Act of 1847 enabled Poor Law Guardians to remove female paupers to Canada. See S. C. Johnson, *History of Emigration from the United Kingdom to North America, 1763-1912* (London, 1913), p. 256.

concerns regarding the number of Irish migrants already settled in the industrial towns of Britain (see **Table 1.1**), and their affect upon life there.

Table 1.1 - Birthplaces of the Population of England and Wales at National Censuses, 1841-1871.¹¹⁵

Birthplace	Census Year			
	1841	1851	1861	1871
England & Wales	15,441,530	17,165,656	19,120,052	21,692,165
Ireland	290,891	519,959	601,634	566,540
Elsewhere	174,320	241,994	344,538	453,561
Total	15,906,741	17,927,609	20,066,224	22,712,266
(Irish as % of Total)	(1.82)	(2.90)	(2.99)	(2.49)
(Irish as % of Non-native)	(62.52)	(68.24)	(63.60)	(55.53)

In 1801 the population of Liverpool stood at 82,000. By 1851 the combined effects of natural increase, drift from surrounding districts and immigration resulted in an explosion to a population of 376,000. Yet not all of this increase was famine related. 1809, for example, saw a marked increase in the number of poor Irish migrants arriving in Liverpool owing to the ‘depressed condition of Irish agriculture’. Crowds of destitute migrants gathered at the workhouse and at St Peter’s Parish Church seeking aid, and the number arriving daily from Ireland led Smithers to observe that in the Exchange district fewer than fifteen people in one hundred could be found who were natives of the town.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ *Census 1891, England and Wales, General Report*, vol. IV, Table 23 - ‘Natives of England and Wales, Scotland, Ireland and other parts, enumerated in England and Wales at each of the six census, 1841-1891’ p. 114.

¹¹⁶ H. Smithers, *Liverpool, Its Commerce Statistics, and Institutions; With A History of the Cotton Trade* (Liverpool, 1825), (Liverpool Record Office).

Likewise, it was noted that a sizeable Irish community was developing in the area surrounding Park Lane and St James Street to the south of the town centre, so that when a new Catholic church was built there during the 1820s its dedication to Saint Patrick left ‘no doubt as to the nationality of the poor for whom it was founded.’¹¹⁷ In 1840 a poor harvest in Britain meant few seasonal migrants from Ireland were able to find employment. Faced with starvation and eviction from their tenancies at home, many chose to remain in Liverpool, further swelling the ranks of the established communities,¹¹⁸ and by 1841 the Irish-born population of Liverpool as a whole was already considerable at 17.3 *per cent*.

The growing Irish migrant presence in Britain led to suspicion and hostility. As a result, despite Ireland’s religious, cultural, political and regional diversity, the Irish people were popularly viewed as homogenously Catholic, Celtic, rural and ‘benighted’, and presented as a primitive antithesis to the Protestant, Anglo-Saxon, industrialised and ‘enlightened’ English. Evidence of such views is found in contemporary depictions, both on the stage and in the press, of the Irish as gullible simpletons or as sub-human creatures bent on destruction (see **Figure 1**).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ T. Burke, *Catholic History of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1910), p. 38.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 63.

¹¹⁹ For discussion of this topic see L. P. Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, (Washington D C, 1997); M. De Nie, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798-1882*, part of the ‘History of Ireland and the Irish Diaspora’ series, James S Donnelly Jnr and Thomas Archdeacon (series editors) (Wisconsin, 2004).



THE IRISH FRANKENSTEIN.

Figure 1 - 'The Irish Frankenstein', *Punch*, 4 November 1843.¹²⁰

We find another example of this ideology in the commission's 1836 report. In response to earlier suggestions that poor laws should be introduced to Ireland in order that the Irish labour 'may stay at home and consume the corn he raises', so that the English farmer 'might have remunerating prices', the report asserted that:

It is the produce which the agricultural labourer raises beyond his consumption that elevates him above savage life; it is in proportion to that surplus that he is enabled to clothe himself instead of going naked, and that he becomes a means of providing national wealth, or proves in any degree a profitable member of society.¹²¹

¹²⁰ 'The Irish Frankenstein', *Punch*, 4 November 1843, p. 199, image accessed on <http://punchproject.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/july-dec-1843-irish-frankenstein.html> (15 November 2009).

¹²¹ PP, *Third Report on Poor Inquiry (Ireland)*, 1836, Section XIII, p. 23.

In the light of the commission's own revelation that vast numbers of Irish labourers were struggling to produce sufficient for their own needs, let alone a surplus which would 'elevate above savage life', their opinion of the standard of Irish 'civilization' seems clear.

The fact that these views are evident before mid-century indicates that they were not solely creations of the post-famine period, though they were certainly intensified and perpetuated by the seemingly overwhelming tide of Famine refugees which threatened to engulf physical and administrative infrastructures particularly in Liverpool which, due to established migrant pathways and proximity to Ireland, received more of the 1840s influx than elsewhere. Derogatory comments were particularly evident amongst Liverpool's Orange-Tory leaders who were keen to maintain their political power in the face of growing Irish-Catholic presence. An example is seen in the *Liverpool Mail's* treatment of Irish dock labourers involved in Catholic-Orange fighting in 1851:

Popery has polluted their mental faculties and debased the physical and moral habits of the Irish peasant that it is impossible to ameliorate his condition as a social animal. He does not think as the Englishman or Scotsman and Welshman does because he is so saturated with traditional falsehood...¹²²

After a protracted period of consideration, government ministers rejected the recommendations of Whately's 1833 Commission as too far-reaching and, therefore, expensive, preferring George Nicholls' adaptation of the tried and tested English workhouse system. The introduction of poor rates on Irish property would, Nicholls

¹²² *Liverpool Mail*, 19 July 1851.

argued, 'serve to connect the interest of landlords and tenants, and so become a means of benefiting both, and promoting the general peace and prosperity of the country.'¹²³

The Irish Poor Law was eventually passed in 1838, its modifications from the English version being few yet significant. For example, in Ireland the workhouse was to represent the sole provision for the destitute, with no outdoor relief to be made available even when the workhouse was full. In addition, there was to be no law of settlement to restrict a union's obligation to established residents within its member parishes. Rather, the Irish Boards of Guardians were to be obliged to provide for any destitute person so long as there was room in the workhouse. These arrangements were to have far-reaching consequences since the absence of either outdoor relief or law of settlement served to encourage the poor to wander Ireland - and further afield - in search of work or charity, whichever they could secure. Within ten years the failings of this inflexible system were to be exposed when widespread famine forced hordes of destitute cottiers to face the stark choice of workhouse or emigration.

¹²³ George Nichols, *History of the Irish Poor Law*, 1856, Reprints of Economic Classics (New York, 1867), p. 152.

1.2 MIGRATORY PATTERNS: ‘OVERRUN BY A PAUPER HORDE’

The unusually wet summer of 1845 provided ideal conditions for the fungus *Phytophthora infestans*; it swept rapidly westward across much of Europe, putrefying potato crops as they stood in the field. In England, where labourers’ wages were at their lowest level for over a century,¹²⁴ the failure of the potato crop coincided with a poor corn harvest so that, in the words of J. C. Drummond, ‘...the food situation became desperate for the very poor...England has never been nearer to revolution.’¹²⁵ Yet the potato formed only part of the English labourer’s diet. In Ireland up to two thirds of the population depended totally upon this crop, so that the arrival of the blight signalled the beginning of a devastating Famine which was to last into the next decade. The ensuing catastrophe resulted in an estimated one million deaths from starvation and associated diseases,¹²⁶ and prompted emigration on a massive scale which saw a further one and a half million flee their homeland within the following decade.¹²⁷ Many sought a new life in the United States of America, others in what were termed the ‘Old Colonies’ of the British Empire such as Canada and Australia, but it is estimated that between one quarter and one fifth of Irish migrants settled in Britain.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ An 1842 survey of Liverpool’s Vauxhall Ward revealed gross earnings to be approximately half the 1835 level. John Finch, *Statistics of the Vauxhall Ward: The Conditions of the Working Class in Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1842) (facsimile edition with introduction by Harold Hinkins, Liverpool, 1986), p. 12.

¹²⁵ J. C. Drummond and A. Wilbraham, *The Englishman’s Food* (London, 1969 edition), p. 23.

¹²⁶ *Census of Ireland, 1851, Part VI: Tables of Deaths* (Dublin, 1856), vol. I, p. 246.

¹²⁷ P. Johnson, *Ireland: Land of Troubles* (London, 1980), pp 96-109; O Macdonagh, ‘The Irish Famine Emigration to the United States’ in *Perspectives in American History*, vol. X (1976), pp 357-446. The 1861 Census of Ireland reported that between 1841 and 1851 the population had decreased by 1,622,319 persons, and that it decreased by a further 775,311 persons during the following decade, making a total reduction of 2,397,630 persons over twenty years. *The Census of Ireland for the Year 1861, Part V, General Report*, 1864. p. x.

¹²⁸ Cormac O’Grada places the figure at between one quarter and one fifth as opposed to the formerly accepted estimate of one eighth in ‘A Note on Nineteenth-Century Irish Emigration Statistics’ in *Population Studies*, vol. 29 (1975), pp 143-149.

With Liverpool representing one of the major ports of entry into Britain from the Irish Sea as well as a major gateway to overseas destinations, it received a massive influx of migrants. Indeed, more than 280,000 Irish migrants entered Liverpool during the year 1846, fewer than half journeying further afield. The following year more than 300,000 arrived in the first six months.¹²⁹ It was estimated that as many as 60,000-80,000 of these remained in the already overcrowded poorer districts, particularly the Vauxhall and Scotland Wards.¹³⁰ When the next national census was conducted in 1851 it revealed the number of Irish-born living in Britain to be 730,335 so that they constituted 2.9 *per cent* of the population of England and Wales and 7.2 *per cent* of that of Scotland. However, their representation in Liverpool was almost 25 *per cent*¹³¹ with by far the highest population growth taking place in the Irish-dominated Scotland Ward. Situated to the north of the town centre, the district was close to the Clarence Dock, the point of disembarkation for ships from Ireland. Here numbers had risen from 35,478 to 61,777 during the decade¹³² so that, with the exception of New York, the district had the greatest concentration of Irish outside of Ireland.¹³³ Yet, these figures fail to accurately portray the full scale of the situation since they refer only to those born in Ireland; they did not

¹²⁹ In order to contextualize these figures, at the 1841 census the entire population of Dublin City and County was enumerated as 372,773. *Ireland, Census of Population, 1936*, vol. 1 (Dublin, 1938), Table 2 - Population of Each Province and County in *Saorstát Eireann* as constituted at each of the twelve censuses from 1821 to 1936, p. 3.

¹³⁰ William Mowl Frazer, *Duncan of Liverpool: being an account of the work of Dr W H Duncan, Medical Officer of Health of Liverpool, 1847-63* (London, 1947), pp 56-7. James O'Connor provides similar figures, though he dates them to January-November 1847. See James O'Connor, *History of Ireland, 1898-1924* (London, 1925), vol. I, p. 228.

¹³¹ John K. Walton and Alastair Wilcox (eds), *Low Life and Moral Improvement in Mid-Victorian England: Liverpool Through the Journalism of Hugh Shimmmin* (Leicester, 1991), p. 15. Also, Colin G. Pooley, 'Living in Liverpool: The Modern City' in John Belcham (ed.), *Liverpool 800, Culture, Character and History* (Liverpool, 2006), pp 171-256, p. 196.

¹³² *Census of Great Britain, 1851, Population Tables I, Numbers of Inhabitants in the years 1801, 1811, 1821, 1831, 1841 and 1851*. England and Wales vol. II, no. VIII, North Western Division Comprising Cheshire and Lancashire, p. 30.

¹³³ Frank Neal, 'Victorian Liverpool and the Irish' in the *Newsletter of the Liverpool History Society*, no. 11, (Winter 2004-5) pp 3-5.

include the English-born children of Irish parents who might be considered Irish on grounds of ethnicity or culture.

The arrival of large numbers of refugees over such a short time placed a severe strain on the town's infrastructure, particularly with regards to accommodation and sanitation. Lodging-houses quickly became seriously overcrowded; in some instances fifty or sixty persons were found to be sharing accommodation consisting of three or four rooms measuring just twelve feet by ten. The Corporation appointed inspectors, and landlords were frequently brought before the magistrates,¹³⁴ yet the demand for accommodation increased so that new arrivals began to break into cellars already condemned as unfit for human habitation and closed in accordance with the Health Act of 1842.¹³⁵

Figure 2 illustrates the dark, airless court housing described by Hugh Shimmin, where water supplies were unreliable and sanitation provision primitive:

These court houses are frequently four storeys high, 'straight up and down', and contain four apartments - a cellar, a living room and two bedrooms; and often in these houses two and sometimes three families reside. At the top of the court stand the open cess pool and privy. The houses adjoining these are sometimes let at a lower rent: thus the poor creatures have a premium offered them for the loss of their health and the possibility of cutting short their days.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ For examples see 'Police Court', *Liverpool Mercury*, 13 July 1847, 20 July 1847, 4 August 1847, 17 September 1847, 15 October 1847 and 23 January 1849. Also, 'Public Office' column in *Liverpool Courier and Commercial Advertizer*, 23 January 1850, p. 3.

¹³⁵ Frazer, *Duncan of Liverpool*, pp 56-7.

¹³⁶ Walton and Wilcox, *Low Life and Moral Improvement*, p. 108.



Figure 2 - No. 2 Court, Mount View (off Rathbone Street), Liverpool.¹³⁷

As a result, living conditions quickly became dangerously squalid. At a meeting of Liverpool's first branch of the Health of Towns Association in 1846, Sir Arnold Knight described the toll on human life. He revealed that whilst in London 1 in 37 of the population died annually, in Liverpool the figure was 1 in 28. Similarly, in London the number of children who died before reaching the age of 9 was 32 in 100, compared with 49 in 100 in Liverpool. The situation in Vauxhall Ward was even worse: the death rate

¹³⁷ No. 2 Court, Mount View (off Rathbone Street), Liverpool, showing communal privies and water pump. Typically four storeys high including the cellar, and just one room deep (the back wall being shared with the adjoining property in the next court) court housing ensured maximum use of available space. Letting individual rooms to entire families - or even to several families - obtained maximum returns for landlords, but tenants also sub-let rooms or took lodgers into their own accommodation. Image accessed on <http://www.liverpoolpicturebook.com/2012/09/CourtHousing.html> (12 September 2012).

amongst those below 9 years was 64 in 100.¹³⁸ Writing some fifty five years later, Burke commented on these disturbing figures and the conditions which produced them:

Sixty-four out of every hundred Irish children dead before nine years of age, from preventable causes!! The Irish poor did not build the narrow streets nor the dirty courts, they did not leave the streets unswept, and had no responsibility for stinking middens left unemptied at their very doors, nor did they create the economic conditions which drove them across the channel and in turn made life in Liverpool the burden it really was. Drink! Yes, they drank! No wonder! where drink alone could bring forgetfulness of present misery.¹³⁹

Realising they were faced with a mounting health crisis, in 1847 the town's Health Committee appointed Dr Duncan as the country's first Medical Officer of Health. During his first year in office he faced outbreaks of typhoid and typhus.¹⁴⁰ By the summer deaths from 'fever' had increased to 2,000 *per cent* above the average in former years.¹⁴¹ The following year he recorded details of three epidemics - scarlatina, influenza and typhus - whilst 1849 saw the arrival of Asiatic cholera. This, he believed, originated with an Irish family arriving by packet steamer from Glasgow where the disease was already raging. Cholera accounted for 5,245 of Liverpool's 17,047 deaths from all causes that

¹³⁸ Sir Arnold Knight, speaking at a meeting of Liverpool's first branch of the Health of Towns Association held at Saint Patrick's schoolroom and chaired by Mr R. Sheil, 1846. Quoted in Thomas Burke, *Catholic History of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1910), p. 82.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 83.

¹⁴⁰ Typhoid (*Salmonella typhi*) is contracted via water, milk and solid food contaminated by faeces of typhoid victims or carriers. Typhus is the common name for a group of three infectious diseases: - Epidemic louse-borne Typhus, Brill-Zinsser disease, and Endemic or 'murine' (flea-borne) Typhus. Epidemic louse-borne Typhus occurs in temperate lands and is the most virulent form. In severe epidemics the mortality rate is as high as 50-70 *per cent*. Known to thrive in conditions of poor sanitation, it was commonly referred to as 'Jail Fever', 'Camp Fever' or 'Ship Fever' and, during this period, came to be known as 'Irish Fever'. Liverpool's appointment of the country's first Medical Officer of Health was in direct response to the rising number of Irish migrants.

¹⁴¹ Frazer, *Duncan of Liverpool*, p. 59.

year.¹⁴² Rightly or wrongly, the Irish were perceived as the bearers of sickness and disease, leading one contemporary observer to comment:

It is doubtful whether a town like Liverpool, which can be reached at a trifling expense by the most destitute of the Irish poor, will ever be as healthy as towns less accessible to that poverty-stricken people.¹⁴³

But, if conditions were so wretched, why did such large numbers of Irish migrants congregate and continue to arrive in Liverpool? David Fitzpatrick suggests that because Irish migrants were drawn largely from rural areas they possessed few marketable skills in an urban setting and, as a consequence, were restricted to the lowest grades of employment. As evidence he points to the fact that they frequently appeared in shipping lists under the headings ‘labourer’ or ‘servant’.¹⁴⁴ However, it must be acknowledged that these were generic terms which might possibly hide a multitude of skills. Nevertheless, any lack of skills or formal training posed little barrier to employment in Liverpool where casual work might be found on the docks or as porters in the warehouses.¹⁴⁵ At that time the town’s position as a major port for trade in the Atlantic and Baltic, as well as the Irish Sea, was being augmented by the development of extensive new dock and warehouse facilities. Eventually, by the 1860s, these were to stretch for seven miles along the waterfront,¹⁴⁶ and facilitate the handling of 40 *per cent*

¹⁴² *Ibid*, pp 60-63.

¹⁴³ Thomas Baines, *The History of the Commerce and Town of Liverpool, and of the Rise of the Manufacturing Industry in the Adjoining Counties* (London, 1852), pp 677-678.

¹⁴⁴ David Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration, 1801-1921*, vol. 1 in the series ‘Studies in Irish Economic and Social History’ (Dundalk, (reprinted 1990), pp 8-9.

¹⁴⁵ In 1834 1,900 Irish men were employed as dock warehouse porters in Liverpool. Donald McRaid, *Irish Immigrants in Modern Britain, 1750-1922* (Basingstoke, London and New York, 1999), p. 52.

¹⁴⁶ Clarence Dock opened for the new steam vessels in 1830. Brunswick Dock opened for the timber trade in 1832 and Waterloo Dock in 1834. Trafalgar and Victoria Docks opened for steamers in 1836. Albert

of the world's trade. This expansion held the promise of employment opportunities for unskilled and semi-skilled male labour in the fields of construction, warehousing, portering, refining and transport networks, and attracted large numbers of hopeful or desperate migrants. Within a few years the journalist Hugh Heinrick was to observe:

The Docks furnish the Irish labourers with a market for the only commodity they have to vend - i.e. strong arms, broad shoulders, and brave hearts...The whole line of docks...swarms with Irish life...I think I am not over the mark in stating that two-thirds of the Liverpool dock labourers are Irishmen.¹⁴⁷

For women the employment situation was somewhat different. Unlike other parts of Lancashire - where textile production provided ample opportunities for female workers - Liverpool's concentration on the handling of raw materials rather than the manufacture of finished goods meant a limited range of job opportunities for women. The only similarity between male and female labour markets lay in the fact that in both cases the presence of an abundant workforce helped to depress wages, kept working conditions poor and ensured that opportunities for advancement were extremely limited.

But if Liverpool's maritime economy provided opportunity for the unskilled and semi-skilled male labourer, it also meant that extremely busy periods of trade were regularly followed by slack times. The problem lay in the whole town's dependency on seasonal and climatic factors - where 'the vagaries of wind, weather, or international politics could

Dock, with its bonded warehouses for valuable goods, opened in 1845 (officially opened by the Prince Consort in 1846). Salthouse Dock was enlarged in 1846 and Wapping Dock opened in 1858. Herculeum Dock was transformed from a small tidal basin to a wet dock between 1864-66, the dry land being excavated with explosives.

¹⁴⁷ Hugh Heinrick, *Survey of the Irish in England*, originally published in sixteen articles in the *Nation*, a Dublin nationalist weekly newspaper, between 6 July and 9 November 1872, and collected in Alan O'Day (ed) *Survey of the Irish in England* (1872) (London, 1990), pp 91-2.

rack the whole town with anxiety'.¹⁴⁸ As a consequence, Liverpool's dockside employers found it more profitable to operate a system of casual recruitment - where workers were hired by the day or half day as the need arose, and released as soon as the job was completed - freeing employers from the burden of paying men to stand idle. Half a century later, Eleanor Rathbone was to criticise the way in which this 'haphazard method of selection and the dependence of the men upon the goodwill of the foremen encourage[d] petty tyranny...'¹⁴⁹ In the meantime, this arrangement - coupled with the vast manpower surplus available for such work - meant that although rates of pay appeared very favourable, few men regularly acquired more than three days work each week. The resultant underemployment meant that actual earnings were rarely sufficient to cover even basic needs and placed significant financial stresses on many working-class households, migrant and otherwise.

The ensuing poverty of Liverpool's labourers had already become the subject of middle-class investigation and comment, evidenced by the survey of the Vauxhall Ward conducted in 1842 by John Finch Junior on behalf of the Liverpool Anti-Monopoly Association. This revealed that of the 5,973 families residing in the district, 2,126 were classed as being so poor as to lack life's necessities. Of these, 1,052 were recorded as supporting themselves by means of 'promiscuous charity, pawning, and crime', 1,017 survived on 'savings, credit, relations and casual employment', whilst fifty seven families

¹⁴⁸ Margaret Simey, *Charity Rediscovered: A Study of Philanthropic Effort in Nineteenth-Century Liverpool* (formerly published as *Charitable Effort in Liverpool in the Nineteenth Century*, 1951) (Liverpool, 1992), p. 13.

¹⁴⁹ Eleanor F. Rathbone, *How the Casual Labourer Lives: Report of the Liverpool Joint Research Committee on the Domestic Condition and Expenditure of the Families of Certain Liverpool Labourers* (read before and published by the Liverpool Economic and Statistical Society, Liverpool, 1909), p. xxvi.

resorted to ‘parish relief, with other assistance’.¹⁵⁰ Five years later - at the height of the Famine crisis - the Vauxhall district once again came under scrutiny. This time Liverpool’s Anglican Scripture Readers, under the direction of Canon Abraham Hume, concentrated their study on the ‘settled’ Irish families of the district.¹⁵¹ They recorded that, of a total of 569 households questioned, 133 were dependent on labourers in regular employment and 190 on labourers in irregular employment, whilst 102 were found to be ‘absolute paupers’ and 144 had ‘no visible means of support’.¹⁵²

Perhaps what is most revealing about these surveys is that in each case the investigators chose to target the Irish poor of the town. Although the 1842 survey does not specifically name this group, it singled out for close observation a district where it was estimated that 50 *per cent* of residents were of Irish origin, and in one street alone (Lace Street with its twenty five courts) 85.5 *per cent* of the 1,110 residents were Irish speaking.¹⁵³ In each case the action of the investigators seems to confirm that prevailing attitudes towards Irish migrants were frequently those of suspicion and censure. This is reinforced by the finding that, in spite of the 1836 commission’s insistence that the migration of Irish labourers into Great Britain was far from injurious to the native workforce - supported by what they called the ‘striking fact’ that wages were highest where the Irish were most numerous¹⁵⁴ - many refused to view the situation quite so optimistically. Furthermore, few sought the opinions of those most affected: the migrant and working classes.

¹⁵⁰ Finch, *Statistics of Vauxhall Ward*, pp 12 and 36.

¹⁵¹ At this time the term ‘settled’ applied to those with five years continuous residency within a parish.

¹⁵² PP, *Select Committee on Poor Removal, 1854*, Minutes of Evidence, evidence of the Rev. A. Campbell, pp 5,000-5,002, data having been obtained from Canon Hume and the Anglican Scripture Readers.

¹⁵³ Canon Abraham Hume, *Missions at Home, or a Clergyman’s Account of the Town of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1850), pp 14-15.

¹⁵⁴ PP, *Third Report on Poor Inquiry (Ireland)*, 1836, p. 24.

Examination of the testimonies collected from eminent local figures by George Cornwall Lewis, and submitted as Appendix G, no. II in the 1836 commission's report, reveals many of them to be based upon personal opinion coloured by racial and cultural prejudices and, as a consequence, frequently conflicting. For example, whilst some contributors claimed that large numbers of aged and infirm Irish regularly made their way to Liverpool for the express purpose of obtaining charity,¹⁵⁵ others reported that these groups very rarely migrated to England, and then only to be supported by able-bodied relatives.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, though some stated that the presence of the Irish had a negative influence upon the habits of the native population,¹⁵⁷ others asserted that the Irish were much improved by association with their English neighbours.¹⁵⁸ In addition, though Irish labour was deemed necessary to meet the growing local demand,¹⁵⁹ others declared that it would be an advantage to the town if the Irish and Welsh alike were to leave.¹⁶⁰

Irish women did not escape criticism as Lewis, in his summary, accused them of drunkenness and claimed their habits were 'more vicious and depraved' than those of English or Scottish women of the same rank. He also spoke disparagingly of their household management skills:

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, Appendix G, no. II, pp 8-41, Minutes of Evidence, evidence of Mr William Dillon, Linen and Woollen Draper, a native of Newry and resident of Liverpool for twenty three years, p. 26.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, evidence of Rev. Vincent Glover, in charge of the Catholic Parish of St Peter's, Liverpool, for eighteen years, p. 22. Also of James Collins, MD, a native of Ireland, and of Rev. Francis Murphy, resident priest of St Patrick's Chapel, Toxteth Park, a native of Ireland and resident of Liverpool for six years, p. 25.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, evidence of William Parlour, Esquire, Superintendent of the Police of Liverpool for three and a half years, p. 20.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, evidence of Rev. Vincent Glover, p. 22. Also of Rev. Thomas Fisher, Resident Priest of St Mary's, resident of Liverpool for thirty three years, p. 23, and of James Collins, MD, p. 24.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, evidence of Mr Michael James Whitty, a native of Co. Wexford, Superintendent of the nightly watch in Liverpool for 6 years, p. 20. Also of Mr Samuel Holme, builder, of Liverpool, p. 28, and of Mr John Johnson, builder, of Liverpool, p. 30.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, evidence of Mr William Dillon, p. 26.

Another circumstance, which has a powerful influence in retarding the improvement of the Irish settlers in Great Britain, is the unthrifty and dissolute character of the women; as it is on the wife that care of the house, and on the mother that the training of the children, chiefly depend among the poor. The Irishwomen are likewise, for the most part, not only wasteful and averse to labour, but also ignorant of the arts of domestic economy, such as sewing and cooking. Hence they are unable to make the best of the plain food which they purchase, or to keep their own and husband's clothes in order, even when they only require mending.¹⁶¹

Clearly, a significant number of those in positions of influence and authority - both locally and nationally - considered Irish migrants a threat to the earning power and self-respect of the British labouring classes and a crippling burden upon the Poor Law ratepayer. In addition, they viewed the Irish as essentially disorderly, with a fondness for drink which spanned the sexes and frequently led to riotous behaviour and aggravated assaults,¹⁶² further draining public resources through increased policing, court hearings and prison accommodation. Almost invariably presented in a negative light, if the Irish gained steady employment they were said to have stolen the job from a British labourer, but if they sought assistance from the Poor Law Guardians they were said to be an unnecessary burden. Similarly, if they laboured long and hard for little pay they were accused of unfairly undercutting native competitors, but if they did not work hard they were said to display 'indolence of character'¹⁶³ - one of the supposed characteristic traits of their race. In short, the Irish were often made an all-too-convenient scapegoat on

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, Appendix C, no. I, Report on the state of the poor, and on the charitable institutions in some of the principal towns; with supplement containing answers to queries, pp iii-xlvi, p. xiii.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, evidence of Mr Michael James Whitty, p. 20. Also of Mr Francis Murphy, p. 25, and of Mr William Dillon, p. 26.

¹⁶³ Leon Faucher, *Manchester in 1844: Its Present Condition and Future Prospects*, translated from the French with copious notes appended, by J. P. Culverwell - a member of the Manchester Athenaeum (London, 1844, reprinted London, 1969), p. 28.

which to place the burden of blame for all the ills of the modernising town with its rapidly expanding but inadequately serviced urban areas.

These prejudices against Irish migrants did not diminish with time. Indeed, the pressure of large-scale migration during the Famine crisis intensified ill-feeling towards the Irish in Britain, as the mass of refugees were blamed for the now familiar problems of urban squalor, the spread of disease, the lowering of living standards, and the rising cost of supporting paupers. These prejudices were still very much in evidence some years later when, in 1854, J. R. McCulloch's *Account of the British Empire* asserted that:

Within the last few years, however, an immigration has taken place into England, and also into Scotland, that has already had a great, and promises to have a greater, influence over the blood and character of the people. We allude to the immigration of Irish, or Celtic, labourers into Great Britain [...] Instead of being diminished, this influx, great as it has been, has latterly been augmented, and threatens to entail very pernicious consequences on the people of England and Scotland. The wages of the latter have been reduced by the competition of the Irish; and, which is still worse, their opinions in regard to what is necessary for their comfortable and decent subsistence have been lowered by the contaminating influence of example, and by familiar intercourse with those who are content to live in filth and misery. It is difficult to see how, with the existing facilities of intercourse between the two countries, the condition of the labouring classes in them should not be pretty much approximated; and there is too much reason to fear that the equalisation will be brought about rather by the degradation of the English than the elevation of the Irish. [...] It were better that measures would be adopted to check, if that be possible, the spread of pauperism in Ireland, and to improve the condition of its inhabitants; but, if this cannot be done, it seems indispensable that we should endeavour to guard against being overrun by a pauper horde.¹⁶⁴

In the same year the Liverpool Select Vestry petitioned the House of Commons requesting that a proposed bill abolishing the compulsory removal of paupers on the

¹⁶⁴ J. R. McCulloch, *Account of the British Empire* (London, 1854), p. 395.

grounds of settlement, introduced by Mr Baines, might not pass into law. In support of their petition they cited Liverpool's expenditure in providing relief for Irish paupers, which had amounted to £70,000 in 1847 and had increased by £16,000 annually, stating that the proposed bill would increase the town's burden substantially.¹⁶⁵ Parliamentary debate on this matter dragged on for several years.¹⁶⁶ In the meantime, compulsory removal of Irish paupers continued.

More than a decade later relations between Irish migrants and their English hosts remained fraught with old resentments. Karl Marx outlined his view of the polarising affects of the mutual distrust which existed between the English and Irish working classes:

Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps, the English proletarians and the Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standards of life. In relation to the Irish worker he feels himself a member of the ruling nation and so turns himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists of his country against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He cherishes religious, social and national prejudices against the Irish worker...The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees the English worker at once the accomplice and the stupid fool of the English domination of Ireland.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ PP, *Report of the Select Committee of Poor Removal, 1854*. Petition from Liverpool Select Vestry to the House of Commons for the compulsory removal of Irish paupers. Minutes of Evidence, pp. 364-5, evidence of the Rev. A Campbell, Rector of Liverpool and chairman of the Select Vestry.

¹⁶⁶ See PP, *Reports of the Select Committees on Poor Removal and the Unremovable Poor* (1854-5, 1857-8, and 1859). Also, PP, *Scotch and Irish Pauper Removal Bill*, House of Commons Debate, 1 April 1856, vol. 141, cc. 309-14.

¹⁶⁷ Karl Marx to S. Meyer and A. Vogt, 9 April 1870, in D. Cante (ed), *Essential Writings of Karl Marx*, (New York, 1867), p. 199.

In Marx's view, wealth was used to protect the power of the bourgeoisie, the status quo being maintained through the subordination of the proletariat. To this end the working classes were divided, English and Irish pitted against each other in order that their massed power might be fragmented,¹⁶⁸ though tensions fluctuated and were more complex than Marx indicates.

It was in this climate of official and public prejudice that Liverpool's Irish migrants attempted to forge new communities and bring up families. But what did this really mean for them - and particularly for women? The only witness statement provided in the 1836 report specifically concerning Irish women in Liverpool was collected from Mrs Ellen Ellison. As Matron of the Ladies' Charity of Liverpool for twenty one years, she was the only female amongst forty local government officers and eminent members of the town's business community to be interviewed by Lewis.¹⁶⁹ Since nineteenth-century gender ideology pronounced the role of women to be confined to the domestic sphere of home and family, the only information regarding Irish women migrants to be obtained by the commission was limited to their reproductive capacity. In particular, it involved their dealings with a charitable organisation which provided material assistance and a 'lying-in' or maternity hospital for poor married or widowed pregnant women. This is a classic illustration of Hickman and Walter's suggestion that Irish women's reproductive role caused them to form 'wider contacts beyond the community' than did men, potentially

¹⁶⁸ See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York, 1998); Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class conflict in Industrial Society*, (Stanford, California, 1959).

¹⁶⁹ The Ladies' Charity of Liverpool was founded in 1796.

exposing them more directly to racism at a personal level as they interacted with middle-class authorities.¹⁷⁰

Examples of this racism are to be found in Mrs Ellison's description of the charity's Irish applicants whom she considered to be uniformly dishonest; 'we avoid lending bed linen to the Irish, as they pledge it', and lacking in parenting skills; 'I think that more of the infants of the Irish die young than of other classes'. But she was particularly critical of the pregnant wives of Irish seasonal harvesters who, whilst their husbands merely passed through Liverpool *en route* to work in rural areas, remained in the town with the expressed purpose of obtaining free maternity care from the charity. She went on to describe how the charity responded to this practice by increasing its residency requirements from three months to twelve, thereby ensuring that a large proportion of applicants from amongst the itinerant Irish were rendered ineligible.¹⁷¹ Clearly, the issue of Irish migrants' access to charitable resources remained a contentious issue for some years, for the lying-in hospital's dealings with Irish women came under scrutiny again in 1848. This time claims that it had been 'improperly assisting' Irish migrants were investigated by the Mayor. He subsequently reported that he was 'now fully satisfied that it was conducted with the greatest propriety, and confined to the relief of the inhabitants of the town.'¹⁷² Significantly, during this year the charity's eligibility criteria was altered once more, assistance only being granted to women with two or more surviving children

¹⁷⁰ Mary J. Hickman and Bronwen Walter, 'Deconstructing Whiteness: Irish Women in Britain' in *Feminist Review*, no. 50 (Summer 1995) pp 5-19, p. 14.

¹⁷¹ PP, *Report on the Poorer Classes (Ireland), 1836*, Appendix G, no. II, pp 8-41, Minutes of Evidence, evidence of Mrs Ellen Ellison, Matron of the Ladies' Charity of Liverpool, p. 17.

¹⁷² J. Matthew Gallman, *Receiving Erin's Children: Philadelphia, Liverpool and the Irish Famine Migration, 1845-1855* (Chapel Hill and London, 2000), p. 101.

(formerly one child) and who were resident in Liverpool for two years (formerly one year). These restrictions, which were introduced with ‘great reluctance’, were deemed necessary since the charity’s income from donations was falling whilst the call for help increased.¹⁷³ This decline in charitable donations is likely attributable to growing prejudice in Liverpool towards migrants in the midst of the famine crisis.

Concerns regarding eligibility for the charity’s assistance certainly came at a time when migration patterns were changing. Earlier in the nineteenth century Irish migration was characterised by the movement of unaccompanied men and family groups, with approximately 66 *per cent* of migrants being males. But by mid-century the representation of family groups amongst migrants increased so that roughly equal numbers of men and women left the country (see **Table 1.2**).¹⁷⁴

Table 1.2 - Emigrants from Ireland by Sex, 1851-1855¹⁷⁵

Year	(In Thousands)		Total
	Males	Females	
1851	114	114	228
1852	95	95	190
1853	85	88	173
1854	72	69	141
1855	45	47	92

¹⁷³ *Liverpool Mercury*, 19 February 1850, p. 8.

¹⁷⁴ This trend reached a peak during the years of the Great Famine. From mid-century onwards female migrants began to outnumber males, particularly in the age range 15-20 years. See *Census of Ireland, 1871, Part III: General Report* (Dublin, 1876), p. 192.

¹⁷⁵ Data sourced from *Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54* (hereafter CEOPP) (Dublin, 1956).

It would appear that the affects of this demographic shift impacted heavily on Liverpool's lying-in hospital as the rising number of destitute married women arriving from Ireland placed greater demands on philanthropic maternity services. It was in direct response to this increasing need from new arrivals that the officers in charge of the charity's resources decided to restrict access in favour of those already established as residents of the town.

Although Mrs Ellison's testimony provides a valuable insight into the way in which Irish women - seasonal visitors as well as long-term residents - made use of Liverpool's charitable provision during their pregnancies, other roles played by these women, including that of breadwinner, are ignored by the report. This concentration on the reproductive element of women's lives and the negation of others bears testimony to nineteenth-century gender ideology encapsulated in the term 'Angel in the House'. This placed women very firmly within the domestic realm where their primary role was presented as that of nurturer.¹⁷⁶ As a result of increased urbanisation and industrialisation home and work became increasingly separated. In particular, the professionalisation of certain types of work formerly undertaken by women - brewing and dairying, for example - meant removal from the domestic environment. Once mechanised and established as 'skilled' work requiring formal training, women's participation was

¹⁷⁶ 'The Angel in the House' was the title of a poem by British poet Coventry Patmore, in which he idealized domesticity. The term came to symbolise those women who embodied selflessness and humility. The feminist view of this ideal was later expressed by Virginia Woolf in a speech delivered before a branch of the National Society for Women's Service in 1931 and published posthumously: 'She [the perfect wife] was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it...Above all, she was pure.' Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women' in *Collected Essays* (London, 1966), p. 285.

resented since it was perceived as reducing the status of the artisan and lowering his wages.

For the growing middle classes female 'leisure' signified male status. In order to legitimise women's removal from the public sphere they were portrayed as 'docile, delicate and emotional', unsuited to the challenge of the emerging capitalist arena.¹⁷⁷

The teachings of the church (of various denominations) were also co-opted, presenting the image of the self-sacrificing Virgin/Mother as the feminine ideal. Yet, for many women, this domestic ideal bore no relation to the reality of their lives. Despite the growing notion of a male bread-winner, the earnings of wives and daughters continued to form an important part of a family's total income. In Liverpool waged labour was a necessity for large numbers of working-class women, their earnings vital to the family's economy due to widespread underemployment amongst men resulting from casual recruitment in the male workplace. Moreover, a growing number of female migrants did not fit this 'family group' profile for, from mid-century onwards, the representation of single women increased to the extent that they began to exceed the number of men. For these women, travelling alone and making their own way in the world, paid employment assumed even greater importance.

¹⁷⁷ See Alice Kessler-Harris, 'Gender and Work: Possibilities for a Global, Historical Overview' in, Bonnie G. Smith (ed), *Women's History in Global Perspective*, vol. 1 (Urbana and Chicago, 2004), pp 145-94, p. 151 and 159.

1.3 TRENDS IN FEMALE EMPLOYMENT

In 1860 the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women was established in London - a development of the feminist *English Woman's Journal* - and an Irish branch was opened the following year.¹⁷⁸ However, the society's clientele were primarily middle-class women for whom it provided training in the skills necessary for clerical and technical work and actively sought out employers willing to hire women.¹⁷⁹ Meanwhile, perusal of contemporary newspapers reveals that from the mid-nineteenth century onwards employment agencies were available which, for a small fee, would obtain positions for male and female servants, lady's companions and governesses.¹⁸⁰ However, for the vast majority of working women, neighbours, friends and family members formed the basis of local networks, and 'word-of-mouth' was the most common mode of securing employment.

As previously noted, Liverpool offered limited opportunities for female employment. Those that did exist were very often unskilled, low status, poorly paid and unacknowledged.¹⁸¹ As a result, in 1861 only 15.8 *per cent* of married women in

¹⁷⁸ The *English Woman's Journal* was founded in 1858 and, in addition to advertising opportunities through which (mainly middle class) women might secure gainful employment, raised awareness of issues surrounding women's property rights and divorce law. See Susan Kent, 'Worlds of Feminism' in Smith, *Women's History in Global Perspective*, p. 289.

¹⁷⁹ Maria Luddy, *Women in Ireland, 1800-1918: A Documentary History* (Cork, 1995, 2006), pp 204-5.

¹⁸⁰ See advertisements placed by 'The Intelligence Office' Domestic Servant Agency, 38 Brownlow Hill, and 'Mrs Evans's Domestic Institution for Servants', 67 Renshaw Street, in *Liverpool Mercury*, 17 January 1845, p. 21.

¹⁸¹ Alice Kessler-Harris notes how American women's engagement in paid labour frequently went unrecorded, their taking in lodgers, sewing or laundry being viewed merely as an extension of their home duties. Kessler-Harris, 'Gender and Work', p. 152. Florencia E. Mallon makes a similar point regarding women in Latin America. Florencia E. Mallon, 'Studying Women's Work in Latin America: Reflections on the Direction of Feminist Scholarship', *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1987), pp 255-61, p. 256.

Liverpool Parish and 7.8 *per cent* in the more prosperous West Derby registration district were listed as employed - far fewer than in neighbouring textile towns.¹⁸² Irish women found themselves particularly disadvantaged in the competition for work since the local market factors, class issues and gender discrimination routinely faced by women were compounded by racial prejudice. Evidence of their negotiation of these difficulties is found through examination of four fields of employment frequently entered by working-class Irish women in Liverpool at that time - domestic service, lodging-house keeping, hawking and prostitution.

Victorian Liverpool employed more servants than any other town outside London.¹⁸³ Certainly the town was prosperous but the market was flooded with cheap labour so that even modest households could afford to employ domestic help. In 1841 there were 17,402 female domestic servants employed in the Borough of Liverpool, representing 11.7 *per cent* or one in nine of the town's female population of all ages.¹⁸⁴ Although this field was a primary employer of the town's female labour, there was sometimes a reluctance to accept Irish applicants, as was expressed in the testimony of Francis Jordan - a native of Ireland - who told the 1836 commission:

¹⁸² Lawrence Feehan, *Charitable Effort, Statutory Authorities and the Poor in Liverpool, c1850-1914* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, 1987), p. 30.

¹⁸³ Jackie Dibley, 'In a Liverpool Home' in *Born To Serve: Domestic Service in Liverpool, 1850-1950* (produced as part of the 'Women's History - Women's Lives' Oral History course, the Second Chance to Learn Project, Harrison Jones School, Liverpool, 1986), p. 8.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas Fresh, Inspector of Nuisances, 'Report to the Health Committee of the Town Council of the Borough of Liverpool, Comprising a Detail of the Sanitary Operations in the Nuisances Department, From 1 January, 1847 to 31 March, 1851' in *Reports of the Health Committee of the Borough of Liverpool, 1851* (Liverpool, 1851), pp 92-3.

I never employ the Irish as domestic servants, thinking them deficient in steadiness; I have nothing to say against their honesty personally, but I am forced to confess that a great proportion of the persons brought forward by the police are Irish of both sexes.¹⁸⁵

Twenty five years later it was still common for advertisements for domestic staff to proclaimed ‘No Irish need apply’, drawing comment from Liverpool journalist Hugh Shimmin. Condemning the hypocrisy of Liverpool’s ‘staunch protestants’ for displaying such ‘intolerance’, ‘national hatred’ and ‘selfish bigotry’, he wrote:

So far as the daughters of Erin are concerned, they may console themselves that their nationality protects them from the sneaking surveillance and vulgar taunts of such ‘quiet families’, where No Irish need apply, and where we hope no English ever will.¹⁸⁶

Nevertheless, by 1851 Liverpool’s female domestic servants numbered 21,940 of whom 7,081 were below the age of twenty years. This figure was bolstered by 2,244 daily charwomen.¹⁸⁷ Twelve *per cent* of those employed in the merchants’ homes of the prosperous Abercromby Square district were Irish,¹⁸⁸ supporting J. A. Jackson’s view that

¹⁸⁵ PP, *Report on the Poorer Classes (Ireland)*, 1836, Appendix G, no. II, pp 8-41, Minutes of Evidence, evidence of Francis Jordan, Esq, Merchant of Liverpool, a native of Ireland and resident of Liverpool for 35 years, p. 26. There was also a tendency for middle-class households in Dublin, for example, to employ English servants.

¹⁸⁶ Hugh Shimmin, ‘No Irish Need Apply’ in *The Porcupine*, no. XXXIV, 8 June 1861, pp. 114-115. However, Shimmin’s view is romanticised for, whilst Irish women’s nationality might ‘protect’ them, it could not provide for them financially.

¹⁸⁷ *Census of Great Britain, 1851*, Population Tables II, Ages, Civil Condition, Occupations and Birth-place of the People: with the Numbers and Ages of the Blind, the Deaf-and-Dumb, and the Inmates of Work-houses, Prisons, Lunatic Asylums, and Hospitals, Vol. II, Division VIII, comprising Cheshire and Lancashire, 1845, p. 652.

¹⁸⁸ R. Lawton, ‘Irish Migration to England and Wales in the mid-nineteenth century’ in *Irish Geography*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1959), pp 35-54, p. 52.

the Irish servant played an important part in the 'necessary establishment of status' for the growing middle class during the second half of the century.¹⁸⁹

Indeed, the authors of the 1851 census noticed that men outnumbered women in the poorer (predominantly Irish) Scotland and Vauxhall Wards, and that women outnumbered men in the prosperous Mount Pleasant and Islington Wards. This was particularly apparent in the twenty-thirty age group. The phenomenon was explained as being due to the movement of female servants from the homes of their parents in the first district, to those of their employers in the second.¹⁹⁰ However, the employment of new arrivals from Ireland - men in the dockside districts and women in the homes of the merchant classes - would also contribute to this trend.

Whilst those entering domestic service generally moved to more prosperous areas of the town, their lot was not an easy one. In the first instance, in the eyes of the law, the status of servants was that of children under the legal guardianship of their employers - subject to their authority and chastisement - while the employer enjoyed extensive rights protecting him from his servants.¹⁹¹ In 1851 public response to several cases of extreme cruelty towards servants prompted the passage of the Apprentices and Servants Act, though this safeguarded only those below eighteen years of age and was hard to enforce

¹⁸⁹ J. A. Jackson, *The Irish in Britain* (London and Cleveland, 1963), p. 88.

¹⁹⁰ *1851 Census*, Population Tables II, p. 613.

¹⁹¹ Cited in Mona Hearn, *Below Stairs: Domestic Service Remembered in Dublin and Beyond, 1880-1922*, (Dublin, 1993), p. 88.

due to the contained domesticity of servant lives.¹⁹² With regards to protective legislation for the vast majority of servants, little else was achieved during the next fifty years.¹⁹³

Secondly, servants' working and living conditions were unregulated. Though these differed from house to house, it was usually found that the smaller and humbler the household, the fewer servants employed and the greater the workload. For example, an 'under house-maid' or (in smaller establishments) a 'maid-of-all-work' usually worked an 18-hour day with one afternoon off per fortnight if she were lucky. In return she might expect to earn between £6 10s and £10 *per annum*.¹⁹⁴ At Christmas it was customary for her to receive a gift from her employer of a dress length of cotton print fabric which she was expected to make up, in her own time and at her own expense, into her day dress.¹⁹⁵ Higher up the scale, an accomplished or 'Professed Cook' in a gentleman's establishment might command £22 or more *per annum*.¹⁹⁶ Confining herself to the creation of more intricate dishes, she left the preparation of simpler fare, and the servants' meals, to her kitchen maids. In contrast, a 'Plain Cook' preparing simple meals in a humbler household could expect no more than £12 or £14 *per annum*. She received no assistance in the kitchen and, in addition to cooking, was usually expected to undertake such duties as cleaning the dining room and answering the front door when the housemaid was busy elsewhere.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Dublin, 1975), pp 118-20.

¹⁹³ Mona Hearn points out that the 1907 act intended to control servants' registries was 'ineffectual', whilst the bill to make compulsory the giving of character notes (or references), and the 1911 bill to regulate conditions of service, never became law. Hearn, *Below Stairs*, p. 24.

¹⁹⁴ Dorothy Marshall, *The English Domestic Servant in History* (London, 1949), p. 18.

¹⁹⁵ Elizabeth Drury, *The Butler's Pantry Book* (London, 1981), p. 123.

¹⁹⁶ Liz Stanley, *The Diaries of Hanna Cullwick, Maidservant* (London, 1984). p. 49.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 133.

However, the available information on rates of pay chiefly applied to London and its environs; elsewhere in the country wages were considerably lower. As we have already observed, the fact that in Liverpool labour was extremely cheap enabled tradesmen and mechanics to employ domestic help. Consequently, girls as young as twelve or fourteen were regularly employed as a household's only servant, receiving no formal training but hoping that skills 'picked up along the way' might lead to a better position within a year or two. The employment of such a young and inexperienced workforce kept wages low and limited opportunities for promotion, often providing no more than an apprenticeship for future marriage.

Once again, Hugh Shimmin gave voice to these domestics, this time in response to complaints that the previous twenty years had seen the standard of female servants deteriorate. He blamed the social posturing of tradesmen's wives who were, in his opinion, 'too proud to stoop to learn anything - too ignorant to teach' who employed labourers' daughters to 'slush and slave' at 9*d* per week and then were:

...the first to cry out, when their poor drudge [...] has left them, that domestic servants are the pest of their lives [...] it is because the girls are so rude and untutored and their first mistresses are so lazy and ignorant, that the race of female servants has deteriorated...¹⁹⁸

If Shimmin's information is correct, such rates of pay would amount to less than £2 *per annum* - far inferior to those previously quoted for similar positions in other regions of the country.

¹⁹⁸ Hugh Shimmin, 'A Bad Servant Manufactory' in *The Porcupine*, no. XXXV, 15 June 1861, pp. 126-7.

Thirdly, employers sought to control all aspects of their servants' lives. In her introduction to *The Diaries of Hanna Cullwick, Maidservant*, Liz Stanley notes:

In common with the inmates of prisons, mental hospitals and monasteries, and sailors on board ship, Victorian servants lived in an environment in which their time was rigidly controlled and their activities confined to those sanctioned by employers. [...] An important feature of 'total institutions' is that within them people are not only stripped of identities, but also no aspect of their existence is deemed to fall outside of the purview of (in this case) their employers. And so we find Victorian employers insisting on the right to control the moral and spiritual lives of their servants [...].¹⁹⁹

Such attitudes meant that control was extended beyond a servant's working hours to cover what little leisure time she found in the evenings. Similarly, the way in which she spent her 'afternoon out' was often strictly monitored, and in most households male visitors - disparagingly termed 'followers' - were forbidden. In addition, attendance at family prayers was often compulsory, as was weekly attendance at church - though this was to be arranged at a time convenient to the family.

Thus, the Victorian domestic servant's condition might be summed up as one combining 'bad legal position, poor living and working conditions and a general lack of freedom'.²⁰⁰ However, it must be conceded that life was materially harsher for very many, if not the majority, of their class. As servants they had the right to board and lodgings and these were usually superior to those experienced by many of their fellow workers. Nevertheless, difficulties arising from racial and religious prejudice amongst employers, combined with distaste for the personal constraints entailed, resulted in some Irish

¹⁹⁹ Stanley, *Diaries of Hanna Cullwick*, pp 31-2.

²⁰⁰ Marshall, *English Domestic Servant*, p. 24.

women migrants rejecting a life spent in domestic service. For some the prospect of self-employment - perhaps in a field requiring little financial outlay - appeared far more attractive for it held the promise of a greater degree of personal freedom and self-determination.

The keeping of lodging-houses was particularly suited to women, especially those who were married or had dependents, since work responsibilities could be fitted around family commitments. Indeed, family members might be considered an asset since they could assist with the extra domestic workload entailed in keeping lodgers. The Liverpool Sanitary Regulations Act of 1847 brought the town's lodging-houses under official supervision for the first time, possibly in response to the impact of the Famine influx. According to Thomas Fresh, Liverpool Corporation's Inspector of Nuisances, his initial investigations revealed many to be dangerously overcrowded and lacking even basic conveniences:

The worst description of these houses were kept by low Irishmen, in courts and narrow streets, and they were chiefly frequented by migratory Irish people, vagrants, and others. The floor of each room, in some of these houses, was covered with old bedsteads, which received, at nights, as many human beings as could be crammed into them; but in many places, even bedsteads were not to be found, and the lodgers were domiciled on wretched filthy pallets of straw, which were piled side by side on the floors; and as the rooms were generally almost without ventilation, when they became filled with inmates at night, they presented scenes of wretchedness which are almost indescribable. The writer of these remarks has frequently seen many of them crowded, in the night time, with human beings, lying side by side on the floors, as thickly as they could be packed, without any distinction of either age or sex; and, as cleanliness and ventilation were seldom thought of by the keepers, the natural consequences frequently followed, that fever and infection were generated amongst the inhabitants, to the serious detriment of the public health.²⁰¹

²⁰¹ Fresh, 'Report to Health Committee, 1851' pp 29-30.

Even allowing for a certain amount of prejudice and exaggeration - due, no doubt, to fears surrounding recurring epidemics of cholera and typhus (then commonly called 'Irish fever') - the inspector's report paints an appalling picture of the state of Liverpool's lodging-houses at the commencement of regulation. The Medical Officer of Health estimated that nine-tenths of the town's lodging-houses were kept by Irish proprietors, and believed that their lack of familiarity with the bye-laws outlining their responsibilities was due to a high rate of illiteracy (at least in English) amongst them.²⁰² Perhaps it is significant that the inspector referred to the proprietors as 'Irishmen' though the daily running of these establishments was more commonly undertaken by women, suggesting a sense amongst commentators of male ownership and ultimate responsibility.

Despite regulation, the problem of unlicensed and overcrowded lodging-houses continued.²⁰³ The Liverpool Lodging House Registry for 1851 - four years after official inspections began - reveals a substantial difference in the number of lodgers for whom licences were applied and the number allowed by the authorities (**Table 1.3**). Not only does this indicate the continued desperate need for cheap accommodation, but also suggests a persistent keenness on the part of lodging-house keepers to cram their premises with as many 'paying guests' as was physically possible, regardless of the conditions this produced and the byelaws that were broken.

²⁰² Frazer, *Duncan of Liverpool*, p. 76.

²⁰³ Examples of prosecutions for these offences are found in 'Public Office' column, *Liverpool Courier*, 31 October 1849, also 23 January and 6 February 1850, p. 3.

Table 1.3 - Summary of the Lodging House Registry, 31 March 1851.²⁰⁴

	Houses	Family	Lodgers Applied for	Lodgers Allowed	Rooms
Emigrants' Lodging Houses north of Dale St and London Rd	271	1235	4345	2812	1443
Emigrants' Lodging Houses south of Dale St and London Rd	15	63	171	146	81
Sub Total	286	1298	4516	2958	1524
Non-Emigrant Lodging Houses north of Dale St and London Rd	235	1149	2535	1661	1034
Non-Emigrant Lodging Houses south of Dale St and London Rd	138	719	1482	1008	689
Sub Total	373	1858	4017	2669	1723
Total Registered Lodging Houses	659	3166	8533	5627	3247

Even with chronic overcrowding the lodging-houses could not provide sufficient accommodation for the steady influx of new arrivals, some of whom sought work in the rapidly expanding town whilst others merely passed through *en route* to destinations further afield. In the spring of 1850, identifying a gap in the market, Mr Frederick Sabel opened an 'Emigrants' Home' in premises formerly occupied by the British Hotel in Moorfields, off Dale Street in the town centre. Capable of accommodating 300 lodgers, it aimed to provide what Fresh described as:

²⁰⁴ Data sourced from Fresh, 'Report to Health Committee, 1851', p. 36.

Comfortable and healthful accommodation without exposure to the chances of extortion and imposition, together with a sufficient supply of wholesome food, at as reasonable a cost as would be elsewhere incurred for food and lodging too frequently of an inferior description.²⁰⁵

This hostel was ‘much resorted to’ by emigrants from Germany, whilst separate accommodation - with its own entrance in Batchelor Street - was provided for ‘Irish and other emigrants whose requirements [...] were of a lower standard.’²⁰⁶ The following year Mr F. A. Marshall opened a second ‘Emigrants’ Home’ in Vulcan Street. Situated close to the Clarence Dock where Irish steamers landed their passengers, it was registered for 650 lodgers. Shortly afterwards a third was established in nearby Marybone, taking the total capacity of these large hostels to approximately 1,000.

Nevertheless, with unprecedented population growth the town’s accommodation situation became desperate so that cellars originally intended as store rooms and workshops were pressed into service as living space. Some cellars, already cleared and condemned as unfit for human habitation during the typhus epidemic of 1847, were reopened by landlords. Entire families crowded into these dark, damp, ill-ventilated rooms below the level of unpaved streets and courts overflowing with human and animal waste. Possessing little or no furniture, many slept on straw on the bare earth floor with sacks for bedclothes.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* This underscores notions of Irish depravity and the separation may relate to Victorian notions of contagion.

²⁰⁷ Finch, *Statistics of Vauxhall Ward*, Evidence of Felix Fitzsimons, pp 51-2, and of James Parker, p. 53.

Those found letting cellars illegally were served with a notice informing them of the breach and of the penalties. Approximately two to six weeks later the premises were re-inspected and, if still occupied, the owner or landlord was summoned before the magistrates. If a fine was inflicted they were allowed between a fortnight and one month to pay it, and if this was neglected a warrant was issued, although, according to the Inspector of Nuisances, these were seldom executed since the people were poor and the object was to clear cellars, not to exact fines.²⁰⁸ Between 1847 and 1849 the corporation evicted 25,015 people from cellars unsuitable for human habitation, aggravating the already critical housing shortage.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, so desperate was the need for accommodation - and so lucrative the income that might be made from its provision - that fines were of little use as a deterrent to illegal letting and for several years those summoned before the magistrates on this charge formed a steady stream although details of the identities and gender of those charged are not provided.²¹⁰

This willingness on the part of landlord and tenants alike to overcrowd lodging-houses and cellars contributed to established notions of the Irish as backward, slovenly and uncivilised. Similarly, it would seem that the letting of condemned cellars was viewed as yet another example of Irish lawlessness and civil disobedience.

²⁰⁸ PP, *Report of Poor Inquiry (Ireland), 1836*, Appendix G, Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, no. II, State of the Irish Poor in Liverpool, pp 8-41, Minutes of Evidence, evidence of Mr James Shaw, Agent to the District Provident Society at Liverpool, pp 14-15; Fresh, 'Report to Health Committee, 1851', pp 25-6.

²⁰⁹ Burke, *Catholic History of Liverpool*, p. 90.

²¹⁰ 'Police Court', *Liverpool Mercury*, 13 July 1847 recorded that on this one day alone 56 occupants of Lace Street, Midgall Street and others in that neighbourhood were fined for letting cellars illegally. Since most of their lodgers were Irish migrants, provision was made at the workhouse for those who could find no other accommodation. Reports of similar large-scale summonses are to be found in the *Mercury* on 20 July, 4 August, 18 September and 15 October of the same year, and also on 23 February 1849. Likewise the 'Public Office' column, *Liverpool Courier* on 23 January, 6 February, and 6 March 1850.

Another form of employment accessed by Irish migrant women was market and street trading. Whilst visiting Liverpool in 1850 as part of a walking tour of England and Wales, American traveller Frederick Law Olmstead recorded that ‘Women are more employed in trade than with us; I have no doubt with every way great advantage,’ and was struck by the fact that the fish and milk markets were ‘altogether in the hands of women’. He noted that despite skinning eels and cleaning fish, the women were ‘nice and neat’ with ‘full, bright, unwrinkled faces, beautiful red cheeks, and a cheerful expression,’ and remarked that, when compared with American women, they ‘appear more bold and self-reliant, their action is more energetic.’²¹¹ Whilst women’s participation in market trading was not unusual in Britain, what does seem surprising is Olmstead’s description of the women’s health and vigour, given Liverpool’s appalling health record at that time. In view of this, what he describes as self-reliance might be better attributed to the need to work hard in order to survive.

As already noted, by the mid nineteenth century the district situated to the north of Liverpool’s town centre had become one of the most densely populated sites in Europe where the Irish representation was rivalled only by that of New York. Long established as a centre for dealers in rags, bones and other detritus, it was here that the district’s trade in second-hand clothing also flourished. At its centre was what came to be known as

²¹¹ Frederick Law Olmstead, *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England* (1852) (quoted in David Seed (ed), *American Travellers in Liverpool* (Liverpool, 2008), pp 164-6.

‘Paddy’s Market’ - due to its position in Saint Patrick’s Bazaar on Banastre Street and its strong Irish connection - which earned fame with locals and visiting seamen alike.²¹²

Official markets were by no means the only outlets for goods. Street trading provided opportunities for small-scale enterprise, and since the necessary trading capital was small, this was often obtained from the pawnbroker.²¹³ In 1836 the Procurator Fiscal of Greenock, Scotland, told the Royal Commission that, ‘The Irish deal in old things of all descriptions, [such as] bones, old tools, old clothes.’ He also observed a ‘great company’ of Irish hawkers selling ‘fish, oysters, salted meat, eggs’ as well as ‘hare skins, and shells from the West Indies and Honduras.’²¹⁴ This was also the case in Liverpool where the novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne - American Consul in the town from 1853 to 1857 - described streets as teeming with basket-women ‘with fruit to sell, or combs and cheap jewelry (sic), or coarse crockery, or oysters, or the devil knows what’ from their pitches on the kerbside (see **Figure 3**).²¹⁵ In 1872 the journalist Hugh Heinrick also observed that Liverpool’s market people and street sellers were a class ‘almost exclusively Irish.’²¹⁶

²¹² ‘The History of Paddy’s Market’, an article originally published in the *Liverpool Echo* in 1929, reproduced on the Scotland Road 2003 webpage accessed on <http://www.scottiepress.org/sr2003/sr2003.html>, p. 10, 1 June 2010.

²¹³ See M. Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet: Pawnbroking and Working-Class Credit* (Leicester and New York, 1983).

²¹⁴ PP, *Report of Poor Inquiry (Ireland), 1836*, Appendix G, Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, Minutes of Evidence, evidence of George Williamson, Procurator Fiscal of Greenock, p. 141.

²¹⁵ James O’Donald May, *Mr Hawthorne Goes to England: The Adventures of a Reluctant Consul* (Ringwood, 1983), p. 59.

²¹⁶ Heinrick, *Survey*, p. 91.



Figure 3 - Basket Women outside Great Charlotte Street fish market, Liverpool.²¹⁷

Barrow-women - known locally by the generic name 'Mary Ellen' in reference to their Irishness - sold fruit and vegetables from street-corner pitches, while more easily-portable items might be hawked door to door. For example, sandstone was pounded into grit for scouring door-steps, and sold by the halfpennyworth.²¹⁸ Meanwhile, 'chip' girls reduced packing cases and other scrap wood to chips, tied it into bundles, and sold it as kindling. Although this was usually regarded as women's work, particularly lean times saw entire families turn to this occupation. Similarly, the wives of labourers in the building trade

²¹⁷ Great Charlotte Street Fish Market image accessed on <http://www.liverpoolpicturebook.com/p/11.html> (2 September 2011).

²¹⁸ Goodman, *Victorian Cabinetmaker*.

frequently supplemented the family income by selling wash-leathers, their husbands joining them when their own work was slack.²¹⁹

Due to the 'high-profile' nature of this work - the women being visible on the streets freely engaging with customers and passers-by in the arena of the 'public' world - they flew in the face of Victorian middle-class ideology which sought to firmly place women within the 'private' domain of the home. As a result they acquired a reputation for coarseness and even loose morals. Such attitudes toward their kind were not improved by press reports of cases like that of Mary Black, Sarah Glynn, Catherine M'Tague, Maria O'Donnell and Margaret Ward, fish-sellers brought before the magistrate and charged with throwing salt and using verbal abuse towards anyone refusing to buy from them.²²⁰ Working women engaged in legitimate business were also denounced as 'harpies' and 'strumpets', overly fond of finery - universally proclaimed as first step on the road to prostitution²²¹ - and accused of neglecting their 'natural' responsibilities within the home. Such critique only intensified for women who broke the moral code.

An American traveller, visiting early in the nineteenth century, recorded his impressions of the town:

²¹⁹ *Morning Chronicle*, 17 June 1850, letter 5 on the 'chip', 'grit' and 'oakum' trades. This practice was akin to the Irish family economy.

²²⁰ 'Police Intelligence', *Daily Post*, 9 September 1865.

²²¹ See Rev. William Bevan, *Prostitution in the Borough of Liverpool: a Lecture*, delivered in the Music Hall, Liverpool, 3 June 1843 (Liverpool, London, Glasgow and Leeds, 1843) (Liverpool Record Office). The choice of location for the lecture was significant since the Music Hall on Lime Street was noted as a key site of solicitation.

In Liverpool the proportion of women is much greater than of men, especially in the lower orders of society. The men of this grade are usually in the army or navy, and multitudes of the females are maintained by their vices.²²²

Certainly Liverpool's status as the second sea port of the British Empire meant that large numbers of sailors regularly frequented the town, estimates placing the figure at between 30,000 and 50,000 ashore at any one time.²²³ Naturally, this resulted in correspondingly large numbers of places of recreation in the districts closest to the docks, and in 1858 the Liverpool police recorded 1,445 public houses, 896 beer houses and 2,318 prostitutes. The seaport's brothels numbered 714 - three times as many as in inland Manchester.²²⁴

Robert Knox made the observation that, 'during seasons of prosperity, debauchery is merely the trade of prostitutes by profession...but in times of distress ... necessity alone has driven them to the streets.'²²⁵ Similarly, William Jameson, Governor of Liverpool's Borough Gaol, was of the opinion that, 'the peculiar and lamentable circumstances of temptation or necessity, or both, surrounding many of these unfortunate and profligate women are such as to leave them no alternative.'²²⁶ Liverpool's teeming port certainly provided plentiful opportunities for women compelled to resort to prostitution in times of

²²² Benjamin Silliman, *A Journal of Travels in England, Holland and Scotland* (1812) (quoted in Seed, *American Travellers* p. 14). Graduated from Yale in 1796 and Professor from 1802 to 1853, Silliman visited Liverpool in 1805 and again in 1806.

²²³ Neal, 'Criminal Profile', p. 16. In 1880 Lowndes estimated the number of mariners 'constantly among us' to be between 40,000 and 50,000. F. W. Lowndes, 'The Liverpool Lock Hospital and the Prevalence and Severity of Constitutional Syphilis in Liverpool' in *British Medical Journal*, (15 May 1880), p. 727.

²²⁴ *Liverpool City Police Instruction Book*, quoted in Paddy Shennan, 'Newly Discovered Merseyside Police documents' in *Liverpool Echo*, 17 July 2012. (Original held in Liverpool Constabulary archives).

²²⁵ Robert Knox, *The Greatest of Our Social Evils* (London, 1857), p. 122.

²²⁶ William Jameson, Governor of Liverpool Borough Gaol, 'Governor's Annual Report, 1863', in *Borough of Liverpool Proceedings of the Council, 1862-63*, p. 10 (Liverpool Record Office).

great hardship, and for those fleeing hunger and sickness in Ireland it also offered a greater degree of anonymity.

Official middle-class attitudes towards prostitution in Liverpool as elsewhere were those of disapproval and censure, as illustrated by a series of reports conducted over a number of years investigating such details as the number of women involved in prostitution in Liverpool, their ages and place of birth. As a result of these investigations it was claimed that in 1851 there were 2,900 known prostitutes in Liverpool,²²⁷ and in 1853 more than a quarter of the prostitutes prosecuted for being ‘disorderly’ on the streets of the town were Irish.²²⁸ One report, published in 1857, proclaimed that there were at least 200 ‘regular’ prostitutes under the age of twelve in Liverpool,²²⁹ and another noted that in 1866 there were 1313 ‘houses of bad character’.²³⁰ Whilst the first annual report of the Liverpool-Irish Catholic cleric Father Nugent shocked the nationalist press with its revelation that ‘more than 60 *per cent* of the law-breaking prostitutes of protestant Liverpool are our own countrywomen,’²³¹ he later noted that ‘...as regards prostitution, there was in Ireland a much stronger public opinion against it than in England.’²³²

²²⁷ James Bear Talbot, *The Miseries of Prostitution* (1844) (cited in ‘Prostitution’ in *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, vol. 53, 1850, pp. 448-506 (quoted in Keith Nield (ed.), *Prostitution in the Victorian Age: Debates on the Issue from Nineteenth-Century Critical Journals* (Farnborough, 1973)). W. Logan, quoting the Annual Report of the Liverpool Chief Constable, gives a figure of 2,249. See W. Logan, *The Great Social Evil* (London, 1871), p. 88.

²²⁸ PP, *Report of the Select Committee on Poor Removal, 1854*, Proceedings, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index, HC 1854 (396) xvii, evidence of the Rev A. Campbell, Q. 4,993 (quoted in Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society, 1800-1940* (Cambridge, 2007), footnote 15, pp 20 and 261. Also Neal, ‘Criminal Profile’, table XI, p. 53.

²²⁹ Finnegan, *Poverty and Prostitution: a study of Victorian prostitutes in York* (Cambridge, London, New York and Melbourne, 1979), p. 81.

²³⁰ Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, p. 82.

²³¹ Rev. James Nugent, ‘The special dispensation’, *Irish People*, 12 November 1864.

²³² Nugent’s evidence to the Prison Ministers’ Committee reported in the *Catholic Times*, 14 May 1870. Yet again this could not stop Irish women in need from working as prostitutes.

Despite Father Nugent's intimation that Liverpool was more accepting of prostitution than was Ireland, it would appear that, from time to time, a public show was made of stamping out this trade. One easy target was 'street girls' who were frequently apprehended if their drunkenness or soliciting threatened to disturb the peace which provides an insight into Victorian concern for public immorality. From 1847 onwards there were recurring bouts of prosecutions for allowing prostitutes to assemble and remain at balls such as those held at the Music Hall on Lime Street and the Assembly Rooms on Clare Street.²³³ Later, although attempts to extend the 1860s Contagious Diseases Acts to include Liverpool were unsuccessful, the prosecution of prostitutes appears to have been pursued increasingly vigorously.²³⁴ In addition, the enforcement of stricter licensing laws in the late 1860s resulted in a decline in the number of public houses prepared to let rooms to prostitutes. However, the double-standard which existed with regard to what was deemed acceptable sexual behaviour for men and women was displayed in the fact that there was never any attempt made to apprehend or prosecute the male clients of prostitutes. Rather, the 'persecution' of working-class prostitutes was hinted at in an 1869 report made by Father Nugent in his capacity as Prison Minister to Walton Prison. Referring to statistics provided by the (Church of England) Prison Chaplain, which revealed a disproportionately high number of Catholic prisoners (**Table 1.4**), Father Nugent acknowledged the increase of 1,176 on the previous year.

²³³ 'Police Court', *Liverpool Courier*, 7 November 1847, p. 3. Also 27 February and 13 March 1850, p. 3.

²³⁴ The influence of the Contagious Diseases Acts on prostitution in Liverpool is discussed further in Part II.

Table 1.4 - Declared Religious Denominations of Prisoners at Walton Prison During Year Ending 30 September 1869.²³⁵

	Males	Females	Total
Anglo-Catholics [*]	2,065	1,488	3,553
Baptists	8	2	10
Church of Scotland	11	47	58
Independents	2	0	2
Jews	8	1	9
Lutherans	33	0	33
Mahometan (sic)	1	0	1
Methodists	39	30	69
Mormon	1	0	1
Presbyterians	77	8	85
Roman Catholics	3,129	3,578	6,707
Not ascertained	2	0	2
Total	5,376	5,154	10,530

* Church of England.

However, the priest then asserted that this rise did not indicate an increase in crime but was largely due to, ‘...the recent energetic and deterrent mode of the Bench in punishing a certain class of offenders.’²³⁶ In support of this assertion he provided further statistics of his own (**Tables 1.5 and 1.6**).

²³⁵ Data sourced from Thomas Carter, ‘Chaplain’s Report’, *ibid*, p. 19 (Liverpool Record Office).

²³⁶ Rev. Nugent, ‘Prison Minister’s Report’ in *Reports of the Governor, Chaplain, Prison Minister, and Surgeon of the Liverpool Borough Prison, Presented to the Court Gaol Sessions, 16th October 1869* (Liverpool, 1869), p. 20 (Liverpool Record Office).

Table 1.5 - Place of Birth of Catholic Prisoners Committed to Walton Prison During Year Ending 30 September 1869.²³⁷

	Liverpool	Ireland	Other Parts of UK	Foreign	Total
Males	1,436	1,318	252	123	3,129
Females	1,259	1,938	355	26	3,578
Total	2,695	3,256	507	149	6,707

Table 1.6 - Occupations of Female Catholic Prisoners at Walton Prison During Year Ending 30 September 1869.²³⁸

Occupation	Number
Prostitutes	1,611
Married Women	701
No Occupation	156
Charwomen	183
Labourers & Basket Women	749
Domestic Servants	85
Shopkeepers & Dealers	53
Skilled Workers	45
Total	3,578

In view of the fact that, at that time, Liverpool's Catholics numbered approximately 150,000²³⁹ amongst a total population of 462,749 (or just over 32 *per cent*) perhaps

²³⁷ Data sourced from *ibid*, p. 21.

²³⁸ Data sourced from *ibid*.

²³⁹ Rev. Nugent, sermon preached on St Patrick's Day 1861 (quoted in Thomas Burke, *Catholic History of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 2000), p. 151). Bishop Goss, in a sermon preached at St Bridget's, 14 January 1872, estimated his flock to be between 150,000 and 200,000 (quoted *ibid*, p. 200). In the same year, Hugh Heinrick estimated the Irish population of Liverpool to be between 180,000 and 190,000. Heinrick, *Survey*, p. 88.

Father Nugent was justified in his belief that women who happened to be Catholic, Irish and prostitutes formed a 'certain class' which was being singled out for the particular attention of the police and the penal system.

Whatever the official stance assumed by the authorities, it would appear that in reality prostitution was accepted by many as an unavoidable, if unsavoury, part of a maritime town's life. And, since venereal disease formed something of an occupational hazard for prostitutes and seafarers alike, it was as a matter of course that Liverpool's old infirmary provided 'Lock' wards for the treatment of those who became infected. Originally situated on the position now occupied by Saint George's Hall, the old Infirmary was relocated to Pembroke Place and rebuilt several times until, in 1832, it was decided that a separate, purpose-built Lock Hospital should be constructed on a nearby plot at 59 Ashton Street.²⁴⁰ It is perfectly possible that this move was merely in response to a need for more space, but the separation of lock ward facilities from the main hospital might also be perceived as demonstrating nineteenth-century ideas concerning moral contagion. Certainly some viewed the isolation of those whose suffering was from the result of immorality as necessary in order to protect the 'innocent'. Furthermore, the relocation of Liverpool's lock facility to a side street - between the main thoroughfares of Pembroke Road and Brownlow Hill - likely reveals a wish to hide the morally corrupt from public view, thereby removing them from the public consciousness.

²⁴⁰ Lowndes, 'Liverpool Lock Hospital, Ashton Street: History and Description' in *Medico-Chirurgical Journal* (1899), pp 151-164 (Liverpool Record Office).

But whereas the majority of Lock Hospitals tended to admit women patients whilst limiting the treatment of infected men to out-patient facilities,²⁴¹ Liverpool provided in-patient wards for men as well as for women. Though it is unclear why this unusually enlightened approach was taken, it is possible that it was in direct response to Liverpool's poor reputation with regard to mortality rates, life expectancy and general public health, and the high number of seafarers coming into the port. In addition, Bevan's observation that Liverpool - as with Lock wards in other areas - approximately one third of the prostitutes admitted for treatment were aged twenty one or less, with some as young as fourteen, would seem to suggest that young women turned to prostitution and many were usually infected early in their careers.²⁴²

The term 'lock' is believed to have originated with the hospital at Southwark, London - built on the site of a medieval leper house - since the French term *loques* denoted bandages or rags.²⁴³ This connection has led Judith Walkowitz to suggest that, to the eighteenth and nineteenth-century mind, those suffering from venereal disease - and prostitutes in particular - had become the lepers of society.²⁴⁴ However, it would seem that this 'outcast' status existed to a greater extent in the minds of the middle-class authorities than in every-day reality. For example, as Frederick Law Olmstead observed of prostitutes on Liverpool's dockside:

²⁴¹ J. R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge, 1980, reprinted 1996), p. 59.

²⁴² Bevan, *Prostitution in Liverpool*, p. 11.

²⁴³ William Acton, 'Prostitution' in *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences*, vol. 1 (1857), pp. 605-8.

²⁴⁴ Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p. 59.

...generally they were pensive and sad, but not ill-tempered or stupid. It occurred to me that their degradation [...] had not brought with it that outcasting from all good which they would suffer with us.²⁴⁵

The available evidence suggests that the rate of poverty amongst Liverpool's Irish migrants, the opportunities presented by the seaport, and the failings of moral censure and arrests ensured the continuance of prostitution. The brothels and groups of prostitutes, as described by Olmstead, indicate their forming communities as part of the survival strategy.

²⁴⁵ Olmstead, *An American Farmer in England* (1852) (quoted in Seed, *American Travellers*, pp 160-1).

1.4 CHARITABLE EFFORT AND MUTUAL SELF-HELP: 'THEY ASSIST ONE ANOTHER A GOOD DEAL'

In 1836 Father Thomas Fisher noted the extent to which networks of mutual self-help quickly developed amongst the Irish in Liverpool, both settled and newly arrived. He informed the commission examining the state of the Irish poor in Britain that, '...they assist one another a good deal, both those who are resident here and those just come over from Ireland, whether resident or not.'²⁴⁶

With thousands of labourers and their families surviving on what might be termed the 'precipice of poverty' - accident or sickness threatening to send them plummeting into wholesale pauperism - a vast array of charitable societies and self-help organisations were established. Amongst those providing assistance was the Liverpool Charitable Society, established in 1823, managed by members of the Established Church, and confining its efforts to the sick poor born as natives of the town.²⁴⁷ Meanwhile, the Strangers' Friend Society, established before 1816,²⁴⁸ concentrated on assisting non-parishioners with no right of settlement and, therefore, no claim on public assistance, the bulk of whom were Irish and Welsh who had come to Liverpool seeking employment. Regularly supplying food, fuel and occasionally money, this society also set up soup kitchens in the winter months distributing between 200 and 1,000 gallons per day at $\frac{1}{2}d$

²⁴⁶ PP, *Report on Poor Inquiry (Ireland), 1836*, Appendix G, No. II, The State of the Irish Poor in Liverpool, pp. 8-41, Minutes of Evidence, evidence of Rev Thomas Fisher, resident priest of St Mary's, p. 22.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, evidence of Mr John Radcliffe, Agent for the Charitable Society and Secretary of the Strangers' Friend Society of Liverpool, p. 13.

²⁴⁸ In evidence given to the 1836 Commission, William Comer described himself as having been a member of the Committee of the Strangers' Friend Society for the last twenty years. *Ibid.*, evidence of Mr William Comer, p. 15.

per quart (and, at times, for free).²⁴⁹ They estimated that four out of seven applicants for soup were Irish, whilst two were Welsh and one English.²⁵⁰ The fact that such a degree of charitable intervention was required during the late 1820s and early 1830s indicates the level of need which already existed amongst Irish migrants to Liverpool prior to the Great Famine. Meanwhile, the Liverpool District Provident Society, established in 1830 and supported entirely by voluntary contributions, provided financial and material assistance to the needy whilst encouraging the poor to save money when their earnings were high, paying a 6d premium on each 10s deposited.²⁵¹

The combination of poverty, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene meant recurring epidemics of typhus, cholera and scarlatina. During the year 1851, for instance, a total of 2,765 'sick and disabled of the town' were cared for in the Infirmary and Lock Hospital - a weekly average of 192 in the former, and 45 in the latter.²⁵² By 1860 Dr Duncan was able to report that deaths in the Borough that year numbered only 11,236, being 588 fewer than in the previous year and 2,500 less than the average of the preceding ten years

²⁴⁹ Mr Comer described the soup produced as being '...made of the best rice, oatmeal and pearl barley, seasoned with pimento, molasses and salt. It is excellent, and very nutritive and palatable; it is useful to children; it prevents sickness; with a little bread or potatoes it is excellent food for a working man.' *Ibid*, p. 16. In 1853 renowned London chef Alexis Soyer devised a recipe for 'Poor Man's Soup' to be served in charitable soup-kitchens. It comprised 2oz dripping, 4oz beef, cut into 1 inch dice, two onions, thinly sliced, the peel of two turnips, the leaves or tops of celery and the green part of two leeks ('the whole of which, I must observe, are always thrown away'). To these were added 12oz flour, 8oz pearl barley, 3oz salt, ¼oz brown sugar and 2 gallons of water. Once brought to the boil, then simmered gently for three hours, the resulting soup was claimed to have been 'tasted by numerous noblemen, members of parliament, and several ladies who [...] considered it very good and nourishing...'. Alexis Soyer, *Charitable Cookery or the Poor Man's Regenerator* (1853) (cited in Maggie Black, *Food and Cooking in 19th-Century Britain: History & Recipes* (English Heritage, 1985), pp 42-3. This and similar recipes were widely publicised though, in fact, the soups thus produced rarely contained much nutritional value.

²⁵⁰ *PP, Report of Poor Inquiry (Ireland), 1836*, Minutes of Evidence, evidence of Mr William Comer, Member of the Committee of the Stranger's Friend Society, p. 16

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, evidence of Mr James Shaw, Agent of the District Provident Society at Liverpool, p. 15.

²⁵² *Report of the Liverpool Royal Infirmary, Lunatic Asylum and Lock Hospital, for the year 1851* (Liverpool, 1862), p. 4.

corrected for increase of population.²⁵³ Keen to prove the benefits of Liverpool's extensive and on-going sanitary improvements to sceptics concerned at rising costs, Dr Duncan asserted that:

Taking the large towns of Lancashire for instance, the mortality of Liverpool was lower than that of Manchester and Salford, Chorlton, Bolton, Blackburn, Ashton and Oldham, Preston, Rochdale, and Wigan. The only town in Lancashire with a population of more than 30,000, and which had a lower death-rate than Liverpool, was Bury, with about 35,000 inhabitants. Among the other towns of England which had a higher mortality than Liverpool, may be mentioned Leeds, Sheffield, Halifax, Newcastle-on-Tyne, and Nottingham; and in Scotland all the principal towns, excepting Edinburgh, and including Glasgow, Dundee, Aberdeen, Paisley, Greenock, Leith, and Perth.²⁵⁴

Liverpool's mortality rate was still startlingly high and left large numbers of children orphaned. There were already numerous charitable orphanages established in the town before the Irish Famine, each attempting to manage its limited resources through the confining of its assistance to those meeting very specific criteria. One example is found in the Female Orphan Asylum, opened in Myrtle Street in 1840. Here, stringent regulations stipulated that a girl might only be admitted upon production of documented proof of her parents' marriage, both their deaths, and her own baptism into the Church of England. In addition, she had to be above the age of eight, in good health (having been inoculated against smallpox or else already recovered from it) and the family to have received no assistance from parish funds.²⁵⁵ These regulations were adhered to rigidly,

²⁵³ W. H. Duncan, 'Report on the Health of Liverpool During the Year 1860' (Liverpool, 1861), p. 3 in *Liverpool Pamphlets, 1825-1861, Medical* (Archives and Special Collections, University of Liverpool Library).

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁵⁵ Alexina Forsyth, *The Three Liverpool Orphan Asylums, 1840-1865* (unpublished BA dissertation, Liverpool Institute of Higher Education, 1984), p. 8.

there being no exception to the legitimacy rule, although in four instances entry in the family bible was accepted as proof of baptism. The fact that 55 *per cent* of the asylum's first one hundred girls admitted were eight year-olds, and a further 23 *per cent* were aged ten or eleven, indicates the great need which existed amongst this very young and particularly vulnerable group, especially when we consider the young age of prostitutes being treated for venereal disease.

Some charitable organisations, however, purported to make no distinction on grounds of race or religion. James Shaw, Agent of the District Provident Society at Liverpool, told the 1836 Commission:

In awarding relief no distinction is made between the Irish and English; no distinction is made as regards religion or country; no question is ever asked about religion...²⁵⁶

John Radcliffe (speaking as Agent for the Charitable Society and Secretary of the Strangers' Friend Society of Liverpool) held similar views, though his assertion that he believed no charitable society in Liverpool made any religious distinction appears, at best, a little naïve.²⁵⁷ Although the officers of the Ladies' Charity discriminated against the temporary migrant in favour of the established resident in their dealings with Irish

²⁵⁶ PP, *Report of Poor Inquiry (Ireland), 1836*, Minutes of Evidence, evidence of Mr James Shaw, Agent of the District Provident Society at Liverpool, p. 14.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, evidence of Mr John Radcliffe, Agent for the Charitable Society and Secretary of the Strangers' Friend Society of Liverpool, p. 13.

applicants, they did at least recognise Roman Catholic marriage (which was not then legally accepted under English law and usually rendered children illegitimate).²⁵⁸

However, as was the case in the Female Orphanage, some charities were quite specific regarding suitable recipients of their benevolence. This setting of qualifying criteria frequently excluded Roman Catholics, amongst others, on religious grounds and it was this exclusion - coupled with fears of proselytizing by the established church - which led the Catholic community to establish its own extensive network, both religious and secular. More than forty years before the great wave of Famine refugees broke upon Liverpool, the Benedictine monks at Saint Mary's church established the town's first school for Catholic children in Gerard Street. Within a few years this was followed by the founding of the Pleasant Street School, established by the Benevolent Society of Saint Patrick, which aimed to provide education and secure apprenticeships for children of all denominations.²⁵⁹ In 1821 a procession was held to celebrate the laying of the foundation stone of the new Saint Patrick's church in the south end of the town. The list of participating organisations provides some idea of the range and extent of self-help within the community, for included amongst them were the Amicable Society of Saint Patrick, the Benevolent Society of Saint Patrick, the Hibernian Society, the Benevolent Hibernian Society, the Hibernian Mechanical Society, the Free and Independent Brothers, the Industrious Universal Society, and the Society of Saint Patrick.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, evidence of Mrs Ellen Ellison, Matron of the Ladies' Charity, p. 17.

²⁵⁹ The Benedictines founded their school in 1803, and that of the Benevolent Society of Saint Patrick followed in 1807. Burke, *Catholic History*, pp 32-5.

²⁶⁰ This last named society was formed with the particular aim of raising funds for the building of Saint Patrick's Church. The work was completed in 1827. *Ibid*, pp 38-9.

In fact, so great was local response that in 1853 Canon Hume estimated that Liverpool's Catholic schools provided education for 10,000 children,²⁶¹ and by 1866 the number of Catholic charitable brotherhoods and welfare organisations, charity schools and burial clubs was reckoned to match, if not exceed, the united efforts of all other denominations, although a degree of self-aggrandisement to boost support and funds is evident in such a claim.²⁶² By 1872 it was proudly asserted that the 'spiritual and intellectual advancement' of Liverpool's Catholics was well provided for owing to the 'zealous charity' of the town's Irish population. This was not a great exaggeration: the pounds of the rich and the pennies of the poor had built, furnished and maintained twenty three churches, ten convents and seven monasteries in addition to elementary schools, industrial schools and reformatories sufficient for 22,369 children.²⁶³

One such organisation was the Catholic Female Orphanage, originally established in 1817 as a home for girls and aimed strictly at orphans, which was located at 96 Mount Pleasant. In 1845 it moved to new premises in Falkner Street and the Sisters of Mercy religious order took over its management from a lay matron. Due to a shortage of Sisters, this order retired in favour of the newly arrived Sisters of Notre Dame in July 1851. At this point they accepted an Industrial School certificate for admittance, thereby agreeing to take in the children of workhouse paupers, though they stipulated that girls sent to them must be 'innocent'.²⁶⁴ But this source of income dried up and the orphanage was

²⁶¹ Hume, 'On the Education of the Poor in Liverpool' in *Condition of Liverpool* (quoted in Gallman, *Receiving Erin's Children*, p. 165).

²⁶² Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, p. 71.

²⁶³ Heinrick, *Survey*, Letter XII, p. 93.

²⁶⁴ This is indicative of the outcasting of prostitutes in the view of the middle-classes.

forced to seek public charity, Bishop Goss inaugurating a Rosary Sunday Collection in the Liverpool District for this purpose.²⁶⁵

Perhaps the greatest champion for the cause of Liverpool's Irish community was Father Nugent, though he was not least amongst their critics: '...he wanted to be proud of them, but they kept letting him down. He once...described the streets of Liverpool as paved with Irish prostitutes.'²⁶⁶

Nevertheless, Nugent instigated a wide range of charitable and self-help projects amongst the poor, one being a penny savings scheme for street traders or 'basket women'. This scheme secured Christmas treats - in the form of clothing, poultry and coal - upon production of a bank book showing money saved during the previous year.²⁶⁷ Amongst several other enterprising projects instigated by Nugent was a savings club amongst the 'fish-girls' which aimed to cover the cost of the fines they regularly incurred for 'obstruction'.

In addition, the idea of sick and burial clubs was popular amongst the poor - for whom the dignity of a decent burial assumed great importance²⁶⁸ - since the system facilitated the setting aside of small sums in anticipation of the inevitable expenditure. One such club, the Saint Patrick's Assurance and Friendly Burial Society, was established shortly

²⁶⁵ In 1927 the orphanage relocated once again, moving to Druid's Cross to make way for the Women's Hospital on Catherine Street. See Forsyth, *Liverpool Orphan Asylums*.

²⁶⁶ Runaghan, *Father Nugent's Liverpool*, p. 5 and p. 54.

²⁶⁷ Cannon Bennett, *Father Nugent of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1949), (quoted in Belchem, *Irish Catholic and Scouse*, p. 42).

²⁶⁸ Terry Cooke, *Scotland Road, "The Old Neighbourhood"* (Birkenhead, 1987), p. 98. The importance of 'sick clubs' would eventually wane with the establishment of the National Health Service in 1947.

after the founding of Saint Patrick's Church in Toxteth in 1827, and within a decade had a national membership of over 100,000.²⁶⁹ Its example was followed in 1834 by the establishment of the Liverpool Hibernian Benevolent Society.²⁷⁰ Similarly, in 1847 the Prudential Insurance Company was founded, providing life cover for 1d or 2d per week. The Royal Liver Assurance was to become the largest of these societies, though it began in Liverpool in 1850 as the Liverpool Lyver Burial Society when nine working men gathered together at the Lyver Inn to form a burial club for local people.

Whilst burial clubs and insurance societies helped the Irish poor spread the cost of the traditional wake and funeral, they began to earn a darker reputation. The fact that a life could be insured for just a few pennies per week, with the prospect of up to £50 being paid out upon death, proved too great a temptation for some and in 1843 a government report described how burial clubs placed 'a bounty on neglect and infanticide'.²⁷¹ Yet their business continued to flourish, the smaller societies gradually being absorbed by the larger such as the Royal Liver Assurance and Prudential Insurance companies, which became nationally recognised names. But for some, even a few pennies per week to insure against times of sickness or bereavement proved beyond their means.

²⁶⁹ Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, pp 106-7.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

²⁷¹ PP, *Report of Royal Commission on Interment in Towns, 1843* (509) XII 395, pp 54-64. In fact, there was to be little change in the regulation of these burial clubs and insurance firms during the next forty years. This topic is further discussed in Part Two.

1.5 POOR LAW PROVISION - LIVERPOOL AS AN EXCEPTIONAL CASE

Britain's 'old' poor law was rooted in Elizabethan legislation which rendered each parish responsible for its own poor and needy. A tax on property enabled the able-bodied poor to receive 'outdoor' relief - in the form of food, clothing or money - in their own homes, whilst the parish workhouse provided 'indoor' relief for the sick and infirm. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 sought to streamline the system through centralisation. Under the 'new' Poor Law responsibility for paupers no longer fell to individual parishes, but to groups of parishes formed into Poor Law Unions. Each 'union' maintained a central workhouse, confinement within this institution being the only form of assistance made available to applicants in all but a few exceptional circumstances. In order to ensure that all avenues of self-help and assistance from friends were exhausted before application was made for Poor Law relief, conditions within the workhouse were calculated to be significantly less comfortable than even the lowest wage could provide at home. In this way all but the totally desperate were deterred from applying for admittance, and then only as a last resort.²⁷²

However, Liverpool proved to be an exception to this 'new' poor law in several ways. Firstly, at the launch of the new system in 1834, the 223,000 residents within Liverpool parish rendered it the largest poor law unit in Britain, removing the need for 'union' with

²⁷² Key works on the poor law and the workhouse are M. E. Rose, *The English Poor Law, 1780-1930* (New York, 1971); Steven King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A regional perspective* (Manchester, 2000); Peter Higginbotham, *Images of England: Workhouses of the North* (Stroud, 2009) and his *Voices from the Workhouse* (Stroud, 2012).

other nearby parishes.²⁷³ Secondly, although in 1841 responsibility for administration of poor relief in the town was taken over by a twenty five-strong Board of Guardians, within a year protests that the new management was more cumbersome, more expensive and less efficient resulted in an act of parliament which returned management to the Select Vestry.²⁷⁴ Thirdly, despite Liverpool's workhouse being the largest in Britain, under-employment - largely due to the sporadic nature of the town's maritime economy - was so prevalent that the town continued to provide 'outdoor' relief on a vast scale for the able-bodied poor.²⁷⁵ This provision of 'outdoor' relief was preferred by both providers and recipients since it was seen as a measure by which the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor might be differentiated since: 'It saves the respectability of a family, for when people go into the workhouse, they continue there, and are branded as paupers.'²⁷⁶

Originally built in 1771 to house 600 inmates, Liverpool's Workhouse occupied a triangular site of twelve acres bordered by Brownlow Hill, Mount Pleasant and Duckinfield Street. Extended and remodelled several times, by the early 1840s it had an official capacity of 3,000. But even this was insufficient for, on occasion, it became

²⁷³ Eric Midwinter, *Old Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1971), p. 76. The surrounding parishes of Aintree, Allerton, Bootle-cum-Linacre, Childwall, Great Crosby, Little Crosby, Croxteth Park, Everton, Fazakerley, Garston, Ince Blundell, Kirkby, Kirkdale, Litherland, Lunt, Netherton, Orell and Ford, Sefton, Thornton, Toxteth Park, Walton-on-the-Hill, Wavertree and West Derby formed the West Derby Union (Seaforth and Waterloo being added in 1894). In 1857 Toxteth Park parish became an independent unit. See *The Workhouse in Liverpool* accessed on <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/liverpool> (10 January 2009)

²⁷⁴ *An Act for the Administration of the Laws relating to the Poor in the Parish of Liverpool* (1842), 5 and 6 Vic., cap. 88. See *Parish Committee and Select Vestry Minute Books*, 1803-1842, file 353 PAR 1/2/-1/2/7; *Liverpool Workhouse Committee Minute Books*, 1842-1911, file 353 SEL 10; *Orders of the Poor Law Commissioners, Poor Law Board and Local Government Board to the Select Vestry*, 1842-1906, file 353 SEL 15, all Liverpool Record Office. The Select Vestry retained governance until it was dissolved in 1922 and its institutions absorbed by the neighbouring West Derby Union.

²⁷⁵ The suggestion that high levels of underemployment in Ireland should be dealt with in the same manner was disregarded.

²⁷⁶ PP, *Report from the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Administration of the Relief of the Poor in Ireland, 1861* (408), x.1, pp 219-21.

necessary for as many as 5,000 Famine refugees to be housed there.²⁷⁷ The extent of later development, and the subsequent loss of green open spaces within its boundaries, is illustrated in **Figures 4 and 5**.

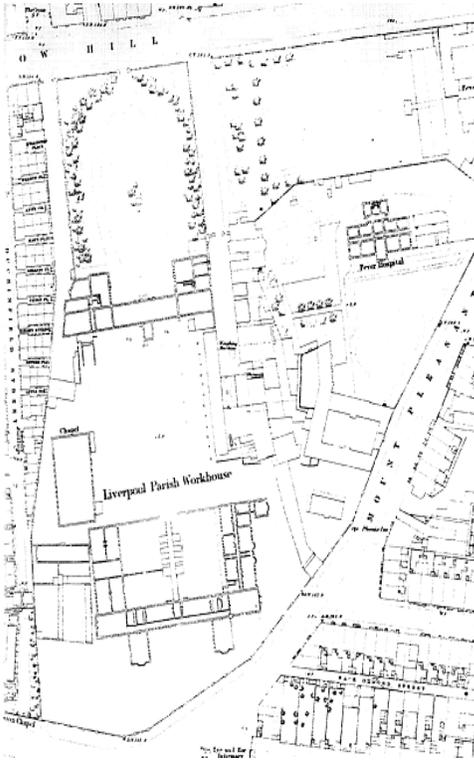


Figure 4 - Plan of Liverpool workhouse, 1848, showing open spaces within its boundaries.²⁷⁸

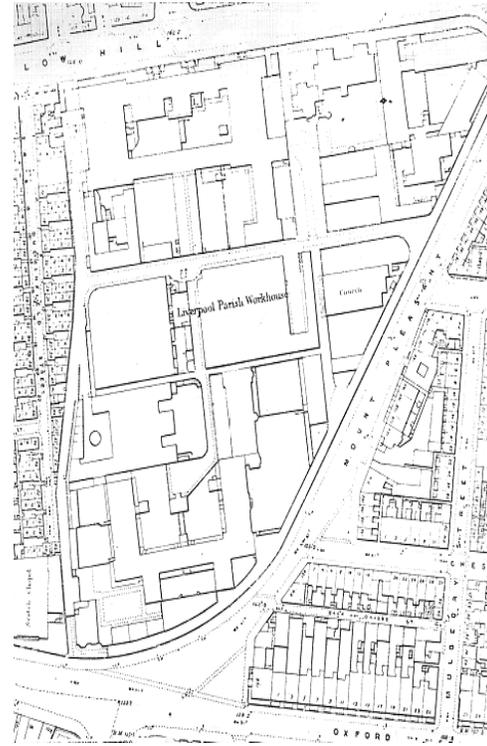


Figure 5 - Plan of Liverpool workhouse, 1886, showing extensive development within its boundaries.²⁷⁹

Along with segregated accommodation and exercise yards for men, women, boys, girls and the elderly, the complex contained fever and smallpox hospitals, a church, school, laundry and workshops. Here the able-bodied were put to work according to their

²⁷⁷ Information sourced at www.workhouses.org.uk/index.html?Liverpool/Liverpool.html, accessed on 10 January 2009.

²⁷⁸ Plan of Liverpool Workhouse, 1848, image accessed on <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Liverpool/> (10 January 2009).

²⁷⁹ Plan of Liverpool Workhouse, 1886, *Ibid*.

abilities as joiners, blacksmiths and stone-breakers, spinners, seamstresses and oakum pickers. From the age of nine children were trained in ‘useful’ skills, the girls weaving, knitting and working as domestic servants.²⁸⁰ In addition, there were ‘vagrant sheds’ where the wandering homeless were provided with shelter for the night in exchange for grinding 30*lb* of flour at four-man grinding stones.²⁸¹

The running of the new Union workhouses was, as noted, initially placed in the hands of Boards of Guardians, and it was they who determined who qualified for poor relief and those who did not. In the years between the passing of the ‘old’ Poor Law Act (1601) and the ‘new’ (1834), a whole series of laws surrounding rights of settlement and removal had been passed with the aim of minimising parish expenditure on newcomers and vagrants. These issues figured largely in the minds of the new management and, as a result, these rights and responsibilities were retained in the new legislation.

In short, paupers were only entitled to poor relief from the parish in which they were born or had gained the right of settlement. This right of settlement might be attained in a number of ways including marriage to a man from that parish (and thus emphasising ideas of female dependency), having parents born there, or renting a house above a certain value. Therefore, anyone applying for poor relief outside their native parish was subject to removal back to the parish with responsibility for them. Although this rule applied to all applicants, it was to become particularly significant for Irish migrants -

²⁸⁰ Smithers, *Liverpool, Its Commerce Statistics* pp. 296-7.

²⁸¹ Information sourced at www.workhouses.org.uk/index.html?Liverpool.Liverpool.html, accessed on 10 January 2009.

especially during the Famine crisis - for, although their seasonal labour made an important contribution to England's rural economy and their role in the development of industry and transport networks was growing, they had no rights to poor relief in England. As a consequence, the very threat of removal deterred large numbers of the destitute and starving from applying for poor relief. Rather, they turned to the self-help initiatives described earlier, and to begging - survival strategies which served to increase the importance of women's and children's earnings within a family. For example, an American visitor, writing in the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* as 'Stranger in Liverpool', described a town teeming with beggars and their children:

I have seen more beggars in one week in Liverpool than I have ever seen in all my life. The streets are full of them; at every step you are arrested and often followed by the pitiful cries of distress and want. Poor, ragged and haggard wretches, with four and five barefooted and poorly clad children, The most of these distressed beings are Irish, and have been driven over the channel by the approach of starvation...²⁸²

Any parish wishing to remove non-native paupers was obliged to arrange transport for the journey to the county boundary, where the next parish encountered took up the responsibility. This relay was repeated until the destination parish was reached, the ratepayers of each county contributing to the cost of the journey. In the case of Irish paupers, two ports were nominated as departure points - Bristol for all those travelling to counties in the south of Ireland, and Liverpool for all destined for counties in the north, west and midlands. In view of this, it is important to recognise that the number of Irish paupers recorded as removed from Liverpool includes all those transported from other

²⁸² 'Stranger in Liverpool', *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, 3 May 1847.

parishes. It also includes those who made their own way to the town and applied for poor relief with the full knowledge that this would result in them receiving a free passage to Ireland.

This system of 'removal' proved less than satisfactory for a number of reasons; in the first instance, it placed a significant burden on the ratepayers in areas surrounding the two ports of departure (Liverpool and Bristol) since they were obliged to contribute to the removal of every Irish pauper, no matter where their journey began. Secondly, areas with very few Irish residents were compelled to pay towards the removal of paupers from other parts of the country simply because they were situated on the route between areas of high Irish residency (such as London and Lancashire) and the departure ports. Thirdly, the system was open to abuse by parish officials who sometimes allowed paupers to abscond on the journey since they received payment regardless of the number of paupers they delivered.²⁸³ Fourthly, those wishing to return to Ireland free of charge might claim poor relief in order to receive free passage home.²⁸⁴ And fifthly, there was nothing to prevent those newly removed to Ireland against their will from taking the next available ship back to England.²⁸⁵ As a result, some parish officials simply opted to provide poor law assistance in the hope that this would prove less costly and troublesome than removal.

²⁸³ PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Laws relating to Irish Vagrants, 1833*, Appendix E, Minutes of Evidence, evidence of W. Elliott, p. 62

²⁸⁴ PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Laws relating to Irish and Scots Vagrants, 1828*, Minutes of Evidence, evidence of Mr T. L. Pain, p. 12 and of Mr G. Forwood, Parochial Officer for Liverpool, pp 15-16; PP, *Report from Select Committee (Irish), 1833*, Minutes of Evidence, evidence of Mr H. Cotteril, Overseer, p. 21.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Change came in 1846 when an amendment, in the form of the Five Year Residency Act, conferred ‘irremoveability’ on anyone who could show they had resided in that parish for five years or more. The high mobility of the urban working classes, and the anonymity this afforded, made it difficult for the authorities to challenge length of residency so that it became almost impossible to remove paupers from a bustling port like Liverpool. Further reductions in residency requirements followed so that by 1865 the qualifying period was just one year’s continued residence. This, combined with an 1861 ruling which transferred the cost of removing paupers wholly to the original removing parish, resulted in a drastic reduction in the practice and in 1878 only 88 paupers were removed from Liverpool.²⁸⁶

But if the position of Irish paupers was tenuous, that of Irish pauper women was doubly so. As women, the law did not regard them as individuals in their own right, but, as noted above, the responsibility of the men in their lives, be that fathers, husbands or sons. In her study of the treatment of women under the Poor Law, Pat Thane describes the position assumed by the authorities and the implications this held for women and children:

[They] took for granted the universality of the stable two-parent family, primarily dependent upon the father’s wage, and the primacy of the family as a source of welfare. Hence the poverty of women and children was thought to be remediable by the increased earnings of husbands and fathers. These were assumptions quite incompatible with the realities of the 1830s, of industrial low pay and recurrent

²⁸⁶ For a full discussion of rights of removal and settlement see Frank Neal, *Lancashire, The Famine Irish and the Poor Laws: A Study in Crisis Management* (A paper based on the presentation to the Irish Famine Network, University College Dublin, 12 October 1994). Also, Frank Neal, ‘The English Poor Law, Irish Migrants and the Laws of Settlement and Removal, 1819-1879’ in D. G. Boyce and R. Swift (eds), *Problems and Perspectives in Irish History Since 1800* (Dublin, 2004), pp 95-116.

unemployment, and early or sudden death. Many deserted or abandoned women were left to support children or other dependents on less than subsistence wages.²⁸⁷

Since the law assumed that a household was headed by a male breadwinner, and that other family members were his dependants, the wife and children of any man applying for poor relief were compelled to enter the institution with him. But this model did not match the reality of people's lives and, in spite of the 1834 legislation, attempts to sweep away 'outdoor' relief were unsuccessful. Liverpool's unique position meant that in 1855 the Select Vestry provided for 45,000 paupers in their own homes, in addition to 28,000 accommodated in the workhouse.²⁸⁸ Although this continuance of 'outdoor' relief was merely in response to the impossibility of accommodating such vast numbers within the workhouse, it meant that the able-bodied were spared the stigma attached to incarceration within that institution. However, the administrators were highly aware that this 'outdoor' system was vulnerable to abuse, and exercised great vigilance in the execution of their duties. Fraudulent claims were reported in the newspapers under such headings as 'Caution to Paupers', 'Pauper Imposition' and 'Another Fraud on the Parish', the emotive language carefully calculated to stir up public outrage and deter abuse of the system. And if the perpetrators happened to be Irish, attention was sure to be drawn to the fact.

For example, an examination of these reports reveals the case of Bridget Maloney who in 1847 appeared before the Relieving Officers in a state of 'great distress'. She was provided with a small sum but, for reasons not reported, suspicions were raised and she

²⁸⁷ Pat Thane, 'Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England' in *History Workshop*, no. 6 (Autumn 1970), p. 29 and p. 31.

²⁸⁸ Midwinter, *Old Liverpool*, p. 82.

was followed home. A search revealed her to be in possession of five half-crowns (12s 6d). She claimed that this was all she had in the world with which to support herself and four children, and had thought it no harm to get a little extra. She was sentenced to one month in jail, the money being confiscated to be used for her support whilst there.²⁸⁹ What became of Bridget's four children is not reported; they were most likely to be taken into the workhouse.

Another case that same year involved Mrs Higgins, an Irish woman accused of obtaining poor law relief under false pretences. For three weeks she received from the authorities 2d 6d per week through the registration of her sick husband under his own name of Martin Higgins, and a further 2s per week under his pseudonym 'John'. In addition, she was found to have given a false account of the number of her children. Mrs Higgins received a custodial sentence.²⁹⁰

These two cases clearly illustrate the shortcomings of a system which regarded a woman only in terms of her relationship to a male provider - as daughter, wife, mother - and her financial dependency upon him. In the first example the woman appears to have been an unmarried mother abandoned by her lover, for had she been a deserted wife or a widow the police would have referred to her by the title 'Mrs'. This single status did not merely mean she had no male breadwinner to provide for her and her four children, but it left her exposed to public moral judgement which led to her being followed home and her property searched. Consequently, she was presented to the world as 'Bridget Maloney',

²⁸⁹ 'Police Court', *Liverpool Mercury*, 19 February 1847, p. 4.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8 July 1947, p. 4.

the lack of marital title testifying to her moral character, and the name itself denoting her nationality.

In the second example Mrs Higgins and her children were dependents of a man unable to provide for his family due to sickness. Since it was in the interest of the authorities to ensure that the man did not abandon his responsibilities in favour of long-term poor relief at the expense of the town, poor law provision was thus made at a bare minimum. The 2s 6d paid to the family each week was approximately one day's wages for a labourer and clearly insufficient to provide for their needs. This was purposefully done in order to deter the father from 'malingering' and persuade him back into work at the earliest opportunity. As a result, the mother and children were made to suffer for the faults - real or imagined - of the father. It was Mrs Higgins' attempts to circumvent this 'back to work' strategy which set her at odds with the law, her Irish nationality compounding outrage at the family's imposition on the town's 'good will'.

The indignant tones in which these cases were reported in the press, and the harsh punishments metered out to the women involved, give clear indication of their position in the view of the authorities. Whilst the law demanded that material provision be made that they might not starve to death on the streets, it would seem that human compassion was another matter entirely. As Irish paupers they were already considered an unfair burden on public funds. The discovery that this burden was being increased through deception brought down the full wrath of the authorities and the press.

CONCLUSION

By the mid-nineteenth century a considerable Irish presence was already long established in Liverpool, its increase displaying features which might be explained by several migration theories. Firstly, Liverpool's trading links across the Irish Sea, and its role as a major access route for seasonal harvesters, point to migration systems theory since these existing connections gradually provided avenues for more permanent migration. Secondly, Britain's industrialisation - particularly in the north-west region - created favourable wage differentials and the possibility of greater opportunities, in accordance with neo-classical theory's 'push-pull' model. When severe famine struck Ireland large numbers fled to 'the nearest place that wasn't Ireland', Liverpool being a primary entry point to Britain as well as a short-term destination for those intent on long-distance migration. But in the wake of the Famine exodus a pattern emerges which conforms to new economics theory, where family survival was ensured through 'spreading the risk'. Family members - frequently daughters - were sent away from home, the expectation being that they would send remittances which might be used to pay the rent, provide for a sister's dowry, or fund a sibling's migration. Thus, the motivating factors for migration changed over time, the male/female ratio shifting until the number of women, particularly young unmarried women, increased to match that of men. Therefore, the scale and complexity of Irish migration renders the use of a single-strand theory approach impossible.

In Britain the combined affects of racial, class and gender ideology limited the opportunities available to working-class Irish women. Liverpool's commitment to international commerce, rather than manufacturing, offered women a limited range of employment, particularly in areas where they might have had skills which could be applied to a more mechanised process: textile production. At the same time, the high number of women seeking work allowed employers to keep wages low. With Poor Law provision meagre, and unavailable to those without right of settlement, Irish migrants turned to their own community for mutual assistance and support.

Thus burdened by prejudice, and with very few opportunities for self-support, Irish women often found themselves at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy. Faced with few alternatives, many turned to low status and low income work in the service industries of 'sailortown', in small-scale street sales, and in domestic service in the homes of the shipowners and merchants. Although such work frequently left them vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, victimisation and criticism from middle-class officialdom, they began to make several niche callings their own where they could eke out a living, often facilitating their own survival and that of their families.

PART TWO

LIVERPOOL'S DIVERGENCE FROM THE NATIONAL
NORM, 1870s-1910s

INTRODUCTION

The last quarter of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth witnessed social and economic changes in both Ireland and Britain. In post-famine Ireland, the move towards pastoral farming and mechanisation reduced the need for female rural labour. This was accompanied by change in inheritance and marriage patterns; even amongst the lower classes of small farmers and labourers, it became usual for one son to inherit control of family-held land and one daughter to receive a dowry. As a result, for a large number of women - especially younger daughters from families of limited means - there was little prospect of obtaining a 'good match', or the independent household marriage had once promised. The marriage rate was falling, and marriage was taking place at a later age, all of which facilitated the entrenchment of a culture of migration; between 1845 and 1914 the average age at marriage for men rose from twenty five to thirty three, and for women from twenty one to twenty eight. At the turn of the twentieth century 88 *per cent* of women aged between twenty and twenty four were unmarried, and 53 *per cent* of those aged twenty five to thirty four.²⁹¹ Marriage also became more of an economic 'match' arranged by families and professional matchmakers. Whether the rising rates of female migration were related to the hope of improved occupation status or improved marriage prospects will be considered here.

In Britain, female employment patterns were shifting, domestic service declining as manufacturing, clerical and shop work increasingly attracted young women, though the affects were not experienced equally in all quarters. This was also a period of reform,

²⁹¹ *CEOPP*, p. 72.

characterised by moves towards democracy and calls for women's admittance to the franchise, the National Insurance Act (1911), and various legislation relating to compulsory education and married women's property. But there was also more restrictive legislation such as the Contagious Diseases Acts which, although introduced in the 1860s, resonated into the following decades.

The aim of this chapter is to better understand changes in the factors determining female migration from Ireland. Also, to examine developments in ideology surrounding gender, race and class, as well as their manifestation in the workings of official systems, the tensions they produced, and their impact upon migrant women's real-life experiences. Therefore, an analysis will be made of rates of migration from Ireland in the post-famine era, particular attention being paid to the scale, composition and choice of destination, along with the social conditions which influenced these factors. In addition, working and living conditions in Liverpool will be examined, the affect of these on physical and mental health, and the reactions these provoked, both private and official. As before, accounts of life in Irish-dominated areas of Liverpool are provided by middle-class commentators since the voice of working-class migrant women continued to go unrecorded. Whilst this might skew our view, run the risk of 'othering' the working classes, and lead to unwarranted criticism of living and working conditions which were largely alien to the writer, without middle-class investigators less would be known about Irish migrants and the native working classes in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain. Moreover, these investigators often called for reform and drew the authorities' attention to some of those most in need in the urban squalor of Victorian

Britain. Amongst their achievements was a series of national social welfare legislation which dealt with such issues as the provision of free school meals and medical inspection for children (1906), the establishment of infant welfare centres (1907), and the National Insurance Act (1911).

Amongst those who campaigned on behalf of the poor, particularly poor women, was Eleanor F. Rathbone (1872-1946). Born in Liverpool, the youngest daughter of businessman and philanthropist William Rathbone VI and his second wife Emily, Eleanor was educated at Somerville College, Oxford and subsequently joined her father in his work investigating social and industrial conditions in Liverpool. In 1905 she helped establish the School of Social Science at the University of Liverpool where she lectured in social administration. In 1909 she was elected as an Independent member of Liverpool City Council, a seat she held until 1934, and was an Independent MP representing the Combined English Universities from 1929 to 1946. A long-term campaigner against social injustice at home and abroad, she spoke out against the second Boer War, opposed violent repression of rebellion in Ireland, and agitated for legislation against child marriage in India. For many years she also lobbied for a system of family allowances to be paid directly to mothers, her efforts eventually bearing fruit in 1945, the year before her death.²⁹² A co-founder of the Liverpool Women Citizen's Association, she declared her belief that 'the interests of women should be directly addressed by someone of their own sex.'²⁹³ Her endeavours in social reform in Liverpool included reports on the conditions of dock labour (1904), the family economies of casual labourers (1909), and

²⁹² See Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (Yale, 2004).

²⁹³ Eleanor F. Rathbone, 'Election address' given at Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society, 1910.

the financial difficulties faced by seamen's wives (1911) and by widows under the poor law (1913).²⁹⁴ Her work and its impact on the lives of Irish migrant women in Liverpool are significant, yet whilst she empathised with these members of her own sex whether this was sufficient to counter class prejudice will also be considered.

²⁹⁴ Rathbone, *Report of an Enquiry into the Condition of Dock Labour at the Liverpool Docks* (Liverpool, 1904); *How the Casual Labourer Lives: Report of the Joint Research Committee on the Domestic Expenditure of the Families of Certain Liverpool Labourers* (Liverpool, 1909); *The Payment of Seamen: How the Wives Suffer: Attitudes of Liverpool Shipowners* (Liverpool, 1911); *Report on the Condition of Widows Under the Poor Law in Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1913).

2.1 MIGRATORY PATTERNS: LATE NINETEENTH- AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY IRISH MIGRATION TO BRITAIN

During the latter decades of the nineteenth century the torrent of migrants entering Britain, though still substantial, began to slow. From a high point in 1861, when the Irish-born residents of England and Wales numbered 601,634 amongst a total population of 20,066,224, or just less than 3 *per cent*, by 1871 numbers were in decline as fewer migrants chose Britain as their primary destination. This trend continued and by 1911 the Irish-born in England and Wales numbered 375,325 or just over 1 *per cent* of the total population (see **Table 2.1**).

Table 2.1 - Birthplaces of the Population of England and Wales at Selected Censuses, 1861-1911.²⁹⁵

Birthplace	Census Year			
	1861	1871	1891	1911
England & Wales	19,120,052	21,692,165	27,882,629	34,464,059
Northern Ireland	-	-	-	68,576
Eire	-	-	-	283,204
Ireland (part not stated)	601,634	566,540	458,315	23,545
Elsewhere	344,538	453,561	661,581	1226,108
Total	20,927,609	22,712,266	29,002,525	36,070,492
(Irish as % of Total)	(2.99)	(2.49)	(1.58)	(1.04)
(Irish as % of Non-native)	(63.60)	(55.53)	(40.92)	(23.43)

²⁹⁵ Data Sourced from *Census 1961, England and Wales, Birthplace and Nationality Tables*, Table 7 (London, HMSO, 1964).

This bears testimony to the growing popularity of the United States over Britain as a migration destination during this era, a trend which was to continue well into the twentieth century. Between 1880 and 1904 the proportion of Irish migrants travelling to the USA fluctuated between 50 *per cent* and 80 *per cent*,²⁹⁶ whilst the period 1901-1931 saw this figure rise to approximately 90 *per cent*.²⁹⁷ Available data also reveals that the proportion of the Irish-born amongst all non-native residents of England and Wales was in decline, falling from 68.2 *per cent* of the non-native population in 1851 to 23.4 *per cent* in 1911 as Britain experienced an increase in immigration from the European continent.

Interestingly, whilst overall numbers of Irish migrants to Britain were decreasing, female emigration was on the increase. During the intercensal periods 1871-81 and 1881-91 women left Ireland at a rate of 1,010 per 1,000 men and 1,042 per 1,000 respectively. Even during the period 1891-1901, when male migration rose due to large numbers joining the British Army to fight in the Zulu and Boer Wars, women's representation remained relatively high at 951 per 1,000 men. This pattern was repeated during the period 1901-11 when female representation overtook that of men at a rate of 1,223 per 1,000.²⁹⁸ Overall, of the 1,357,831 migrants who left Ireland between 1885 and 1920,

²⁹⁶ D. A. E. Harkness, 'Irish Emigration' in Walter F. Willcox (ed.), *International Migrations, vol. II: Interpretations*, (London, 1931), pp 261-282, p. 278.

²⁹⁷ *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (US Census Bureau, 1976) accessed on <http://library.w/u.edu/details.php.resID=568>, 5 October 2010. See also Harkness, 'Irish Emigration', p. 278.

²⁹⁸ Data sourced from *Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems, 1948-54, Reports* (Stationery Office, Dublin, 1956), Table 86, p. 115. For discussion of this topic see Robert E. Kennedy, *The Irish: Emigration, Marriage, and Fertility* (Berkeley and London, 1973), p. 82; Tracey Connolly, 'Irish Workers in Britain During World War Two' in Brian Girvin and Geoffrey Roberts (eds), *Ireland and the Second World War: Politics, Society and Remembrance* (Dublin, 2000), p. 125. See also Diarmaid Ferriter,

684,159 were females. Of these 89 *per cent* were single and most were below the age of twenty four.²⁹⁹

For some commentators in Ireland, this rise in female migration was viewed as evidence of psychological inadequacy in the emigrants themselves. An article in the *Freeman's Journal* of 1908 lamented:

Irish girls, beguiled by hopes of fantastic wages abroad, give up more than they know, when instead of the simple neighbourly village life, or the friendly relations still existing in good Irish households, they choose at a distance the tawdry, uncertain splendours of a despised servant class, and take on themselves the terrible risk of utter failure far away from all home help. It is surely true that scarcely one Irish girl abroad is ever happy again at heart.³⁰⁰

This representation enabled the 'blame' for emigration to be attributed to the defective character of female migrants rather than on any flaws in Irish society.³⁰¹ It was to become a recurring theme amongst Irish commentators on migration, particularly female migration, during the next fifty years.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the northwest counties of England - due to their proximity to the main gateway to and from the Irish Sea - held a far higher proportion of Irish migrants than the national average. For example, of the 458,315 Irish-born enumerated in England

Ireland in the Twentieth Century, accessed on <http://www.gov.ie/en/essays/twentieth.html>, 26 September 2011.

²⁹⁹ J. A. Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland, 1885-1920* (Lexington, 1989), p. 100.

³⁰⁰ *Freeman's Journal*, 24 February 1908.

³⁰¹ See J. J. Lee, 'Emigration: A Contemporary Perspective' in Richard Kearney (ed.), *Migrations: The Irish at Home and Abroad* (Dublin, 1990), p. 34. One example is found in the report of the Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1956, discussed later in 3.3 Migratory Patterns II: Post-War Ireland and the Emigration Problem, pp 288-338.

and Wales in 1891, 184,495 were found in Lancashire and Cheshire, compared with 92,969 in London, Middlesex, Surrey, Kent and Essex combined. Within these two northwest counties specific towns contained particularly high concentrations; in Birkenhead 6.2 *per cent* of the population was Irish-born, in Wigan and St Helens the figure was 6.3 *per cent*, in Barrow-in-Furness 8.2 *per cent* and in Liverpool 9.1 *per cent*. Within Liverpool there were areas of even higher concentration; the population of the Scotland Ward, for example, being made up of 20.2 *per cent* Irish-born.³⁰² Even in 1911 when the number of Irish-born in Britain was at its lowest for sixty years, the national average being just 1.04 *per cent* of the total population, the four towns which made up Merseyside returned figures ranging from 3.3 to 6.7 *per cent* (see **Table 2.2**).

Table 2.2 - Migrant Population of Merseyside, 1911.³⁰³

Borough	Population	Migrants as % of Population			
		Total	Irish	Scots	Welsh
Liverpool	746,421	24.1	4.6	1.9	2.1
Bootle	69,876	27.7	6.7	6.7	3.4
Birkenhead	130,794	40.2	3.7	2.7	3.9
Wallasey	78,504	61.4	3.3	2.4	3.2
Total	1,025,595	300,023	46,366	24,279	25,660

³⁰² *Census 1891, General Report, England and Wales*, vol. IV, p. 62.

³⁰³ Data sourced from R. Lawton, 'Genesis of Population' in W. Smith *et al* (eds), *Scientific Survey of Merseyside* (British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1953), pp 120-131, Table XII, p. 128.

Writing the *History of the Irish in Britain* in 1892, John Denvir remarked on both the possibilities for advancement which presented themselves to the Irish in Liverpool, and the grinding poverty which many of them still faced:

There has been...a vast change for the better in the surroundings of our people, and, indeed, in every other way, so that there is no town in the country in which we have made greater progress than in Liverpool. Irishmen are gradually emerging from the ranks of unskilled labour and becoming more numerous among the artisans, shopkeepers, merchants and professional classes... Notwithstanding this success, however, there is probably also more wretchedness among our people here than anywhere else in the country.³⁰⁴

Typically for the period, he confined his attention to 'Irishmen', neglecting at least half of the migrant group supposedly under scrutiny.

³⁰⁴ John Denvir, *The Irish in Britain from the Earliest Times to the Fall and Death of Parnell* (London, 1892), pp 435-7.

2.2 TRENDS IN FEMALE EMPLOYMENT: 'A READY PAIR OF HANDS'

The years marking the close of the nineteenth century and the dawn of the twentieth saw significant changes in patterns of female employment in both Ireland and Britain. In Ireland, changes in farming practice saw a move away from labour-intensive tillage towards land-intensive pastoral, removing the need for a substantial amount of female seasonal labour. Along with a fall in demand for home-based textiles and the commercialisation of dairying - traditionally female undertakings carried out at home - this impacted on the contribution women might make to the family economy. In 1881 12 *per cent* of Ireland's agricultural workforce was female; by 1911 it had fallen to 3.2 *per cent*.³⁰⁵ Without a sufficient service or manufacturing base to absorb the surplus workforce outside the regional industrialisation of the north-east, the earning power of women was significantly reduced.

In Britain, although the period 1891 to 1911 saw no drastic increase in the total number of women employed, which merely rose in line with population growth, the types of work undertaken were beginning to alter. On the whole, women workers in England and Wales were concentrated in just a few areas of industry, of which the largest and most important was the personal service sector. This included not only cleaning, laundry and catering but, most importantly, domestic service. Indeed, this field was to represent more than 33 *per cent* of women workers in every census between 1891 and 1931, reaching a peak of 42 *per cent* in 1901. In that same year the textile industry and clothing production accounted for another 30 *per cent* of women workers, so that together these

³⁰⁵ Catriona Clear, *Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin and Washington D.C., 1987), p. 16.

areas represented almost three quarters of the entire female workforce.³⁰⁶ Whilst the 1891 census for England and Wales indicated that, of a total population of twenty nine million, 1,386,167 females and 58,527 males were employed in indoor service in private homes, the opening years of the new century saw the ‘golden age’ of domestic service begin to decline.³⁰⁷ By 1911 there were 114,177 fewer female servants, despite the national population having grown by six million. Most notably, the number of girls aged between ten and fifteen years engaged in this field fell from 107,167 in 1891 to 39,413 in 1911 due to the implementation of protective legislation, and tighter restrictions on compulsory schooling.³⁰⁸

Compulsory education for all was introduced during the 1890s, shortly followed by the Balfour Education Act of 1902 which ushered in secondary education and raised the school leaving age from ten to twelve years. The resultant rise in literacy levels prompted the popularity of cheap newspapers aimed at the masses, one local example being the *Liverpool Echo* which at its establishment in 1879 cost just a halfpenny and remained at the same price until 1917.³⁰⁹ This exposure to outside influences created a greater awareness of alternative possibilities in the wider world. Britain’s industrial expansion at home and flourishing trade with the far reaches of Empire brought economic growth, and with it increased opportunities for working-class girls in factories and shops.

³⁰⁶ E. James, ‘Women and Work in 20th Century Britain’ in *Manchester School of Economics and Social Science*, vol. XXX (September 1962), pp 283-299, reproduced in J. Lewis, *Women in England, 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Sussex, 1984), Table 10, p. 156.

³⁰⁷ The high demand for, and supply of, domestic servants might be attributed to the rising prosperity and living standards of the middle classes during this period.

³⁰⁸ Frank Dawes, *Not In Front Of The Servants: Domestic Service in England, 1850-1939* (London, 1973), p. 9.

³⁰⁹ The *Liverpool Echo* was established as a cheaper alternative to its sister publication the *Liverpool Daily Post*.

The number of women employed in manufacturing and in transport also rose 40 *per cent* from 1,710,313 in 1891 to 2,398,310 in 1911 and that of women in food processing and the manufacture of clothing also increased dramatically.³¹⁰ Furthermore, within a few years the impact of the First World War would be felt when 400,000 women left domestic service for work in the factories, many of whom would never return to their former employment.³¹¹

Britain's industrial and commercial expansion during this era brought prosperity on such a scale that by 1900 people were, on average, calculated as being more than twice as well-off as their grandparents had been. However, this wealth was not distributed evenly across society, the vast majority of working people seeing little benefit for their labours.

In the words of D. Edwards:

The extra income went into the pockets of males in the rapidly expanding middle class. The poorest 90 per cent would have noticed no improvement in standard of living; the servant girl was still earning 2/6 [12p] per week and a female factory hand as little as a penny [0.5p] an hour.³¹²

This was due, at least in part, to society's persistence in the view that married women - even working-class women - were not supposed to work outside the home, for in so doing they were perceived as advertising their husband's inability to provide for them. Yet, for very many women, this idealised view of domesticity bore little resemblance to their real

³¹⁰ Peter N. Stearns, 'Working Class Women in Britain, 1890-1914', in M. Vicinus (ed.), *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Bloomington, 1972), pp 100-120, pp 109-10.

³¹¹ Hearn, *Below Stairs*, p. 102.

³¹² D. Edwards, 'Victorian Liverpool: Some Facts and Figures' in J. M. Bone and Christine Hillam (eds), *Wives and Whores in Victorian Liverpool: Varieties in Attitude Towards Medical Care for Women* (papers delivered at a meeting of the Liverpool Medical History Society, 4 April 1998, published Liverpool, 1999), pp 3-13, p. 5.

lives where paid employment was a necessity. However, we see evidence of regional diversity in the rate of employment amongst married women. For example, in 1901 less than 10 *per cent* of all married and widowed women in Swindon and Newcastle went out to work, whilst in London, Manchester, Sheffield and Birmingham the rate was between 10 and 20 *per cent*, though in all cases most of those termed ‘married’ were actually widowed. Meanwhile, in the textile districts of Lancashire and Yorkshire, and the shoemaking districts around Northampton, female employment rates were significantly higher, with some towns reaching 40 *per cent* in 1901 and almost 50 *per cent* in 1911.³¹³ In Liverpool, sustained levels of poverty made paid employment a reality of life for large numbers of married women.

During this era extensive social research was undertaken, including those conducted by Charles Booth in the east end of London, and by B. S. Rowntree in York. The first of these studies revealed that one third of all families owed their survival to the earnings of both husband and wife,³¹⁴ and the second found that the earnings of wife and children were often greater than that of the male ‘head of the household’.³¹⁵ Meanwhile, a number of organisations conducted similar investigations in Liverpool, prompted by its deviation from normal work and earning patterns; in 1904 Liverpool Economic and Statistical Society examined the conditions of dock labour in Liverpool,³¹⁶ and in 1909 the same organisation published the results of Eleanor Rathbone’s research into the domestic lives

³¹³ Data sourced from *Census of England and Wales, 1901 and 1911*.

³¹⁴ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour in London* (London, 1902), first series, vol. 1, pp 37-49; vol. 4, pp 300-1, 310-11 and 322-3.

³¹⁵ Benjamin S. Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (second edition, London, 1922), p. 56.

³¹⁶ Eleanor Rathbone, *Report of an Enquiry into the Conditions of Dock Labour at the Liverpool Docks* (Liverpool, 1904).

of casual labourers and their families.³¹⁷ In the same year the Liverpool Women's Industrial Council reported on paid work undertaken in the home,³¹⁸ and in 1913 it investigated the 'Condition of Widows Under the Poor Law'.³¹⁹ These reports agreed that, in the case of Liverpool, the continued prevalence of casualism in the male employment market rendered many women the household's main breadwinner, for although male work was relatively well paid, it was so irregular that families could not be supported on this income alone. The situation was well-illustrated in Rathbone's 1904 examination of dock labour:

...estimates given us by a number of wharfingers, foremen, and labourers all agree in putting the average employment of a dock labourer at not above three days a week with overtime.³²⁰

In providing evidence to the *Royal Commission of the Poor Laws, 1910*, Rathbone again cited the casual nature of dockside employment as a major cause of married women seeking work outside the home. She maintained that a 'large section' of dock labourers were reliant upon their wives' earnings, though she acknowledged the possibility that a working wife might 'disincline' some husbands to seek regular work.³²¹

Yet, despite evidence that large numbers of women made significant contribution to - and in many cases totally provided - their family's income, the importance of female earnings

³¹⁷ Eleanor Rathbone, *How the Casual Labourer Lives: Report of the Liverpool Joint Research Committee on the Domestic Condition and Expenditure of the Families of Certain Liverpool Labourers* (Liverpool, 1909).

³¹⁸ *Homework in Liverpool: Report of an Inquiry by the Investigation Committee* (Liverpool, 1909).

³¹⁹ Eleanor Rathbone, *Report on the Condition of Widows Under the Poor Law in Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1913). These reports are discussed further later in this chapter.

³²⁰ Rathbone, *Conditions of Dock Labour*, p. 33.

³²¹ PP, *Royal Commission of the Poor Laws, 1910*, Appendix, vol. 8, p. 270.

was frequently ignored in considerations of women's employment within working-class economies. The assumption of the 1834 Poor Law that a wife was dependent upon her husband, rather than a contributor to the family income,³²² continued into the twentieth century so that the National Insurance Act of 1911 deemed married women's earnings non-essential to the family economy. As a result her inability to secure paid work was not recognised as unemployment, nor was any health provision made for her, since the objective of the National Insurance Act was to secure an income for the male breadwinner. Similarly, charitable institutions and employers alike continued to adhere to the notion of a male head of household as principle provider, disregarding the importance of the contribution made by women and viewing them merely as unproductive dependants.³²³ These views, coupled with the plentiful supply of female workers in Liverpool, meant that women's wages were kept so low that many were frequently obliged to supplement their earnings with parish relief.³²⁴

Although the need for female employment in Liverpool was considerable, the range of opportunities was limited. As a result the prevailing national trend was bucked so that, whilst right across the country domestic service was being abandoned in favour of other forms of employment, Liverpool retained a vast army of women employed in the personal services sector, the majority being domestic servants, well into the twentieth century (see **Table 2.3**).

³²² See Ellen Smith, *Wage-earning Women and their Dependants* (London, 1915); M. H. Hogg, 'Dependants on Women Wage-earners' in *Economica* (January 1921) pp 69-86; B. S. Rowntree and Frank D. Stuart, *The Responsibility of Women Workers for Dependants* (Oxford, 1921).

³²³ Eleanor Rathbone considered the term 'dependant' as suggesting 'something parasitic, accessory, non-essential'. Rathbone, *The Disinherited Family* (1924, third edition, 1927, with introductory essay by Suzie Fleming, Bristol, 1986), p. 122.

³²⁴ This is discussed further on pp 159-189.

Table 2.3 - Occupational Structure of Liverpool's Female Workforce, 1901-1911.³²⁵

Occupational Group	1901		1911	
	No	%	No	%
Personal Services	37,512	44.1	38,129	39.9
(of which Indoor Domestic Servants)	(23,069	29.1)	(21,555	22.5)
Dealers/Shop Ass	7,416	8.7	9,610	10.1
Clerical/Local Gov	2,521	3.0	5,053	5.3
Professional	6,582	7.7	7,057	7.4
Manufacturing	26,227	31.0	30,243	31.6
Other	4,783	5.6	5,473	5.7
Total Women Occupied	85,058	100.0	95,563	100.0

(Note, Female workforce calculated as aged 10 and over).

In 1891 almost 20,000 women were employed as domestic servants in private households in Liverpool, and in 1901 that figure reached a peak of 23,069.³²⁶ Others worked as domestic staff in the commercial field; hotels, boarding houses, hospitals and in laundries or as cleaners in offices, shops and on ships when in dock. Yet more worked from their own homes taking in washing, an occupation which continued to be particularly favoured by married women. But whether they 'lived in', worked from home or went home to their families at night, the burden of the domestic worker was a heavy one. No doubt for very many women the words of Mary Jewry in *Warne's Model Cookery* rang true, though they offered little consolation:

³²⁵ Data calculated from *National Census Occupation Tables*, 1901 and 1911.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

Recollect, my little general servant, that if your place is a hard one, it is also the best possible one for training you for a better. After all, too, you have not more to do, nor, in fact so much as you would have as the mistress of your own home when married, when you would probably have to clean the house, work for your family's support, and take care of children, besides enduring anxiety and the many cares of the mother and wife. In your place you have no care for daily bread or clothes. Your food and raiment are sure, and you have every comfort. If you rise early, bustle about, and waste no spare moments, you will get through your work very well...A little arrangement and thought will give you Method and Habit, two fairies that will make the work disappear before a ready pair of hands...³²⁷

Although Jewry rightly identified the continued view of domestic service as a good apprenticeship for married life, faced with such a daunting prospect, low pay, and condescending attitudes amongst employers, little wonder that elsewhere in the country many young women were seeking alternative opportunities where they might at least have a reasonable amount of free time to spend as the please. With fewer girls entering 'service', and the expansion of the middle classes who wished to employ servants as a symbol of their status, what had long been termed 'the servant problem' began to take on greater importance. Where once this had referred to the difficulty of finding good dependable staff and keeping them, in some areas it now began to mean the problem of finding any staff at all.

From the mid nineteenth century onwards domestic servants were regularly recruited from workhouses, orphanages and industrial schools; sources which promised a plentiful supply of young women. However, it was claimed that this practice lowered standards in servants' conditions for - as the psychologist Violet M. Firth pointed out in her 1925 work - since arrangements for the girl's employment were undertaken by institution

³²⁷ Mary Jewry, *Warne's Model Cookery* (London, 1893), p. 106.

officials who were themselves members of the 'employer caste', the terms were not often in her favour. Furthermore, with no family to support her through a period of unemployment, and the prospect of returning to the institution not one to be relished, a girl from this kind of background had little choice but to remain where she was placed.³²⁸

On the other hand, employers viewed such girls as ill-prepared for life in a middle-class private home. According to the 1880 edition of the *Journal of the Girls' Friendly Society*, the fact that they had spent their early lives in an institution meant that:

... unable to resist the temptations of a well-stocked larder, they picked up pretty objects which they were not supposed to touch, and tried on clothes they found lying about. They had scrubbed floors but did not know how to clean carpets, they could handle heavy crockery but not crystal tumblers. All too often they were dismissed with no character or, just as bad, a poor one, and ended up back in the workhouse at seventeen, consumptive or pregnant, or both.³²⁹

However, an alternative plentiful source of female labour lay close at hand, for the closing years of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth witnessed an increase in the proportion of women leaving Ireland. Ann Rossiter suggests that although entering the labour force as domestic servants in Britain placed Irish migrant women near the bottom of the employment hierarchy, this work was favoured since it provided accommodation, allowing the accumulation of savings and the sending of

³²⁸ Violet M. Firth, *The Psychology of the Servant Problem: A study in social relationships* (London, 1925).

³²⁹ Dawes, *Not in Front of the Servants*, p. 109.

remittances to family in Ireland.³³⁰ It also allowed some migrant women to live in more affluent middle class areas than would otherwise be possible.

Yet, increasingly domestic service was perceived as slipping closer to the bottom of the employment ladder so that, in the view of some, only the unemployed or criminals, down-and-outs or prostitutes were considered lower.³³¹ After the First World War, many who had left service for war work in the munitions factories were reluctant to return. Little wonder, for despite endeavours to improve conditions ‘below stairs’, very little was achieved after the introduction of the Apprentices and Servants Act of 1851, which only protected the rights of workers under eighteen years of age. As early as 1872 there had been attempts to improve conditions of employment through the organisation of domestic staff into trade unions in Dundee and Leamington. The Domestic Servants’ and Hotel Workers’ Union had been established, as well as a domestic section of the Workers’ Union, and in 1890 the London and Provincial Servants’ Union set up their head office in London’s Oxford Street. Four years later they organized a meeting at Kensington Town Hall, but although they circulated a pamphlet on ‘How to Improve the Conditions of Domestic Service’ and stirred publicity for their cause in the press, the movement failed to attract a large membership, due in part to the isolation experienced by significant numbers of lone servants employed in private middle-class homes. As a result, their plans for a regulated registry office and a home for unemployed and elderly servants

³³⁰ Ann Rossiter, ‘Bringing the Margins into the Centre: A Review of Aspects of Irish Women’s Emigration from a British Perspective’ in Ailbhe Smyth (ed.), *Irish Women’s Studies Reader* (Dublin, 1993), pp 177-202, p. 186.

³³¹ Dawes, *Not in Front of the Servants*, p.139.

amounted to nothing.³³² The initiative was not repeated elsewhere, even in Liverpool where, as noted, the number of domestics remained comparatively high.

In 1905 an article appeared in *The Lancet* announcing that servants' quarters were frequently in such poor condition that they warranted the attention of the local authorities' Medical Officers of Health. Yet it was another six years before parliament drafted a bill to regulate conditions of employment, and to 'provide for periodical inspection of their kitchens and sleeping quarters.' The bill progressed no further.³³³ Similarly, a bill which aimed to make compulsory the providing of character notes (or references) was never printed.³³⁴ Indeed, the only relevant legislation passed by parliament during this period was an act in 1907 aimed at controlling servants' registries. In practice this had little effect, partly due to the vagueness of the terms in which it was couched.³³⁵ Perhaps one reason for the continued failure to address the problem of poor conditions lay in the attitude of very many employers towards their servants; an attitude summed up in a *Punch* cartoon which originally appeared in 1865, and was reprinted in 1898 (**Figure 6**), further highlighting how slow change was in this sector of employment.

³³² Dorothy Marshall, *The English Domestic Servant in History* (London, 1949), p.12.

³³³ Dawes, *Not in Front of the Servants*, p.75.

³³⁴ Hearn, *Below Stairs*, p.89.

³³⁵ *Public Health Acts Amendment Act, 1907*, Chapter 53, Part III, Section 85, Registries for Servants. Point 2 merely stated that it was the responsibility of the local authority to make and enforce any byelaws it deemed necessary for the prevention of fraud or immorality in the running of servant registries.



Charming lady (showing her house to benevolent old gentleman), "That's where the housemaid sleeps."
Benevolent old gentleman, "Dear me, you don't say so! Isn't it very damp? I see the water glistening on the walls!"
Charming lady, "Oh, it's not too damp for a servant!"

Figure 6 - 'What will become of the servant gals?', *Punch*, 8 July 1865, reprinted 1898.³³⁶

For some women, however, it was a rejection of the situation in Ireland which led them to leave and take up positions as domestics in Liverpool. Unwilling to remain as unpaid help on the family farm, they sought opportunities denied them in Ireland; the Monaghan sisters - Molly, Bella, Ellen and Maggie - were amongst them (see **Figure 7**).

³³⁶ 'What will become of the servant gals?' cartoon, *Punch*, 8 July 1865, reprinted 1895, accessed on <http://www.diomedia.com/public/en/1013971/imageDetails.html> (4 November 2009).



Figure7 - 'Cook's Afternoon Out', Ellen Monaghan, circa 1904.³³⁷

Leaving their family's farm in Belleek, County Fermanagh around the turn of the century, the Monaghan sisters followed each other to Liverpool to take up employment as domestic servants. Here we find evidence of the classic 'chain migration' pattern, for Bella - having secured employment in the household of an eminent medical man - found a position for Ellen with her own employers' neighbours. As a result, the two sisters were able to live and work next door to each other. Eventually all four sisters married

³³⁷ Ellen Monaghan, photograph taken at a Liverpool studio and sent to her family - author's private collection.

Liverpool-born men and settled in their adopted city. Each left domestic service upon marriage, but when Ellen's husband enlisted to fight in the First World War she - having no children - returned to her former employment. Putting aside every penny she could spare, by the time her husband returned from active service in France she had saved enough to buy a taxi cab and set him up in business. Bella's husband was also self-employed as a painter and decorator; thus, through marriage and their own labours, the sisters enjoyed upward mobility on the social scale.

Over the years the four sisters maintained contact with their family in Ireland, as was characteristic of migrants, with young female migrants gaining a reputation for being especially loyal in sending money and remittances home. Their extended summer visits continued even after the death of their parents, when the family farm was inherited by an elder brother. Whilst these visits provided a country holiday for the sisters' Liverpool-born children, for the women themselves they became merely an opportunity to clean the aging bachelor's house:

Oh, they all looked after Uncle Barney. They took it in turns to go, and they stayed for weeks at a time. They had this huge trunk - a suitcase was no good - and they filled it with clean curtains and what-have-you. And they'd clean the house from top to bottom, and put up the curtains...and they'd bring the old things home with them.³³⁸

Evidently, Mary Jewry's prediction regarding 'the many cares of the mother and wife' was not inaccurate. Although the flow of remittances may have ceased once female

³³⁸ Interviews with Shelagh Thompson, granddaughter of Isabella Carter (nee Monaghan), 8 January and 8 April 2010 (used with permission).

migrants married, their responsibilities towards relatives 'back home' continued to be keenly felt, even after they had families of their own. Indeed, their continued involvement in family life in Ireland might be cited as evidence of the transnational ties maintained by some migrants, described by Glick Schiller *et al.*³³⁹

Liverpool's economic profile also changed little until the end of the nineteenth century. In 1880 the town of Liverpool was declared a city, and between 1895 and 1913 its boundaries were extended to include the outlying districts and villages of Wavertree, Walton, West Derby, Toxteth, Fazakerly, Allerton, Childwall, Much Woolton and Little Woolton, raising the population to 1,022,748.³⁴⁰ Yet, despite Liverpool's expansion in area and population, the city entered the twentieth century still largely dependent upon its waterfront commerce maintained by a vast workforce of casual male labour. As Margaret Simey observed, 'This was a port, a great port, and nothing but a port.'³⁴¹ Though tobacco processing, the distilling of spirits, soap making and sugar refining formed Liverpool's main manufacturing interests, in 1891 these processes combined employed just 2,280 men. By contrast the tobacco trade alone employed 1,964 women at that time.³⁴² This gender division would remain for many years to come.

³³⁹ Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc, 'From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration' in *Anthropology Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 1 (January 1995), pp 48-63.

³⁴⁰ John Belchem, *Merseypride: Essays in Liverpool Exceptionalism* (Liverpool, 2000, revised 2006), p. 202.

³⁴¹ Margaret Simey, *The Disinherited Society: A Personal View of Social Responsibility in Liverpool During the Twentieth Century* (Liverpool, 1996), p. 17.

³⁴² L. Feehan, *Charitable Effort, Statutory Authorities and the Poor in Liverpool, c1850-1914* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, 1987), p. 5.

In 1894 the Manchester Ship Canal was opened, allowing that inland manufacturing hub direct access to the overseas shipping trade.³⁴³ In Liverpool concerns were expressed regarding the threat this might pose to the city's primary status as a port, though these proved to be unfounded. Indeed, the closing years of the nineteenth century saw the shipping tonnage using Liverpool's docks continue to rise so that it more than compensated for any business lost to Manchester. Nevertheless, Chandler suggests that the development of the ship canal may have brought about the realisation that Liverpool was perhaps too reliant upon her docks, prompting subsequent industrial development in the field of electrical communications as well as seed crushing and sugar refining.³⁴⁴ These industries, along with clothing and tobacco, foodstuff and toy production, were to become significant employers of Liverpool's female workforce. Familiar household names - such as Hornby, Meccano, Jacob's and Crawford's - actively sought women workers on the grounds that they were more nimble-fingered for delicate work. Their reputation as a more pliant and less unionised workforce, and their availability at lower wages than men, also benefited employers. Consequently, these firms were to have less impact on male employment, and manufacture did not become a major feature of Liverpool's economy as the primary focus remained on overseas trade. Indeed, as late as the 1920s only *37 per cent* of Liverpool's total workforce was employed in manufacturing processes, compared with a national average of *67 per cent*.³⁴⁵

³⁴³ The Manchester Ship Canal was opened to general traffic on New Year's Day 1894. This was followed by an official opening ceremony, attended by Queen Victoria, on 25 May that year.

³⁴⁴ George Chandler, *An Illustrated History of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1972), pp 115-6.

³⁴⁵ Belchem, *Merseypride*, p. 206.

Within Liverpool's manufacturing sector, it might be argued that the best-paid employment for women lay in the tobacco factories producing cigars and cigarettes. This industry was unusual in that it offered women well-paid skilled employment for which a seven-year apprenticeship was served. Nevertheless, whilst earnings in the tobacco trade might be as high as 21 shillings per week, they could be as low as 2s. In 1894 Clara E. Collett, acting as investigator for the Royal Commission on Labour, made a study of female employment in this field. She found that a female cigar maker began her apprenticeship at thirteen or fourteen years of age on 2s per week. After one year the apprentice commenced piecework though she earned half the usual rate paid to a journeywoman until her seven years were served, despite producing the same work. In this way employers ensured a constant supply of cheap labour since a large number of women failed to complete their apprenticeship largely due to marriage. The few who did serve their entire apprenticeship and attained the full rate of pay could expect to earn more than £1 per week in return for producing between 1,000 and 2,000 cigars. However, cigarette makers did not fare so well since the majority were found to earn less than 6s and only 5 *per cent* of them earned more than 18s per week.³⁴⁶ In her report Collett compiled the following data showing pay scales and the proportion of women workers attaining each wage (**Table 2.4**).

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Table 2.4 - Wages of Women and Girls engaged in Tobacco Processing, 1893.³⁴⁷

	Weekly Earnings (in Shillings)							
	Under 6s	6-8s	8-10s	10-12s	12-15s	15-18s	18-21s	21-36s
% Attaining Each Band	38.8%	19.0%	15.1%	13.5%	7.1%	3.3%	2.0%	1.2%

These figures reveal that only 3.2 *per cent* of the women earned 18s or more per week, whilst 72.9 *per cent* earned less than 10s per week. In order to set this information within context, this was at a time when an unskilled man might expect to earn between 4s 6d and 7s per day as a dock labourer, depending upon the tasks required of him.³⁴⁸

With women's earnings from factory work so low, little wonder that the attraction of domestic service prevailed, where at least food, lodging and uniform were provided. It is, however, true that factory work was by no means the only new opportunity available to working-class women arriving in Liverpool from Ireland. But whilst nursing and midwifery, as well as teaching, were beginning to open up for educated girls from 'respectable' backgrounds, racial and class prejudice sometimes precluded the admittance of Irish women.

Writing in the 1860s, Emily Davies - contemporary of Florence Nightingale and founder of Girton College, Cambridge - declared nursing unsuitable work for middle-class women, dismissing it as 'in every way too nearly allied to that of an upper servant to be

³⁴⁷ PP, *Royal Commission on Labour, 1893-4* (c. 6894-XXIII) vol. XXVII, Part 1, Report of Miss Clara E. Collett on the Conditions of Work in Liverpool and Manchester, p. 68.

³⁴⁸ Rathbone, *Conditions of Dock Labour* (Liverpool, 1904), p.23.

in the least appropriate for the daughters and sisters of the merchantile and professional classes.³⁴⁹ The image was not aided by the fact that in the poor law union fever hospitals patients were nursed by fellow pauper inmates. But towards the end of the nineteenth century the workhouse infirmaries and fever hospitals of Britain and Ireland gradually became general ‘municipal’ hospitals. As a result, the custom of nursing care being provided by fellow pauper inmates was replaced with the engagement of trained nurses, though this was a slow process and as late 1894 some hospitals in Ireland were found to be still operating under the old system.³⁵⁰ This was particularly the case in institutions under the direction of religious orders since nuns did not nurse male patients, nor did they undertake night duty. Rather, these tasks were performed by pauper women, frequently with little or no formal training.³⁵¹

In Ireland Roman Catholic female religious orders came to dominate the provision of healthcare. Even as training became formalised, being acquired through apprenticeship, the authority of religious orders over the nursing profession was not diminished. Indeed, their control of health provision in Ireland was still in evidence in the latter years of the twentieth century.³⁵² Perhaps as a result of this influence, the nursing profession enjoyed high social esteem in Ireland, being regarded as ‘one of the few socially acceptable and available vocational opportunities for women...’³⁵³

³⁴⁹ Emily Davies, quoted in Jane Howard (ed.), *The Higher Education of Women. A Classic Victorian Argument for the Equal Education of Women* (London, 1988), p. 189.

³⁵⁰ *British Medical Journal*, vol. 1 (1844), 2 May 1896, p. 1113.

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, vol. 2 (1812), 21 September 1895, pp 740-2; vol. 2 (1814), 5 October 1895, pp 845-7.

³⁵² As recently as 1983 Dwyer reported that ‘To a large extent, basic general training [of nurses] in Ireland remains under the control of religious orders.’ M. Dwyer, ‘Under the Nun’s Influence’, *Nursing Mirror*, 20 April 1983, pp 21-22.

³⁵³ Nicola Yeates, ‘Migration and Nursing in Ireland: An internationalist history’ in *Translocations: Migration and Social Change*, An Inter-disciplinary Open Access E-Journal, ISSN Number 2009-0420, pp

A substantial number of Irish women chose to travel to Britain to receive nursing training. For example, between 1890 and 1900 half of all nurses accepted by the Dublin branch of the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nurses - which provided further training to enable district nursing - had undertaken initial training in England.³⁵⁴ But although this provides evidence that some women returned to work in Ireland after qualifying, a significant proportion remained in Britain, beginning what was to become a long-standing tradition of Irish over-representation in the British healthcare system.

No doubt one important reason for this high rate of migration was the fact that in Ireland the pupil nurse or 'probationer' had to pay a substantial sum for her training, whereas in British hospitals training was provided for free. In addition, accommodation and uniform were provided, and even a small allowance paid. Naturally, this made training at a British hospital a very attractive option. However, in Liverpool, issues surrounding race, class and religion meant that Irish pupil nurses were more readily accepted at the former workhouse institutions rather than at the more prestigious hospitals such as the Liverpool Royal Infirmary.³⁵⁵

Although openings for nurses may have been more numerous in Britain, and financial rewards greater, the work remained arduous, the discipline strict, and the hours long.³⁵⁶

1-21, p. 6 accessed on http://oro.open.ac.uk/19007/1/Translocations_Vol_5_Issue_1_d_p_df.pdf, 12 October 2012.

³⁵⁴ G. M. Fealy (ed.), *Care to Remember: Nursing and Midwifery in Ireland* (Cork, 2005), p.7.

³⁵⁵ This topic is discussed further in Part Three.

³⁵⁶ As late as the 1920s it was not unusual for nurses to work 71 hours per week on day duty and 84 hours per week on nights. Striving to improve conditions for her nurses, in 1922 Martha Roberts - Matron at Liverpool's Walton Hospital - introduced a 112 hour fortnight. This schedule was considered revolutionary in that it allowed nurses on night duty a meal break in the middle of the night. Doreen McGiveron, *The Walton Experience: Contributions to Local and National Developments in Health Care, 1915-1945*, a

The combination of long working hours, compulsory residency within hospital accommodation, and a bar on marriage meant that nurses became dependent upon the hospital for social needs. In many cases, the hospital community became a replacement family.

Another area of growing opportunity at this time was that of teaching and, since the Roman Catholic Church considered it prudent to avoid Protestant proselytisation through the provision of their own denominational schools, Catholic teachers were in great demand. In 1851 the Sisters of Notre Dame took over the running of the poor school at Liverpool's Copperas Hill, and shortly afterwards established a secondary school. The purchase of premises on Mount Pleasant allowed them to open a middle school for girls, and in 1856 this was developed into a training college for female teachers - one of only three Roman Catholic teacher training colleges in Britain. In 1898 Saint Mary's Hall, attached to the Notre Dame Convent, was established for the training of secondary school teachers.

Here, in addition to testing the academic ability of students, religious adherence was also carefully monitored. After completing a five-year apprenticeship a teacher might apply for certification which enabled her to take a post as an assistant school mistress. The *Liverpool Education Handbook* for 1903 shows that many student teachers remained at the school where they had studied, though the more ambitious could take the Queen's

paper presented to the Liverpool Medical Society, 13 February 2002, p. 12, accessed on <http://www.evolve360.co.uk/data/10/docs/14/14mcgiveronpd.f> (12 October 2012). See also R. White, *Social Change and the Development of the Nursing profession. A Study of the Poor Law Nursing Service, 1884-1948* (London, 1978), p. 169.

Scholarship examination. Those who gained a first-class graduation could expect to earn £25 per annum, whilst a second-class brought £20.³⁵⁷

During this period teaching at elementary level was becoming an increasingly feminized occupation; in 1903 more than 80 *per cent* of the 1,656 teachers listed in Liverpool's secular schools were women. At infant level all but one of the teachers was female, as were all in mixed intermediate level and at schools for the 'mentally or physically defective'. Whilst 7 *per cent* of teachers of senior boys were female, there were no male teachers of senior girls.³⁵⁸ Though there are no corresponding records available relating to the proportion of women teachers in Catholic schools (nor, indeed for schools under the auspices of the Anglican and non-conformist churches) the very fact that two of the country's three training colleges for Roman Catholic teachers admitted only women might be taken as an indicator of their relative numbers.

It would appear that in the teaching profession, as in nursing, Roman Catholics could encounter a degree of snobbery. Pupil-teachers were usually drawn from the lower middle-class of clerks, shopkeepers and small businessmen, but the greater proportion of Catholics in Britain were Irish migrants and their descendents who tended to occupy the lower positions in the social and economic hierarchy. Since Catholic teachers were largely drawn from the ranks of the working classes, they were considered by some to be 'a lower and less civilized class than the masters and mistresses of [...] other schools.'³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ Information accessed on http://www.liverpool-schools.co.uk/html/teacher_training.html (3 June 2010).

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ Matthew Arnold, correspondence to confidential government enquiry in 1895, in correspondence file ED9/14, National Archives.

Notwithstanding class and religious prejudices, the working classes which provided candidates for the nursing and teaching professions were those with sufficient income to provide a daughter with a reasonable level of education, and to forego any contribution to the family income from her during a prolonged period of training. Consequently, they were more likely to be the daughters of the ‘artisan’ and ‘mechanic’ rank than of the casual labourer who long predominated in Liverpool.

For those women lacking the education or means to take advantage of these new opportunities there remained other, more traditional, areas of female employment in a busy port. In 1888 the *Liverpool Review* declared, ‘There are more wretched women, fewer honourable occupations for women and poorer wages in this city than in any other part of the country.’³⁶⁰ Several years later this was reiterated when Clara Collett’s report to the 1894 Royal Commission on Labour stated, ‘...there is a very large class of women and girls in Liverpool who pick up a living by odd jobs.’³⁶¹ These ‘odd jobs’ included such tasks as rag picking and sack mending, processes in which large numbers of women were engaged. The first of these involved the sorting of rags which originated as off cuts from the local tailoring and dressmaking industry and cotton waste from Lancashire’s textile mills. The task is aptly described in Patrick MacGill’s 1915 novel *The Rat-Pit*:

All day long they worked together in the murky cavern sorting the rags. The smell of the place was awful, suffocating almost; the damp and mouldy rags gave

³⁶⁰ *Liverpool Review*, 26 May 1888.

³⁶¹ PP, *Royal Commission on Labour*, 1893-4, Reports from the Lady Assistant Commissioners, (c6894 XXIII) vol. XXVII, Part 1, ‘Report of Miss Clara E. Collett on the conditions of work in Liverpool and Manchester’, p. 67.

forth an unhealthy odour; dust rose from those that were drier and filled the place and the throats of the workers.³⁶²

Once sorted, the rags were sold through the city's chandlers for use in ships' engine rooms. The fact that this work was mainly undertaken by married women and widows desperate for an income ensured that their rate of pay was kept to a minimum. A sorter earned 1s 4d for an eleven-hour day, during which time she would be expected to sort three hundredweight of rags. Those who did not complete their task on time were obliged to work overtime without pay.³⁶³ The availability of this work fluctuated, but during busy times women were expected to work extra hours through the night to complete the load. Despite the fact that from 1891 the Factory and Workshop Acts restricted the number of hours women were permitted to work to twelve hours within the period 6am to 10pm, employers regularly contravened these laws, willing to risk having to pay a fine if caught.

Similarly, women were employed at sorting and mending the sacks which were then used in the transport and storage of a whole range of goods from grain and seed to sugar and coal. Once empty, these sacks were bought, sorted, mended and sold on for further use. Women engaged in these tasks might work from 7.30am to 6pm Monday to Friday, and from 7.30am to 2pm on Saturdays. For this they earned 1s 5d per day. However, few were able to secure such regular hours and many obtained work for just two or three days per week. Conversely, when work was busy women frequently carried 40lb of sacks to mend at home, prompting the following report in 1906:

³⁶² Patrick MacGill, *The Rat-Pit* (London, 1993), p. 244.

³⁶³ *Liverpool Review*, 3 August 1901.

I have in mind the case of an old woman - a corporation tenant. When I saw her she was stitching away as if for her dear life at a sack, which she was mending, sending the big darning needle in and out as quickly as her thin hands could ply it. She told me it was possible to mend 500 sacks a week. The pay is 1s per 100 and out of the 5 shillings she might earn she has to pay 2 shillings for carriage...The rent is 2s 6d...Fortunately parish relief swells her worldly wealth to 3 shillings.³⁶⁴

As previously discussed, street trading became established as a niche employment amongst Irish women in Liverpool, the trend continuing throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. During the 1890s the building on Banastre Street which had for many years housed St Patrick's Bazaar - better known as 'Paddy's Market' - was deemed no longer suitable for use. Stallholders were relocated to St Martin's Market Hall situated between Bevington Hill and Scotland Road, and took the market's popular nickname with them.³⁶⁵ Here the trade in all manner of second-hand goods continued to flourish, most particularly in second-hand shoes and clothing. In addition to those who traded in the city's several markets, large numbers of women continued to hawk commodities door to door. On visiting the Scotland Road district in 1883, a correspondent for the *Liverpool Daily Post* described the endeavours of 'chip' girls:

The women seem to monopolise the only decided occupations. Some streets are inhabited entirely by chip girls, and at certain times in the day you may see scores of tattered and battered women, young and old, sitting on the cellar steps, in the roadway, and on the sidewalks, chopping wood, and making up their baskets for sale...These girls have different districts in the town and outskirts, often walking miles before they reach their customers. They sell their chips at the rate of a

³⁶⁴ 'Our Slums', *Special Commissioners Report on Poverty in Liverpool, 1906*, Archive of the League of Well Doers (quoted in L. M. Grant, 'Women's Work and Trade Unionism in Liverpool, 1890-1914' in *North West Labour History Society Bulletin*, vol. 7 (1980-81), pp 65-83, p. 124).

³⁶⁵ 'The History of Paddy's Market', p. 10, accessed on <http://www.scottiepress.org/sr2003/paddysmarkets2003.htm>, 1 June 2010.

penny for a dozen bunches, often, however, getting much less than this...There are hundreds of these girls keeping body and soul together on tenpence a day.³⁶⁶

Others sold fruit, vegetables and flowers from barrows and baskets on street corners, particularly on Great Homer Street which lay to the north of the city centre. These 'Mary Ellens' were dressed distinctively in salmon coloured blouses, dark neck shawls, and pleated skirts nipped in at the waist with a linen apron. Very early each morning they loaded up their barrows and pushed them to pitches frequently occupied by their mother and grandmother before them where they worked long hours in all weathers - another indication of the slow pace of change in Liverpool. In his reminiscences of Scotland Road, Terry Cooke recalled that many of these women continued to work until more than eighty years of age, and marvelled that 'some of the more experienced women could quite easily balance on their heads a basket containing 56lb of oranges.'³⁶⁷

With opportunities for legitimate employment so few, and long hours of labour reaping little reward - whether spent in the factory, in the storage shed or hawking door to door - it is not surprising that some women turned to prostitution. In spite of priestly assertions that, 'Irish girls don't often go wrong',³⁶⁸ Irish women were not immune to the prospect of earning so-called 'easy money':

The drunken laugh that grates painful on the ear - the tongue that addressed the casual passenger in the language of vice and coarseness - is too often in the tone of the poor degraded Irish girl, who, far from home and friends, guidance and

³⁶⁶ 'Squalid Liverpool', *Liverpool Daily Post*, 5-10 November 1883, 5 November 1883, p. 6 and 7 November 1883, p. 5 (Liverpool Record Office).

³⁶⁷ Terry Cooke, *The Old Neighbourhood*, pp 40-1.

³⁶⁸ 'Squalid Liverpool', 7 November 1883, p. 5.

protection, sank into the vicious vortex which swamps virtue and destroys the bodies and souls of thousands in such a town as this.³⁶⁹

In itself, prostitution was not illegal, though prostitutes on the streets were liable to police arrest for any one of a number of offences, including vagrancy, disorderly conduct or creating a public nuisance.³⁷⁰ Soliciting was considered an offence, but only if the woman was a common prostitute, if she loitered in a public place, or annoyed bystanders and residents. The law dealt more severely with those charged with running a ‘house of ill fame’, or ‘living off immoral earnings’, although male clients faced no penalty.

However, prosecution was not the only action taken to control prostitution. Through the introduction of the Contagious Diseases (C.D.) Acts of the 1860s the authorities attempted to control the spread of venereal disease, but particularly syphilis amongst the British Armed Forces. Since female prostitutes were perceived as the primary source of disease and corruption, these laws allowed the detention of any woman suspected of being a prostitute found in or around any of the eighteen specified garrison towns and naval ports, and their subjection to regular medical examination.³⁷¹ If she was found to be free from infection, the woman was registered as a prostitute and compelled to present herself for medical inspection at fortnightly intervals. If infected, she was forcibly detained within a lock hospital for up to nine months. Refusal to submit to an

³⁶⁹ Heinrick, *A Survey of the Irish in England*, p. 94.

³⁷⁰ Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p. 14; Maria Luddy, ‘Abandoned Women and Bad Characters’: Prostitution in Nineteenth Century Ireland’ in *Women’s History Review*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1997), pp 485-503.

³⁷¹ The specified towns in England were Aldershot, Canterbury, Chatham, Colchester, Devonport, Gravesend, Maidstone, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Sheerness, Shorncliffe, Southampton, Windsor, and Woolwich, and in Ireland were Cork, Queenstown and The Curragh. See Danielle Pettit, ‘Attitudes to Venereal Contagion in Victorian Liverpool’ in Bone and Hillam (eds), *Wives and Whores in Victorian Liverpool*, pp 51-63, p. 51.

examination carried the penalty of one month in prison. In this way the authorities were, in effect, sanctioning vice in allowing it to flourish in certain districts on provision that regular health checks were made.

The recommendation of the military authorities, and certain members of the medical profession, that these measures be extended to cover ports such as Liverpool received serious consideration. Amongst its advocates was F. W. Lowndes, a specialist in venereology and surgeon at the Liverpool Lock Hospital. He claimed that at least 40 *per cent* of the town's prostitutes were infected, singling out Irish women to illustrate his point:

It is well known that Irish women in their own country are, even amidst very unfavourable surroundings, a most virtuous class, and yet they furnish the largest proportion of prostitutes in this city...they have generally belonged to the lowest and most degraded class of prostitutes, living in brothels situated in the very worst streets of the borough, and resorted to by the numerous negroes always present in Liverpool as ships' cooks, stewards, seamen and labourers. The condition of these women, both physical and moral, is deplorable, and their reclamation is a prospect of which the most hopeful might despair.³⁷²

The implication here is that in consorting with black men, Irish prostitutes confirmed their status as the lowest and most immoral of women who were unlikely to reform - a theme which was to re-emerge with the arrival of black American servicemen during World War II. Furthermore, Lowndes claimed that the incidence of syphilis within the general population was much worse than people generally believed, and insisted that

³⁷² F. W. Lowndes, *The Extension of the Contagious Diseases Acts to Liverpool and Other Seaports Practically Considered* (Liverpool, 1876), p. 31. See also Lowndes, *Prostitution and Venereal Diseases in Liverpool* (London, 1886), pp 3-4.

extension of the C.D. Acts and the institutionalising of prostitution was the only way to bring the spread of the disease under control.³⁷³

Those who opposed the C.D. Acts organised themselves, and in 1866 the National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts was established. Since their meetings were closed to women, in 1869 Josephine Butler formed the Ladies' National Association. Initially, she met prostitutes through her work in the Liverpool workhouse, and concluded that economic reasons were responsible for women turning to this trade. With the intention of tackling poverty and injustice through training for economic independence, she founded an Industrial Home in the city where destitute women might be prepared for future employment.

Amongst the National Association's ranks was J. Birbeck Nevins, consulting surgeon to Liverpool Eye and Ear Infirmary, senior lecturer at the Liverpool Royal Infirmary School of Medicine, and consulting physician at the Stanley Hospital. Though not an expert venereologist, he made a detailed study of the incidence of syphilis in Liverpool - amongst the Royal Navy and merchant seamen, as well as in the workhouse, infirmaries and Lock Hospital - during the period covered by the C.D. Acts. He compared his findings with figures for areas within the jurisdiction of the C.D. Acts, and found the rate of infection amongst the population of Liverpool to be far less than Lowndes claimed. For example, in the workhouse he found fewer than 5 *per cent* of inmates to be infected,

³⁷³ Lowndes, *The Extension of the Contagious Diseases Acts*, pp 34 and 38.

whilst of the town's 14,176 deaths from all causes in 1876, just seventy were found to be from syphilis.³⁷⁴

Even with Lowndes' alarmist figures, the Contagious Diseases Acts were never formally extended to Liverpool, but there is evidence to suggest that their 'moral enforcement' was used to remove prostitution from public view. In the years prior to 1870 the average number of convictions for prostitution in Liverpool was 300-200 per year, resulting in approximately 200 convictions. But in 1871 this number rose sharply with 3,388 cases brought before the magistrates, which resulted in 1,902 convictions, and remained at this increased level for several years. Danielle Pettit argues that this was a direct result of public debate surrounding the Contagious Diseases Acts - their extension versus their repeal - raising awareness of the issues surrounding prostitution. This placed increased pressure on the police to clean up the streets, who responded by focussing on the prosecution of brothel-keepers and known prostitutes.³⁷⁵ It was as a result of this 'moral enforcement' that Father Nugent, seeing the large number of prostitutes turned out onto the streets, perceived the need for a place where they might find safe shelter. As a direct result, Saint Saviour's Refuge was founded as a place of refuge and rehabilitation in Liverpool.³⁷⁶

The rigorous campaigning of the National Association and the Ladies' National Association eventually secured the suspension of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1883. Their repeal three years later effectively removed the threat of officially sanctioned

³⁷⁴ J. Birbeck Nevins, *The Medical Enquirer*, 15 June 1876.

³⁷⁵ Pettit, 'Attitudes to Venereal Contagion', p. 55.

³⁷⁶ Further discussion of this topic appears later in this chapter.

molestation. Viewed in this light, it might be said that the ensuing Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 was an attempt by the authorities to maintain some level of control in this field. The age of female consent to sexual intercourse had already been raised from twelve to thirteen years in 1875, and the 1885 act's raising of this age once again to sixteen years automatically criminalized younger prostitutes.³⁷⁷ In addition, it provided the police with greater powers against organised prostitution since it allowed brothel-keepers to be fined up to £20, or receive a prison sentence of three months with hard labour, for a first conviction. Subsequent convictions earned them a £40 fine or four months hard labour.

Perhaps as a result of these measures prostitution in late nineteenth-century Liverpool took on an increasingly clandestine appearance, for although the city's brothels had been candidly listed as such in the national census of 1851, in later years many were recorded as 'milliner's shops'.³⁷⁸ This might explain why, despite increased police powers against brothel-keepers, there was a steady decline in the number of arrests in Liverpool for actual prostitution between the years 1895 and 1913; a pattern not replicated in the other cities such as London, Manchester, Dublin and Belfast. (see **Table 2.5**).

³⁷⁷ P. Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London and New York, 2000), p. 84.

³⁷⁸ Walton and Wilcox, *Low Life and Moral Improvement*, p. 149.

Table 2.5 - Number of Arrests for Prostitution in Liverpool and Comparison with Other Cities, 1895-1913 (rates per 100,000 of population in brackets).³⁷⁹

City	Year				
	1895	1900	1905	1910	1913
Liverpool	2,806 (480)	2,267 (331)	1,876 (266)	1,472 (197)	1,208 (160)
Manchester	1,070 (205)	1,131 (208)	1,154 (190)	860 (120)	1,003 (140)
London (Metro-politan Police Dist)	633* (11)	1,804 (28)	4,028 (60)	4,451 (62)	4,605 (62)
Dublin	699 (190)	431 (112)	651 (163)	785 (190)	689 (164)
Belfast	84 (29)	86 (25)	223 (61)	453 (119)	479 (119)
Rest of Ireland	158	139	102	265	221

* - Actual figure reported. Arrests had been decreasing since 1890, but then rose significantly.

³⁷⁹ Data sourced from *Judicial Statistics of England and Wales* (HMSO, London), *Judicial Statistics of Ireland* (Dublin, 1896, 1903, 1908, 1913) and *Statistical Returns of the Dublin Metropolitan Police* (Dublin) (quoted in Joseph V. O'Brien, *Dear, Dirty Dublin: A city in distress, 1899-1916* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1982), p. 192.

2.3 CHARITABLE EFFORT AND MUTUAL SELF-HELP: SISTERLY SOLIDARITY

This period also saw a large number of official investigations into the condition of Britain's poorer classes being undertaken, which were to lead eventually to a programme of social welfare reform. One of the reasons for these investigations was growing concern that the population was in decline. Although between 1860 and 1900 general death rates fell by approximately 151 per thousand - and those for children aged one to five years fell by 330 per thousand³⁸⁰ - infant mortality remained high at 114 per thousand.³⁸¹ In addition, the national birth rate was in steady decline, so that the mid-Victorian working-class average of six or more children fell to just under 2.5 children by 1929.³⁸² With fewer births, and a constant infant mortality rate, a higher proportion of infants were failing to survive the first twelve months of life. Another spur to this investigation of the poor was the shocking discovery made in 1899 - when Britain went to war in South Africa - that undersized, undernourished and suffering from the effects of diseases such as rickets and tuberculosis, 60 *per cent* of volunteers were medically unfit for army service.³⁸³

Faced with these problems, the authorities set about discovering the cause of such high rates of infant mortality and adult debility. In 1891 the government had set up a Royal

³⁸⁰ *Supplement to 65th Annual Report of the Registrar General of Births, Marriages and Deaths in England and Wales, 1891-1900* (Part I, 1907, Col. 2618).

³⁸¹ Joe Hicks and Grahame Allen, *A Century of Change: Trends in UK Statistics Since 1900*, Research Paper 99/11, 21 December 1999, Social and General Statistics Section, House of Commons (London, 2000), p. 8.

³⁸² Richard M. Titmuss, *Essays on 'The Welfare State'* (London, 1958), p. 89.

³⁸³ In some urban areas as many as 9 out of 10 volunteers were rejected on medical grounds, prompting the question, 'If they are unfit for the army, what are they fit for?', *British Medical Journal*, 25 July 1903, p. 202. See PP, *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration, 1904*, Report Cd.2175; Witnesses and Minutes of Evidence Cd.2210; Appendix and General Index Cd.2186.

Commission and then a Select Committee to investigate Sweated Labour, and two years later a Royal Commission had reported on the state of labour in general. In 1895 there was a Special Commission on Distress through Want of Employment, and in 1899 another on the Aged Deserving Poor. In fact, the era saw a whole series of enquiries and accompanying reports into living and working conditions, yet it would be some years before the collected results produced any positive effect on real lives.

As noted, the availability of a large female workforce in Liverpool meant that their wages were kept so low that many were forced to supplement their earnings with Poor Law or charitable relief. One result of such low incomes was that it became common for women to neglect their own welfare in favour of that of their husbands and children. Malnutrition and premature old age were often the result, exacerbated by numerous pregnancies. But if working conditions were no better than they had been thirty years earlier, at least attention was being drawn to the fact by those campaigning for social reform.

In 1891 the government's Select Committee investigating sweated labour in Liverpool received the evidence of Hyman Balsam - a Polish tailor then resident in England for more than twenty seven years - describing the situation in his workshop:

In many cases we have married women working for us whose husband has no work for months and months and the women support their children...and if it

were not for the women working, the children would be almost in the workhouse.³⁸⁴

A year later, Collett's report on women's work in Liverpool, undertaken for the Royal Commission on Labour, asserted that the majority of the 'poorest class' of working women were Irish 'with a very low standard of living and apparently quite careless of the future':

Many of the women are the wives of men irregularly employed or at sea a great part of the year; several are in doubt whether they are deserted or widowed. The kind of work offered, and the circumstances under which it is sought, all tend to keep in existence a large class of irregular female labour, and with it a dislike to regular work, which prevents even children who have just left school from seeking for regular employment, and incites them to begin their industrial life as hawkers or cleaners for neighbours.³⁸⁵

This reference to a 'dislike for regular work' may indicate a lack of understanding on behalf of a middle-class observer since the pressures and responsibilities of working mothers made regular work outside the home difficult. Nevertheless, the work described produced earnings which were impossibly inadequate. For example, amongst a sample of 194 working women in 1907 - many with dependent children - seventy seven were found to work at least four days per week. Their average wage was 5s, with only eleven women earning 10s or more whilst just two earned 12s.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ *Select Committee on Sweating*, Fourth Report, Evidence of J. Goodman, J. Allen, H. Richmond; Liverpool Trades Council, *Minute Book*, 19 June 1891, Liverpool Record Office.

³⁸⁵ PP, *Royal Commission on Labour*, 'The Employment of Women', vol. XXIII, 1893 (c6894).

³⁸⁶ PP, *Royal Commission of the Poor Laws, 1910*, Appendix vol. 18, pp 173-4. Office cleaners received, on average, eight shillings per week, whilst rough factory work brought in seven to eight shillings.

In addition to poor conditions and low pay, the treatment working women received from their employers was, at times, harsh. For example, in 1895 one elderly woman engaged in rope-making arrived late for work and found not only was her pay docked but she was also fined 1s 8d. In response to complaints from her co-workers the employer accused his female workforce of laziness, prompting the following defence from the *Liverpool Labour Chronicle*:

Many of [them] rise before five, tidy their little homes, prepare the day's food and pass the factory gate after a walk of 2 miles before the steam whistle stops shrieking at 6.30 ...So many of them receive only a few shillings a week, and have to travel a long way to reach cheap shelter, and are not able to afford out of their wages such food as would give them energy and vigour. Sometimes, then, it happens that a woman hears the dreaded whistle stop when she is a quarter of a mile away, and then knows that some of her hard earned wages will be kept back from her.³⁸⁷

In 1908 The Women's Industrial Council (WIC) examined the circumstances of 216 female homeworkers in Liverpool. Of the eighty four cases where the woman was married, thirty were reported as having husbands who worked irregularly, and in fifteen cases the husband was unemployed. It was discovered that whilst piece-work rates for clothing production undertaken by women in their own homes appeared higher than in other towns in the region, the overall earnings remained very low.³⁸⁸ Opportunities for this type of employment were limited by the lack of a large manufacturing base in the city. In contrast with the findings of Stedman Jones's study of conditions in London - which revealed that most of the married female employees in the capital worked from

³⁸⁷ *Liverpool Labour Chronicle*, October 1895 (quoted in Krista Cowman, *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother: Women in Merseyside Political Organizations, 1890-1920* (Liverpool, 2004), p. 35).

³⁸⁸ *Homework in Liverpool. Report of an Inquiry by the Investigation Committee of the Liverpool Women's Industrial Council* (Liverpool, 1909).

home³⁸⁹ - the WIC investigation discovered fewer than 2,000 women homeworkers in Liverpool. Most of these worked in the clothing trades, though some were employed in producing boots, blinds, umbrellas, paper bags and cardboard boxes.³⁹⁰ Comparison of the figure recorded by the WIC as working from home with Liverpool's 11,503 working wives enumerated in the 1911 census suggests that the vast majority of these women were engaged in employment outside their homes. Collett's view of the 1890s, therefore, did not represent the early twentieth-century situation.

The efforts of the WIC highlighted the problem of sweated labour and this, along with the establishment of the Anti-Sweating League (which had a branch in Liverpool) drew public attention to the exploitation of women in many industries. This led to the appointment of a Select Committee to investigate homeworking, the findings of which had some influence on proposals in the Board of Trade Act of 1909 which set minimum wage rates in several sweated trades. But although 250,000 of the nation's workers came under the act some sectors, such as dressmaking - already acknowledged as the poorest section of the clothing industry - were not included. This was compounded by the minimum hourly rate for women in the tailoring trade being set at approximately half that of men, confirming the inferior status of women's labour. Even then it proved near impossible to enforce these minimum rates of pay, and evidence suggests that they were not received by the majority of homeworkers.³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ G. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A study in the relationship between classes in Victorian Society* (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 86.

³⁹⁰ *Homework in Liverpool*, pp 3-4.

³⁹¹ See James A. Schmiechen, *Sweated Industries and Sweated Labour* (London, 1984), p. 177.

In the opinion of Mary McArthur, Secretary of the Women's Trade Union League during the early 1900s, the weak position of women workers was self-perpetuating since:

...the low standard of living may be stated to be at once the cause and consequence of women's lack of organisation. This sounds paradoxical, but it is nevertheless true that, while women are badly paid because of their unorganised condition, they may be unorganised mainly because they are badly paid.³⁹²

Nevertheless, it was reaction against poor working conditions and low pay that had prompted the formation of the Tailoresses and Coatmakers Union in 1890 which, within a few weeks, had 300 Liverpool members. They campaigned for a shorter working week with no loss of earnings and were eventually successful in forcing some employers to reduce their hours of work, which were formerly from 8am until 8pm, to 9am until 7pm.³⁹³ In her study *Women Workers and the Sexual Division of Labour: Liverpool, 1890-1939*, Linda M. Grant notes that the formation of this union is the earliest record of active female trade unionism in Liverpool.³⁹⁴ Despite their substantial numbers - one study in 1904 recording no fewer than 8,260 milliners and dressmakers, 3,121 women and girls employed as tailoresses, with a further 1,452 working as shirtmakers and seamstresses³⁹⁵ - women workers remained vulnerable. Further attempts to organise the city's female workforce, and particularly those employed in the clothing trade, were

³⁹² Mary McArthur, Secretary of the Women's Trade Union League, quoted in B. Drake, *Women in Trade Unions* (first published 1920, London, 1984), p. 45.

³⁹³ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Report of Miss Clara Collette, 'The Employment of Women', vol. XXIII, 1893 (c. 6894), p. 70.

³⁹⁴ Grant, *Women Workers and the Sexual Division of Labour: Liverpool, 1890-1939*, p.167.

³⁹⁵ A. Harrison, *Women's Industries in Liverpool: An Enquiry into the Economic Effects of Legislation Regulating the Labour of Women* (Liverpool, 1904), p. 16.

generally unsuccessful for, in the words of the WIC report, ‘these women had nothing at all to depend upon but their work and do not dare risk offending the firm.’³⁹⁶

The salvation of the working women did not lie with the trades unions, for they often worked against women, fearing that their employment at lower rates of pay would push men out of work. For example, in early March 1916 the large number of men volunteering for military service resulted in a shortage of dock labourers. In response, between thirty and fifty women were taken on at the Huskisson Dock in Liverpool to unload and store cotton from Leyland Line vessels. At the same time, a number of women were employed at the Toxteth Dock unloading ships of the Harrison Line. But the men refused to work alongside the women and the Dockers’ Union forced the companies to terminate the women’s employment. In March 1916 it was announced that women were no longer employed on the Liverpool Docks; the experiment was not repeated.³⁹⁷

In addition to this proliferation of Liverpool reports authorized at a national level, there were a host of local bodies conducting their own investigations and pressing for reform. In 1897 W. Grisewood reported on the state of the city’s poor,³⁹⁸ in 1904 Eleanor Rathbone enquired into the conditions of local dock labour,³⁹⁹ and in 1911 she

³⁹⁶ *Home Work in Liverpool*, pp 11-12.

³⁹⁷ *Women’s Work on the Waterfront, 1816-1987* (Liverpool, 1987), p.22. During World War II women were employed to sweep tea warehouses after they were emptied, one bonus being that they were able to supplement their meagre tea ration with the sweepings from the floor. They were not engaged to unload ships.

³⁹⁸ W. Grisewood, *The Poor of Liverpool: Notes on their condition based on an inquiry made by the Liverpool Central Relief and Charity Organization Society* (Liverpool, 1897).

³⁹⁹ Eleanor F. Rathbone, *Report of an Enquiry into the Conditions of Dock Labour at the Liverpool Docks* (Liverpool, 1904).

investigated methods of employment and payment amongst Liverpool's seamen and the detrimental effect upon their families.⁴⁰⁰ Perhaps the most revealing of these local studies was Rathbone's 1909 report on the social and economic consequences of the dockside casual system⁴⁰¹ - described as 'the most degrading as well as the most insecure form of employment.'⁴⁰²

One of the research methods employed was to persuade forty families - where the husband was engaged in dockside casual labour - to keep weekly records of their income and expenses, to be submitted for regular inspection and analysis. As a result it was found that in sixteen cases the wives contributed to the total income through charring, washing, sewing or hawking. Some of the others took in lodgers, and it was supposed that most of the remainder 'earned a little occasionally' though these sums were, for the most part, 'trifling' and did not form a major part of the family income. Such work was also often unrecorded in the census and in the investigations of bodies like the WIC. Despite caring for young children, many of the women declared that they would have gladly undertaken a greater amount of regular employment, but were hampered by the supply of female workers far exceeding demand.⁴⁰³ The study revealed that the diets detailed in many of these household accounts were so appallingly monotonous and nutritionally poor that it was difficult to reconcile them with the levels of physical labour which they sustained. For example, several indicated nothing more than tea, bread and

⁴⁰⁰ E. F. Rathbone, *The Payment of Seamen: How the Wives Suffer: Attitudes of Liverpool Shipowners* (Liverpool, 1911).

⁴⁰¹ E. F. Rathbone, *How the Casual Labourer Lives* (Liverpool, 1909).

⁴⁰² John Ramsey Bryce Muir, *A History of Liverpool* (London, 1907), p. 309.

⁴⁰³ Rathbone, *How the Casual Labourer Lives*, p. xiv.

dripping being consumed by entire families for weeks at a time, with many more similar but for the occasional addition of kippers or bacon on payday.

Alluding to the assertions of earlier reports,⁴⁰⁴ Rathbone conceded that it was perfectly true that the poor were partly to blame for their own misfortunes:

If all the husbands were sober, industrious, healthy and moderately strong, and all the wives thrifty and skilled housewives, they would fare at least as well as the families described in the minority of cheerful studies.⁴⁰⁵

However, she insisted that the system of casual employment formed the greatest stumbling block to their advancement since it ‘aggravated and perpetuated’ their poverty by ‘making the upward path as difficult and the downward path as easy as possible’. She elaborated:

Everything about the system of employment seems to foster the formation of bad habits and nothing to encourage the formation of good ones. The alternations of hard work and idleness disincline the men to steady exertion. The uncertainty of earnings encourages concealment from the wife and by accustoming the family to existence at the standard of bad weeks sets the surplus of good ones free for self-indulgence. The fluctuations of income make the problem of housekeeping impossibly difficult for most of the women, and the consequent discomfort and privations of the home drive the man to the public-house, wear out the health, the spirit and the self-respect of the woman, and injure the health and the happiness of the children.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁴ Between July and November 1899 the *Liberal Review* ran a series of articles on slum life. It claimed that it was the ‘failures, the outcasts, the dregs of humanity’ and not the ‘honest poor’ who mostly inhabited the slums, and that they had arrived there through their ‘own shortcomings and failings’, 80 per cent of which was due to drink. *Liberal Review*, 2 September 1899, p. 8.

⁴⁰⁵ Rathbone, *How the Casual Labourer Lives*, p. xxvi.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. xxvi.

Whilst Rathbone appears to have understood some of the complexities of working-class family economies, her report betrays some middle-class assumptions. For example, she speaks of the men's disinclination to 'steady exertion' when, in fact, there was little opportunity for regular work or for the formation of what she terms 'good habits'. Similarly, she makes the sweeping assumption that all working-class men resorted to the public house to the detriment of their families, when this was not necessarily the case. However, the report maintained that it was the women and children who suffered most from this system for, whilst the most thrifty might make the wages of the busy weeks supplement those of slack weeks, the more usual course of events was as follows:

The standard of family life is fixed by the amount earned in the slack months. In other words, that is the sum which the man falls into the habit of giving his wife for housekeeping, and what is earned over it is kept as pocket money.⁴⁰⁷

In short, the mass of information provided by the combined reports agreed that the continued prevalence of casualism in Liverpool's male employment market rendered many women the household's main breadwinner. Yet, despite this research - supported by that of Booth in East London during the 1880s, and of Rowntree in York during 1901 - the importance of women's income to the family economy was frequently ignored. The Poor Law of 1834 had taken for granted the two-parent nuclear family, and assumed that the wife was dependent upon her husband rather than an active contributor to the family income. This assumption was continued when the National Insurance Act of 1911 deemed married women's earnings non-essential to the family economy. As a result, the

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

act made no provision for non-employed wives, its objective being to secure an income for what was perceived as the male 'bread winner'.

The first part of the National Insurance Bill introduced by Lloyd George, British Chancellor of the Exchequer, dealt with provision in times of sickness and, despite its benefits, was unpopular with domestic servants and employers alike. Workers were to contribute 4d per week as insurance against illness, their employers contributing 3d and general taxation supplying a further 2d. In return a worker was to be entitled to receive sick pay at 10s per week for the first thirteen weeks, and at 5s per week for the next thirteen weeks. Servants, in particular, objected to compulsory contributions being deducted from their already-meagre wages, and employers resented what they termed a 'servant tax'. The *Daily Mail* was enlisted in calling for a strike of mistresses against the tax, and petitions were signed by both employers and servants (no doubt some under duress). Nevertheless, the bill was passed and became law.

The second part of the National Insurance Act dealt with unemployment provision, a weekly contribution of 2½ d entitling a worker to unemployment benefit (or 'dole') at a rate of 7s 6d per week for up to fifteen weeks during any one year. Provision was restricted to just a few named areas of industry which experienced predictable periods of unemployment. Domestic service was not one of the sectors included, the demand for servants being such that the authorities thought it hardly possible any might suffer prolonged periods of unemployment. Even after the First World War, when health and unemployment welfare was extended to cover most workers between the ages of sixteen

and sixty five years, domestic servants (along with agricultural workers) were still excluded from unemployment benefits.

The scheme was not met with universal approval, its proposal receiving strong opposition from the (mainly Conservative) House of Lords which was only silenced by threats to introduce large numbers of Labour peers who could be relied upon to back the act. Even the workers it was intended to help did not relish the prospect of involuntary contributions being docked from their wages, and voiced their disapproval by chanting 'Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief...' at the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, whenever he made public appearances.

Perhaps their complaints were justified for, though it cannot be denied that the 1911 act meant a higher degree of economic security for some sectors of the workforce, these benefits were largely limited to relatively well-paid men in secure employment. This was because the payment of unemployment benefit was expressly restricted to those engaged in 'any trade or business carried on for the purposes of gain', which was deemed to include building, mechanical engineering, iron founding, sawmilling, ship building and vehicle construction. It did not include trades which traditionally relied on casual labour (such as dock labouring and agriculture) and those which placed its labour force on short-time rather than lay them off (such as coal mining and spinning). Significantly, it also excluded the country's vast army of - mostly female - domestic servants. In this way the restricting of eligibility to skilled workers engaged in trades where unemployment was

infrequent and temporary ensured that any potential drain on financial resources was limited.

Despite objections, the bill passed and became law. However, after the First World War, when health and unemployment welfare was extended to cover most workers between the ages of sixteen and sixty five years, its benefits were still not made available to domestic servants or agricultural workers. Those most in need - the low-paid and irregularly employed - gained nothing since regular National Insurance contributions proved difficult to extract, either from employers (who could easily evade payments for casual workers), or from employees (who could ill afford them from already-meagre wages). The very large numbers of married women engaged in casual work were specifically excluded from unemployment benefit since, with their wages deemed supplementary to those of their husbands, their lack of employment was not considered 'unemployment'. But perhaps most unjust was the ruling that, upon marriage, a woman lost her rights to all National Insurance contributions she had already made, and was required to start again if she continued in employment. Even when married women did qualify for benefit, the authorities were usually reluctant to pay since it was generally suspected that they merely wished to catch up with their housework at the expense of the state.⁴⁰⁸

These exclusions held severe implications for Liverpool's workforce, where a large proportion of both men and women were employed irregularly on a casual basis. So too for the 21,555 women employed as domestic servants in private homes - and another

⁴⁰⁸ See PP, *Report of the Departmental Committee on Sickness Benefit Claims Under the National Insurance Act, 1914*, Cd. 7687.

16,574 who cleaned offices, hospitals, hotels and ships in dock, and took in washing⁴⁰⁹ - whose long hours of labour were deemed 'unproductive'. In essence, their struggle with poverty remained unaltered, a situation which prompted Labour Leader Keir Hardie to describe the National Insurance scheme as 'a porous plaster to cover the disease that poverty causes.'⁴¹⁰

Poor working conditions and low wages were not the only difficulties to be contended with. In 1883 the *Liverpool Daily Post* formed a team of investigators - made up of a town councillor, a physician and a member of the newspaper staff (none of them named) - to enquire into life in Liverpool's poorer districts. The results of their enquiries were published in a series of reports entitled 'Squalid Liverpool', which appeared between 5 and 10 November 1883. The authors described court housing as being, 'packed closely together with an ingenious economy of space which does credit to the builder though Liverpool has little to be thankful for it.'⁴¹¹ Their report went on to describe the inhuman conditions endured in the decrepit houses and filthy alleys which existed 'within a stones throw of prosperous money-making Liverpool - the Liverpool of clubs, of cafes, of banks, of commercial palaces.'⁴¹² The fact that such conditions were allowed to continue to exist was declared 'a scandal and a disgrace.'⁴¹³ Yet, just three months after these revelations were made public, a letter to the editor of the *Liverpool Courier* drew attention to recent assurances made by Lord Carrington to the House of Lords that vast

⁴⁰⁹ Data sourced from *National Census Occupation Tables, 1901-1931*.

⁴¹⁰ Keir Hardie in a speech to miners at Merthyr Tydfil, 1908, quoted in J. Fulbrook, *Administrative Justice and the Unemployed* (London, 1978), p. 129. Also in W. Hamish Fraser, *Keir Hardie: Radical, Socialist, Feminist* (1973), p. 151.

⁴¹¹ 'Squalid Liverpool', *Liverpool Daily Post*, 5-10 November 1883 and 5 November, p. 5.

⁴¹² *Ibid*, 7 November 1883, p. 5.

⁴¹³ *Ibid*, 6 November 1883, p. 5.

improvements had been made in the housing of the poor so that the ‘cellar population of Liverpool and Manchester scarcely existed.’ The author enquired on what authority this claim was made since, at least in the case of Liverpool, there were estimated to be 80,000 still living in cellars.⁴¹⁴

Twenty or thirty years later little had changed, as evidenced in Pat O’Mara’s *The Autobiography of a Liverpool Irish Slummy*, a memoir of poverty experienced during the early years of the twentieth century. Born in Liverpool to Irish parents in 1901, his childhood was spent around Great George’s Square and the Queen’s Dock, an Irish-dominated district to the south of the city centre. He described local housing conditions:

What the ‘court’ represented was a narrow alley receding off the street to a larger areaway, like an unseen tooth cavity, and ending in a conglomeration of filthy shacks. About twenty-five large families - dock labourers, hawkers, sooty artisans and their children - lived in the average court. Two revoltingly dirty toilets stood in the areaway and were always in demand; a queue usually waited in line, newspapers in hand. The shacks were so closely packed together and their walled partitions so thin that one had no choice but to listen to what went on on either side. Screams often rent the air at night, one courter waylaying another in the darkness. The cheaper elderly whores favoured the courts, and could always be found attending to their furtive business in the darker corners. Huge cats continually stalked the place, their eyes an eerie phosphorescence in the darkness.⁴¹⁵

This court housing (see **Figure 8**) had long been the target of Corporation housing schemes which, urged on by the reports of the Medical Officer for Health, aimed to clear and level districts designated as slums and re-house the population. But although some

⁴¹⁴ ‘Watchman’, Letter to the editor, *Liverpool Courier*, 25 February 1884, p. 5.

⁴¹⁵ Pat O’Mara, *The Autobiography of a Liverpool Irish Slummy* (London, 1934, revised edition, Liverpool, 2009), p. 32.

sites were levelled these were frequently sold to private developers who, with an eye to profit, built housing beyond the means of the very poor. This, and the fact that between 1869 and 1891 just three Corporation housing schemes had been completed, only served to compound the housing problem.



Figure 8 - No. 2 Court, Silvester Street, Liverpool.⁴¹⁶

In 1895 a new initiative was set in motion to provide new and more hygienic homes for dispossessed slum-dwellers at rents within the reach of the poor, and by 1919 Liverpool

⁴¹⁶ No. 2 Court, Silvester Street, Liverpool, showing the narrow entrance into the court from the street and walls lime-washed in accordance with sanitary regulations. Image accessed on <http://www.walkingbook.co.uk/liverpool/anfield/pages/villas.html> (2 December 2011).

Corporation had constructed twenty five blocks on regenerated sites, containing a total of 2,895 tenements. In 1912 they proudly reported that mortality rates - which had been 40-60 per thousand in the old court housing - had fallen to 20-30 per thousand amongst residents of corporation tenements.⁴¹⁷ However, closer inspection of the data reveals that whilst both infant and adult mortality rates in the tenements were indeed lower than in those districts with the very worst housing, they were still significantly higher than the average for Liverpool as a whole. In addition, there was a general increase in infant mortality amongst both tenement dwellers and the general population of the Borough during this period. This suggests that perhaps conditions in the new housing were not quite as healthy or beneficial as the authorities would have us believe, and that other factors were involved (see **Table 2.6**).

Table 2.6 - Comparison of Death Rates in Liverpool Corporation Tenements* with Total Population of Liverpool, 1912-1915.⁴¹⁸

Year	Population Living in Corporation Tenements			Total Population of Liverpool Borough	
	Crude Death Rate per 1,000	Infant Mortality rate per 1,000	Number of tenements	Crude Death rate per 1,000	Infant Mortality rate per 1,000
1912	30.8	178.5	2,665	17.7	125
1913	27.7	145.7	2,733	18.0	132
1914	28.8	176.3	2,811	19.4	139
1915	26.9	181.2	2,811	18.6	133

* All tenements were located in the central city area.

⁴¹⁷ *Liverpool Council Proceedings, 1912-13*, pp 1611-23 (Liverpool Record Office).

⁴¹⁸ Data sourced from 'Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health for Liverpool' in *Liverpool Council Proceedings, 1912-15*.

Indeed, responses to the new accommodation revealed the existence of very different ideas with regards to what constituted acceptable housing for artisans and labourers. On one hand the city's councillors praised the tenements, and some even complained that the standard of luxury was too high for slum dwellers. Conversely, the small room size, the shared toilet and scullery facilities, and the lack of hot water caused the local press to describe the new tenements as 'glorified courts', 'comfortless, ill-designed and inadequate'.⁴¹⁹ These shortcomings were compounded by relatively high rents - between 1s 6d and 2s 6d per week for a one-room flat in 1905 - which soon led to overcrowding as growing families attempted to keep their expenditure on rent as low as possible.

Little wonder then, that the physical strain and emotional stress of daily existence under such harsh and uncertain conditions rendered many women worn out before their time. For them the combination of poverty, poor housing and grinding toil was compounded by childbearing, child rearing, and the constant struggle to make ends meet, wreaking havoc on their physical and mental health. With low incomes scarcely providing the bare essentials in food and shelter, neglect of their own needs in favour of those of husband and children resulted in malnutrition and premature old age. In the words of Eleanor Rathbone:

The facial expression and carriage of many of the poorer working women in and after middle life (ie, in that class, from about 30 onwards), suggest that their condition is one of chronic suffering, so habitual that they are scarcely conscious of it, due to extreme anaemia, weariness, and the various small ailments that result from self-neglect, over-exertion and under-nourishment, during the years of childbearing. On the whole one is more astonished at the amount some of them accomplish in their homes with so poor equipment, and at the high level of

⁴¹⁹ *Liverpool Review*, 25 April, 1903, pp 366-367.

devotion, patience and cheerfulness they reach, than at the deficiencies of others.⁴²⁰

In 1907 the Medical Officer of the Liverpool poor law union reported to the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws that significantly more women than men were admitted to the Liverpool Infirmary suffering from malnutrition.⁴²¹ Their condition was often exacerbated by numerous pregnancies for, at the turn of the century, the typical working-class woman married in her teens or early twenties and, experiencing ten pregnancies, spent fifteen years of her adult life either pregnant or nursing.⁴²² As a result, in 1900 the life expectancy of a woman aged twenty was just forty six years.⁴²³ Interestingly, the work of McNay *et al* suggests that any improvement in female mortality rates brought about by their involvement in paid employment - which facilitated greater access to resources - was counterbalanced by poor working conditions, which increased female mortality.⁴²⁴

The effects were also evident in the high rates of infant mortality. Between 1860 and 1900 the average rate of infant mortality in Britain remained high at 140 per thousand.⁴²⁵ However, it was noted that this rate varied from region to region - being highest in the industrial and mining towns of the North and Midlands - and even from district to district within a town. For example, in 1905 the average infant mortality rate for Liverpool was

⁴²⁰ Rathbone, *How the Casual Labourer Lives*, p. xxiv.

⁴²¹ Dr Edward W. Hope, 'Report of the Medical Officer of Health for Liverpool' in *Council Proceedings*, 1905-06, p. 1149; *Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, 1909*, Appendix vol. XVIII, p. 64.

⁴²² Titmuss, *The Welfare State*, p. 91.

⁴²³ *Supplement to the 75th Annual Report of the Registrar-General, Part 1, 1914*, English Life Table, no. 7 for 1901-10. Rates in Ireland were similar, at 49 years.

⁴²⁴ Kirsty McNay, Jane Humphries and Stephen Klasen, 'Excess Female Mortality in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales: A Regional Analysis' in *Social Science History*, vol. 29, no. 4 (2005), pp 649-681.

⁴²⁵ Hicks and Allen, *A Century of Change*, p.8.

154 per thousand, though closer inspection revealed that this ranged from 95 per thousand in the middle-class Sefton Park Ward to 227 and 240 per thousand respectively in the overcrowded dockside (and predominantly Irish) Scotland and Exchange Wards.⁴²⁶

Such variation led to the conviction that many infant deaths were preventable, though various causes were cited. Most accepted that environmental factors such as overcrowded housing and poor sanitation arrangements played a role⁴²⁷, as did the use of artificial milk over breastfeeding (especially before pasteurised or dried milk became widely available), though there was disagreement as to how important these factors were. Furthermore, whilst some claimed that the majority of infant deaths were due to working-class mothers being largely ignorant of the basic principles of hygiene and mothercraft, others insisted that the employment of married women outside the home caused them to neglect their children. Either way, the burden of blame was placed squarely on the shoulders of working-class mothers, conveniently absolving the civic authorities responsible for administering Poor Law relief, overseeing sanitation arrangements and preventing overcrowding.

With infantile diarrhoea considered one of the major contributors to infant death, during the 1880s Dr Edward William Hope and Dr Hugh Jones made a study of patients with the condition at the Infirmary for Children at Myrtle Street, close to Liverpool city centre. They found that amongst 1,082 fatal cases the number of bottle-fed infants was sixteen

⁴²⁶ Hope, 'Report of the Medical Officer of Health, 1905-06', pp 1149 and 1154.

⁴²⁷ Dr A. Newsholme, *Second Report on Infant and Child Mortality* (42nd Annual Report of Local Government Board, 1912-13), Supplement in Continuation of Report of the Medical Officer of the Board (1913), p. XXXII.

times greater than that of breast-fed infants. In addition, Dr Hope showed that the average age at death for bottle-fed babies was just 7.4 months.⁴²⁸ These statistics were acknowledged by Dr George Newsholme, Chief Medical Officer of Health to the Local Government Medical Board, as being invaluable in establishing the correlation between patterns of infant feeding and diarrhoea.

George Newsholme was an advocate of the ‘negligent working mother’ theory as a cause of high infant mortality, which arose from increased employment rates amongst married women. On average 13 *per cent* of all urban wives and widows in Britain were employed in 1901, and by 1911 this had risen to 14.8 *per cent*.⁴²⁹ However, in the textile districts of the North West the figures were 40 *per cent*, rising to almost 50 *per cent* respectively.⁴³⁰ As a consequence it was claimed that infants were put at risk through abandonment to ignorant baby minders by mothers negligent of their nurturing responsibilities. Furthermore, bottle feeding - necessitated by the absence of the infant’s mother - was charged with causing fatal digestive disorders through the use of contaminated milk. George Newman’s 1906 study *Infant Mortality: a social problem*, cited the work of Dr E. W. Hope, Medical Officer for Health for Liverpool, examining infant mortality in the city. His findings prompted him to declare that the infant mortality rate was ‘substantially lower among the Irish than the English’ as Irish mothers suckled their

⁴²⁸ June Clayton, *Dr Edward William Hope, Medical Officer of Health for Liverpool, 1894-1924: Development of an International Public Health Authority*, accessed on http://www.mi.org.uk/medical_society/13/13Clayton.pdf, 3 October 2009. For Hope’s later research see: E. W. Hope, *Localised Outbreaks of a) Typhus and b) Infantile Diarrhoea*, paper read at the Congress of the Sanitary Institute, Bolton, 22 September, 1887; E. W. Hope, *Discussion on Infant Mortality*, paper read at the Congress of the Royal Institute of Public Health, Aberdeen, 1900, pp 298-301.

⁴²⁹ *Census of England and Wales, X; Occupation and Industry* (London, 1914), Cd.7018.

⁴³⁰ J. R. MacDonald *et al*, *Wage Earning Mothers* (London, no date though published between 1900 and 1910), cited in P. N. Stearns, ‘Working Class Women’, p. 114.

infants thereby giving them ‘proper food at proper temperatures, the supply being made when wanted.’⁴³¹ However, this practice did not seem to lessen Irish infant mortality rates in Ireland itself.

One reason for this variance was the establishment of Milk Depots, providing uncontaminated milk in various forms including condensed and dried, so that in 1905 Dr Hope reported that the Liverpool Corporation fed 10,000 babies through these outlets.⁴³² But this response was viewed by many as merely soothing the symptoms; to deal with the root of the problem it was deemed essential that the employment of mothers should be stamped out. Indeed, at the National Conference on Infant Mortality in 1906, the President of the Local Government Board declared that, in addition to infant mortality, working mothers were responsible for broken homes, idle husbands, ineffective fathers, and undernourished children. He concluded, ‘We have got to restrict married women’s labour, as often and as soon as we can.’⁴³³

In fact, as early as 1898 this ‘negligent working mother’ theory had been challenged before the Royal Statistical Society by Clara Collett, who had recently reported on working conditions in Liverpool and Manchester for the Royal Commission on Labour.⁴³⁴ She claimed that the data used to support the theory was too vague, and that it

⁴³¹ Robert Woods, ‘Newman’s *Infant Mortality* as an agenda for research’ in E. Garrett, Chris Galley, Nicola Shelton and Robert Woods (eds), *Infant Mortality: a continuing social problem* (Aldershot, 2007), p. 41.

⁴³² Hope, ‘Report of the Medical Officer of Health, 1905-6’, p. 1150.

⁴³³ See *Report of Proceedings of National Conference on Infantile Mortality...with address by the Right Honourable John Burns, MP* (London, 1906); *Report of Proceedings of Second National Conference on Infantile Mortality* (Westminster, 1908).

⁴³⁴ Clara E. Collett, ‘The Collection and Utilization of Official Statistics Bearing on the Extent and Effects of the Industrial Employment of Women’ in *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, vol. 61 (June 1898),

was obscured by the presence of sizable middle-class populations in some areas studied. She then tested their hypothesis more thoroughly by calculating the number of married and widowed working women within homogeneously working-class districts for comparison with infant mortality rates, and found no correlation. In addition, she pointed out that although in some cases children might be adversely affected by the absence of the mother, in others they would benefit from the extra income her employment provided.

Nevertheless, in 1907 the Home Office contacted Medical Officers of Health in certain 'representative industrial centres' requesting they investigate the effects of maternal employment on infant mortality. In particular, they were to determine whether the proposed introduction of new legal restrictions on the employment of married women might in fact have adverse effects, such as causing the already-declining birth rate to fall even further, or plunging households dependent on female income deeper into poverty, thereby increasing the chances of infant death. Perhaps because of his earlier involvement in the provision of statistics, Dr Hope - Medical Officer for Liverpool - was amongst those consulted.⁴³⁵

In his survey 160 homes were visited in Liverpool's city centre, as well as the outlying Old Swan and Garston districts. Amongst these he found sixty mothers who regularly undertook paid employment and in all cases their earnings were low. When asked why they worked, just five women claimed it was through choice. Twenty three stated it was

pp 219-260; 'Report by Miss Clara E. Collett (Lady Assistant Commissioner) on the Conditions of Work in Liverpool and Manchester', *Royal Commission on Labour The Employment of Women*, Parliamentary Paper C-6894 (London, HMSO, 1893), pp 65-82.

⁴³⁵ Hope, 'Report of the Medical Officer of Health', in *Council Proceedings, 1909-10*, vol. II.

because their husband's wages were low, and one because her husband was unemployed. A further twenty six claimed their husband's drinking forced them to work, and one because her husband was lazy.⁴³⁶ Industrial employment was most readily available in Old Swan and Garston, whilst twenty three of the thirty six city-centre working mothers were employed in mending sacks, sorting rags, or hawking. Interestingly, Dr Hope noted that the hawkers in particular found plenty of time to attend to their infants. Furthermore, his findings confirmed Collett's supposition - made some nine years earlier - for he reported that in many cases the children of Liverpool's working mothers were better fed and better cared for in more comfortable homes than those of unemployed mothers. In closing, he ventured that, whilst their improved condition might be attributed to the increased household income, it may well be because these working mothers were the most energetic and capable.⁴³⁷

Despite intervention on the part of the authorities, the material lives of many poorer women improved very little, and as late as 1927 Eleanor Rathbone was still drawing attention to the adverse affects of poverty on women's health and the lack of knowledge of these women:

There are no official records of the health of these women, as there are of the men and children. Not being in the eyes of the law 'employed persons', they have no panel doctor and can seldom afford the luxury of medical attendance unless they become seriously ill. One can only judge of it by appearances, and by the vital statistics which show that a married woman's chance of life is rather less than that of a spinster, in spite of the fact that invalids do not usually marry (with men it is

⁴³⁶ *Ibid*, Table A - 'Re-employment of working mothers', p. 1870.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 1869.

decidedly the other way), and that maternal mortality is one of the few causes of death that has decreased not at all during the past quarter of a century.⁴³⁸

So great was the level of deprivation endured by these women, and so limited their access to healthcare, that Rathbone went on to compare the mortality rate amongst working-class mothers with that of coal miners, a job widely acknowledged as highly dangerous. She revealed that whilst there were on average 1.3 fatalities per 1,000 amongst colliers, the death rate for mothers in childbirth was 4.3 per 1,000.⁴³⁹

In addition to poor physical health, the women's mental health frequently suffered. In recent years a range of mental health studies have revealed that, compared with any other group, Irish migrants - and Irish women migrants in particular - currently have the highest rates for psychiatric admissions for depression and for alcohol abuse.⁴⁴⁰ In addition, in three separate comparative studies of different categories of Irish and English patients, each using different instruments of enquiry, Irish women scored higher on neurotic scales.⁴⁴¹ This is not a new phenomenon, for a similar pattern can be traced back to the early years of the twentieth century. In Brendan D. Kelly's study of poverty, crime and mental illness amongst the Irish during the first half of the twentieth century, admission rates to what was then termed the 'Lunatic Asylum' were high amongst Irish migrants. Many of these were diagnosed as suffering from 'mania', 'delusional insanity'

⁴³⁸ Eleanor Rathbone, *The Ethics and Economics of Family Endowment* (London, 1927), p. 43.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁰ Ethel Corduff, 'Invisible Exports: Why do Irish-born women in Britain have higher rates of mental illness than both indigenous and other immigrant women?' in *Nursing Times*, 12 March 1997, pp 28-31; Frank Keating, David Robertson and Nutan Kotecha, *Ethnic Diversity and Mental Health in London: Recent developments* (London, 2003).

⁴⁴¹ M. J. Kelleher and J. R. M. Copeland, 'Assessment of Neurotic Symptoms in Irish Female Patients' in *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 124 (1974), pp 554-555.

and ‘melancholia’.⁴⁴² Whilst it is now acknowledged that this vulnerability to mental illness is linked to the migration experience and its consequences - including low socio-economic status, poor housing, poor physical health, and cultural isolation - in the past it was frequently viewed as confirmation of the Celt’s genetic and cultural inferiority to the Anglo-Saxon.

From 1792 to 1881 Liverpool had its own Lunatic Asylum, originally situated alongside the old Infirmary in St John’s Gardens,⁴⁴³ and later relocated to a site on Ashton Street adjacent to the Lock Hospital. The combined institution’s annual report for 1880 records that the asylum treated 35 patients - 15 males and 20 females - at a cost of £2947 17s 6d, which appears a remarkably high sum. Perhaps as a result of this high expenditure the records for 1881 show that the Lunatic Asylum was sold,⁴⁴⁴ ‘the patients being either removed by their friends or sent to other institutions of a similar kind.’⁴⁴⁵ Arrangements were made for some to be housed at the workhouse, but it would appear that thereafter the County of Lancashire Lunatic Asylum at Rainhill⁴⁴⁶ - situated some eight miles from Liverpool - received the majority of the city’s mental health referrals. Institutional

⁴⁴² Brendan D. Kelly, *Poverty, Crime and Mental Illness: Female Forensic Psychiatric Committal in Ireland, 1910-1948* (Oxford, 2008).

⁴⁴³ The site is now occupied by St George’s Hall.

⁴⁴⁴ In 1895 the asylum premises on Ashton Street became the home of the new University College, Liverpool, later the University of Liverpool.

⁴⁴⁵ *Report of the Liverpool Royal Infirmary, Lunatic Asylum and Lock Hospital, for the year 1881* (Liverpool, 1882), p. 4.

⁴⁴⁶ Built in 1851 to house 400 patients, the Rainhill Asylum was extended in 1860 and again in 1886 enabling the accommodation of 1,000 patients. By 1900 its capacity had increased to 2,000 and by 1936 it held 3,000 making it the largest psychiatric complex in Europe. Later known as Rainhill Hospital, it was gradually closed during the 1980s and demolished in 1992.

accounts indicate that the other county asylums located at Prestwich, Lancaster, Whittingham and Winwick also received Liverpool patients from time to time.⁴⁴⁷

A comparison of asylum population statistics with those of the general population reveals the Irish contingent to be disproportionately large. For example, in 1871 15 *per cent* of Liverpool's population was Irish, yet they made up 43 *per cent* of the inmates at the asylum. In Manchester the situation was similar, for whilst the Irish made up 9.7 *per cent* of the population, they represented 25 *per cent* of inmates at the Prestwich Asylum. This pattern was not confined to Britain but was evident in Australia also. For example, in Victoria during the period 1848-89 the Irish representation amongst the general population was 14 - 19 *per cent*, though they formed 28 *per cent* of asylum inmates.⁴⁴⁸

In Liverpool, Irish over-representation was still evident at the turn of the century, the Rainhill Asylum annual reports for the year 1900 providing the data laid out in **Table 2.7**. Analysis of these figures reveals that those patients listed as 'Irish' formed 18.9 *per cent* of the asylum's inmates, at a time when the Irish-born contingent amongst Liverpool's population was 6.7 *per cent*.⁴⁴⁹ Furthermore, although both English and Irish female asylum inmates outnumbered male patients from their respective countries, the

⁴⁴⁷ *Reports of the County Lunatic Asylums at Rainhill, Prestwich, Lancaster, Whittingham, and Winwick, with the Accounts of the Receipts and Payments of the Respective Treasurers of the said Asylums* (Preston, 1901) (Liverpool Record Office).

⁴⁴⁸ Elizabeth Malcolm, *Mental Health in Ireland and the Diaspora, 1850-2000: Many Questions, Many Answers*, Lecture presented at the Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool, 4 November 2010. She explores these issues further in 'Mental Health and Migration: the cases of the Irish, 1850s-1990s' in Angela McCarthy and Catharine Coleborne (eds), *Migration, Ethnicity, and Mental Health: International Perspectives, 1840-2010* (London and New York, 2012), pp 15-38.

⁴⁴⁹ Data sourced from birthplace tables, *Census of England and Wales, 1901*.

differential amongst Irish women was slightly higher, suggesting that Irish women were the group most likely to be committed.

Table 2.7 - Nationality of Patients in the Rainhill Asylum on 31 December 1900.⁴⁵⁰

Country of Origin	Males	Females	Total
English	730	774	1504
Irish	191	205	396
Scottish	35	22	57
Welsh	30	41	71
Manx	3	-	3
American	3	1	4
German	10	7	17
Russian	3	2	5
Spanish	1	-	1
French	1	-	1
Danish	2	1	3
Polish	3	2	5
Greek	1	-	1
Italian	3	-	3
Canadian	2	-	2
Scandinavian	8	3	11
Sclav (sic)	1	2	3
Arab	1	-	1
Unknown	4	-	4
Total	1,032	1,060	2,092

⁴⁵⁰ Data sourced from *Accounts of the County Lunatic Asylums*, p. 25.

The causes of high rates of asylum committal were contested during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴⁵¹ Poverty, hereditary insanity, close inter-marriage, stimulants (such as tea and alcohol), economic depression, institutional dependency and migration itself were each suggested as causes. In Britain, America and Australia it was commonly believed that Ireland systematically exported its lunatics, releasing them from asylums and offering financial incentives to emigrate. In response, in the USA during the 1880s migrants who were diagnosed as insane within three years of arrival were routinely returned home. As a result, returned migrants made up 7 *per cent* of inmates in Irish asylums during the early 1900s. This seems hardly surprising for, in addition to the more general problems of poverty and poor housing which they shared with their native-born neighbours, migrants frequently encountered racial and religious prejudice, discrimination and hostility. They suffered the upheaval and dislocation of separation from home, family and friends, and the struggle to adapt from a rural lifestyle to an urban industrial one.

Thus, often faced with underemployment, squalid housing and inadequate sanitation, which each took its toll on physical and mental health, large numbers of women managed households and reared families on incomes which were not merely pitifully low but irregular. One response was the development of a tradition of mutual self-help, sharing resources when times were good, and drawing on the goodwill of family, friends and neighbours when times were hard. In this way informal networks were established, providing emotional, practical and financial support in times of sickness, unemployment or bereavement.

⁴⁵¹ See Malcolm, *Mental Health in Ireland and the Diaspora*.

The importance which these attachments to friends and neighbours assumed was observed by Shimmin, although this nuance was sometimes missed by middle-class observers. He reported that when an elderly woman was questioned as to why dilapidated housing in a filthy court was endured when better conditions could be found elsewhere for just a few pence more per week, he learned that:

A neighbour was not to be met with in any place or every day, and it was not easy to leave a spot which she had known so long, and where, in sorrow or in joy, she had met with sympathetic hearts.⁴⁵²

This reliance upon community support was also noted by Eleanor Rathbone in her *Report on the Condition of Widows in Liverpool*:

In so close a community there are many and varied sources of help... One unfailing source is that of neighbours and friends. They know the circumstances of the family as no outsider can hope to know them and time after time come to the rescue, helping with food and shelter, clothing, attendance as the case may require.⁴⁵³

Is it possible that these survival networks - so fondly recalled in the reminiscences of Pat O'Mara and Terry Cooke in their accounts of life in the city's poorer quarters⁴⁵⁴ - had a far more sinister side? In *The Black Widows of Liverpool* Angela Brabin asks:

⁴⁵² Hugh Shimmin, 'An Oriel Prospect' in *Porcupine* (quoted in Walton and Wilcox (eds), *Low Life and Moral Improvement*, p. 116).

⁴⁵³ Rathbone, *The Condition of Widows in Liverpool*, p. 10.

⁴⁵⁴ See O'Mara, *Liverpool Irish Slummy*; Cooke, *Scotland Road*.

Was there a hidden dimension to the idea of the sharing, caring working-class community?...The women who cried together, gossiped together, lent and borrowed and protected one another, did they also kill together?⁴⁵⁵

Throughout this period Liverpool's child mortality rate was extremely high.⁴⁵⁶ Even if childhood was survived, life expectancy for a woman was twenty seven years⁴⁵⁷ and that for a working-class man just nineteen years.⁴⁵⁸ The prospect of a decent burial assumed particular importance for the poor since it afforded a degree of dignity often denied them in life. As a consequence, burial clubs and insurance societies grew in popularity and death became big business.⁴⁵⁹ As early as 1843 a government report highlighted the negative aspects of burial clubs and insurance schemes, warning that they placed 'a bounty on neglect and infanticide'.⁴⁶⁰ But little was done to change the situation so that, more than thirty years later, the 1876 Report of the Friendly Societies' Registrar noted the 'enormous' extent to which children in manufacturing districts were illegally over-insured.⁴⁶¹ This document went on to discuss the possibility of a parliamentary commission to investigate such irregularities and suggested that attention be concentrated on the Liverpool area where it was feared a large amount of this particular crime was perpetrated. But, in the words of Judith Knelman, 'Social reformers were no match for the combined opposition of the insurance companies and the working classes.'⁴⁶² The proposed investigation never materialized and widespread laxity in insurance laws

⁴⁵⁵ Angela Brabin, *The Black Widows of Liverpool* (Lancaster, 2003, second edition 2009), p.63.

⁴⁵⁶ In 1900 the infant mortality rate in Liverpool was 186 per 1,000 live births.

⁴⁵⁷ David Edwards, 'Victorian Liverpool: Some Facts and Figures' in Bone and Hillam, *Wives and Whores in Victorian Liverpool*, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁸ Frazer, *Duncan of Liverpool*, p. 24.

⁴⁵⁹ Cooke, *Scotland Road*, p. 98.

⁴⁶⁰ PP, *Royal Commission Report, Interment in Towns, 1843* (509) XII 395, pp 54-64.

⁴⁶¹ *Report of the Friendly Societies' Registrar, 1876*, p. 22, quoted in Home Office file *Liverpool Poisoning Case*, PRO HO144/126 A33023/21 (National Archives).

⁴⁶² Judith Knelman, *Twisting in the Wind: The Murderess and the English Press* (Toronto, 1998).

continued, allowing people to be insured without their knowledge by those who held no interest in their lives, but who stood to gain by their deaths. The consequences are best illustrated by a notorious Liverpool case in October 1883 which, at the time, prompted a memorandum from the Home Secretary demanding:

This horrible story must be investigated with the greatest speed and energy and with all the resources at our command, both with reference to the individuals accused, and the system of Life insurances which has originated these wholesale murders.⁴⁶³

The case involved Catherine Flanagan and Margaret Higgins, middle-aged sisters originally from the north of Ireland but resident in Liverpool's North End for some twenty years where they operated as lodging-house keepers, char women and small-scale money-lenders.⁴⁶⁴ In October 1883 they were accused of the murders of Thomas Higgins (Margaret's husband of eleven months), Maggie Jennings (their lodger) and John Flanagan (Catherine's son). Margaret was also charged with the murder of Mary Higgins, her ten year old stepdaughter.⁴⁶⁵

At first, Thomas Higgin's sudden death seemed nothing more than just another unfortunate case of dysentery. But when the dead man's brother discovered that Thomas' life had been insured with six separate policies for a total sum in excess of £148 he

⁴⁶³ Home Office file, *Liverpool Poisoning Case, Memorandum from Sir William Vernon Harcourt to Sir A. J. O'Liddell*, 26 February 1884, PRO, HO A33023/12 (National Archives).

⁴⁶⁴ 'The Liverpool Poisoners: Execution of Flannigan and Higgins', *Liverpool Courier*, 4 March 1884, p. 7.

⁴⁶⁵ A brief account of the case is included in Cooke, *Scotland Road*, pp 98-9.

became suspicious.⁴⁶⁶ He contacted the doctor who had signed the death certificate and managed to persuade him that the cause of death might, in fact, have been poison. The police and coroner's office were alerted and, with the hearse at the door and the wake in process, Thomas' funeral was stopped. A post mortem was carried out on the spot and confirmed the cause of death as arsenic poisoning. The widow was arrested but her sister absconded and, with the assistance of friends and neighbours, managed to evade the police for ten days. Meanwhile, exhumations were ordered for the remains of Mary Higgins, Maggie Jennings and John Flanagan - household members who had all died suddenly within the previous three years. Upon examination, each was found to exhibit similar evidence of arsenic poisoning.

Only then did it emerge that earlier in the year Patrick Jennings - one of the sisters' lodgers - had voiced concerns about the sudden death of his daughter Maggie, but the attending physician had ordered Jennings out of the dispensary and even threatened him with violence. The landladies' murderous exploits thus remained undetected for another ten months, allowing them to continue their lucrative business.

Catherine Flanagan eluded capture for ten days. When finally apprehended she offered to turn Queen's evidence, providing the police with information implicating several others. Though the full details were not made public at the time, press reports of the trial stated that the police were investigating further poisonings in the sisters' neighbourhood and that more arrests were imminent, the issue being under the consideration of the local

⁴⁶⁶ Thomas Higgins's life had been insured with the British Workmen's Insurance Co. (£12 12s), The Royal Liver Friendly Society (£50), Scottish Legal Life Assurance Co. (c. £15), Pearl Life Assurance Co. (£40), Prudential Assurance Co. (£15 12s) and the Wesleyan & General Assurance Soc. (£15). *Ibid*, p. 67.

authorities and the Treasury Solicitor.⁴⁶⁷ In fact, Catherine had made a statement which implicated her sister and three other women - Margaret Evans, Catherine Ryan and Bridget Begley - in the murders of a further six victims.⁴⁶⁸ Thus, it came to light that the district bounded by Vauxhall Road and Great Homer Street, Boundary Street and Burlington Street, was home to a deadly syndicate which habitually insured the lives of their relatives, lodgers and neighbours with several different societies, then poisoned them and shared the payouts. However, the prosecution thought it unlikely that Catherine's testimony would be considered sufficiently reliable to secure a conviction and they declined her offer.

With her bid for clemency having failed, Catherine was committed to stand trial alongside her sister Margaret at the Liverpool Assizes in St George's Hall, the charge being the murder of Thomas Higgins. Details of the other three murders were submitted as 'similar fact' evidence. The trial lasted just three days, and in his summing up the judge highlighted the culpability of the insurance companies when he posed the question, 'How many people lying in the burial grounds of this and other large towns are there who, if their lives had not been insured, might still be alive at this moment?'⁴⁶⁹

Meanwhile, the *Liverpool Daily Post* remarked on revelations that, in several instances, the burial clubs and insurance companies had been dissatisfied with the circumstances surrounding a death and refused to pay out, yet had failed to make further investigations

⁴⁶⁷ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 20 and 22 February 1884, p. 5.

⁴⁶⁸ Home Office file, *Liverpool Poising Case, Statement of Prisoner Catherine Flanagan*, PRO, HO 144/126 A33023/10 (National Archives).

⁴⁶⁹ Mr Justice Butt, in his summing up to the jury, reported in *Liverpool Echo*, 16 February 1884, p. 4; *Liverpool Courier*, 23 February 1884, p. 5.

or to inform the authorities. It concluded, 'If the practice of poisoning is to be rooted out from among the ignorant classes, the methods of these burial and friendly societies must undergo a radical reform.'⁴⁷⁰ However, the negligence of the medical profession - which habitually issued death certificates without even seeing a body - passed unremarked.

The sisters were found guilty and sentenced to be hanged at the old Kirkdale Jail, just a few streets from the scene of the crimes. They were executed on 3 March 1884. Curiously, that same day the newspaper reports began to take a very different direction. Although the *Liverpool Courier* still eagerly awaited further arrests resulting from 'startling revelations' made by the prisoners, the *Daily Post* refuted earlier claims that the women had confessed and provided names relating to other poisonings.⁴⁷¹ Again, two days later, the same newspaper stated that 'rumours' of imminent arrests relating to further poisonings had proved false, no information having been received by the police after all.⁴⁷² Clearly a decision had been made to draw these investigations to a close and the newspapers, which had built up the public's expectations, were engaged in a back-peddalling exercise.

However, neighbourhood gossip continued to rage as a further seven untimely deaths within the Flanagan/Higgins household were recalled. For example, one neighbour claimed to have overheard an argument between the sisters six years earlier, about the time when Margaret's first husband had died. Allegedly, Margaret accused Catherine with the words, 'You have poisoned my husband,' to which her sister had responded, 'He

⁴⁷⁰ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 18 February 1884, p. 5

⁴⁷¹ *Liverpool Courier*, 3 March 1884, p. 4; *Liverpool Daily Post*, 3 March 1884, p. 3.

⁴⁷² *Liverpool Daily Post*, 5 March 1884, p. 5.

was not your husband. He was your fancy man. He was an old Orangeman.⁴⁷³ These additional deaths were never investigated by the police, bringing truth to the *Daily Post*'s statement, 'How many their victims were and when they began their villainous trade will probably never be known.'⁴⁷⁴ If these further deaths were indeed murders, they bring the total number of victims to seventeen.

In the immediate wake of this trial the Home Office launched an investigation into insurance practice, ranging from large 'respectable' companies down to small unregistered friendly societies. These were described in the words of a Home Office memorandum as 'Vast parasitical growths on the industry of the poor',⁴⁷⁵ exploiting their clients through legal loopholes. It was revealed that, even amongst the larger societies, it was customary to allow wives to sign policies on behalf of their husbands, and that collectors regularly 'invented' health and family history details for those about to be insured. Questions were asked regarding the advisability of a system under which agents were so reliant upon commission for their wages that they actively touted for business amongst what were commonly termed 'family clubbers' with little regard for the consequences. In short, the findings suggested that malpractice was rife, and not merely confined to Liverpool, but widespread.⁴⁷⁶ As a result the Home Office set about tightening up regulations.

⁴⁷³ *Liverpool Courier*, 4 March 1884, p. 7.

⁴⁷⁴ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 18 February 1884, p. 5.

⁴⁷⁵ Home Office file, Liverpool Poisoning Case, Memorandum Relating to Involvement of Insurance Societies, PRO HO 144/A33023/21 (National Archives).

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

In more recent times, the crimes of Catherine Flanagan and Margaret Higgins have prompted a re-evaluation of ideas surrounding working-class networks of mutual self-help and community solidarity. As noted, both the 1843 Royal Commission report and the 1876 *Report of the Friendly Societies' Registrar* indicated that, for a considerable number of people, it was but a small step from prudently preparing for the eventuality of a family death to helping them on their way with poison. Clearly, this liberal interpretation of the term 'mutual self-help' was influenced and aided by the ease with which life insurance policies, arsenic poison, and even signed death certificates could be procured, and was compounded by the fact that life was held very cheap indeed. Furthermore, since privacy was a rare thing in communities living such a cheek-by-jowl existence, the successful perpetration of such a crime relied on a certain degree of neighbourhood complicity.

Catherine Flanagan's ten days as a fugitive were only possible because her friends 'closed ranks' in support of one of their own. For several days she was sheltered by people who later claimed not to know she was wanted by the police, despite her having requested that newspaper reports of the investigation be read to her. She even met with acquaintances at public houses in the neighbourhood, which suggests she was confident she was in no danger of being handed over to the authorities. And, when circumstances allowed, her friends used their contacts to secure lodgings in other parts of the town where she could 'lay low' before attempting to escape by train from Edge Hill Station. Such facts have been viewed as examples of the anti-authority and anti-police co-operation described by Ellen Ross in her study of women's survival networks in London

before the First World War.⁴⁷⁷ However, the case is far more complex than this simple ‘them’ and ‘us’ analysis would suggest, for it does not take into account the myriad inter-connecting - and sometimes conflicting - allegiances owed to kin, court and co-religionists within the larger working-class community.

Beyond the immediate circle of family, friends and neighbours, those in severe need often sought assistance from Liverpool’s numerous charitable societies and organisations. In January 1891 the *Liverpool Review* lamented the small number of respondents to the call of philanthropy, reporting that whilst the pamphlet circulated by the Liverpool Central Relief and Charity Organisation Society - listing 160 local charities - reached the hands of 12,000 citizens ‘known to occupy a good position’, approximately 5,000 of these appeared to make no charitable contributions whatsoever.⁴⁷⁸ No doubt this situation was due in part to the widely-held belief that the causes of poverty were moral weakness and personal failure, this belief being exacerbated by, at times, high levels of anti-Irishness. Indeed, between July and September 1899 the same publication ran a series of articles on slum life, and between 7 October and 11 November followed it with a series outlining what various Christian workers were doing to alleviate conditions. As a result of these findings it proclaimed that it was the ‘failures, the outcasts, the dregs of humanity’ and not the ‘honest poor’ who mostly lived in the slums and that they had arrived there through their ‘own shortcomings and failings’, of which 80 *per cent* was due to drink, so often associated with Irish migrants.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁷ Ellen Ross, ‘Survival Networks: women’s neighbourhood sharing in London before World War One’ in *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 15 (1983), pp 4-28.

⁴⁷⁸ *Liverpool Review*, 3 January, 1891, p. 6.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 2 September 1899, p. 8.

Although some organisations maintained the distinction between those deemed ‘deserving’ of charity and those ‘undeserving’, the medical charities providing for the sick poor appear to have been less rigid in limiting their assistance. For example, according to William Rathbone’s District Nursing Association, which provided care for the poor in their own homes:

To aid the deserving poor is theoretically our aim, but practically, many whom we know to be the reverse of this receive help and we believe that the interest thus manifested in a time of illness and utter destitution has a beneficial effect, morally as well as physically.⁴⁸⁰

Whilst the medical charities accepted that a proportion of their assistance was received by the less deserving, one organisation appears to have shunned the distinction altogether. In 1893 local businessman H. Lee J. Jones, appalled by the undernourishment of Liverpool children, founded the Liverpool Food Association. Avowedly non-sectarian and non-political, it aimed to feed undernourished children, rag-pickers and dock labourers from its soup kitchen in Limekiln Lane off Scotland Road. Voluntary Lady Attendants carried ‘hotpots’ to the homes of housebound invalids, and meals costing a half-penny (or free to the most needy) were delivered to twenty two schools. After undergoing several changes of name this charity became known as the League of Welldoers.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁸⁰ *Annual Report of The District Nursing Association, 1869*, p. 73.

⁴⁸¹ This organisation continue in operation today serving the same community from the same premises, providing meals for pensioners, day trips for disadvantaged children, and hosting community events at its day centre.

Nevertheless, the Victorian notion of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor continued to manifest itself. Although the Central Relief Society later replaced these terms with the less accusatory ‘helpable’ and ‘non helpable’, the latter term was still viewed as retaining ‘unfavourable moral connotations’.⁴⁸² Furthermore, despite the assertions of reformers that the causes of poverty were largely economic rather than moral, those in authority frequently expressed the well-worn opinion that the poor were the authors of their own fate. As late as 1909 the report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress still maintained that:

Distress is often due not so much to misfortune as to faults in character. So far as this is the case, relief alone can only do a limited amount of good: and this may do a great deal of harm. Personal advice and influence alone can be of true service, and relief should only be given where there is a clear effort towards improvement.⁴⁸³

This apportioning of blame towards the poor was bolstered by the continued portrayal of the Irish as brutish and ignorant:

The wretches you see in Scotland-road [sic] inherit probably the proclivities of a dozen generations of degradation. Many of them come from Ireland, and bitterly has the sister country repaid us for centuries of wrong inflicted by our hands. Her poor, ground down from year to year to lower and lower depths of poverty, at length are driven by hunger from the sterile heaths and mountain sides, to find and to intensify in our great cities a squalor worse than they originally experienced. But the blame is not theirs. They have been born to ugliness and destitution, and with predispositions to vice transmitted from many a savage, ignorant ancestor.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸² Grisewood’s memorandum, *Central Relief Society Minute Book*, 18 June 1893, pp 47-52, Liverpool Record Office.

⁴⁸³ PP, *Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, 1909*, Majority Report, Appendix, vol. 4, pp 553-4.

⁴⁸⁴ ‘Squalid Liverpool’, 5 November 1883, p. 6.

Along with the medical charities and other non-sectarian organisations were numerous denominational charities, some of which reached out into the wider community. Their efforts were appreciated by the poor but, fearing that charitable effort might be used by Protestant denominations as tools for proselytisation, the Roman Catholic hierarchy took steps to prevent the loss of their flock.⁴⁸⁵ To this end, parallel institutions were founded, both within and beyond the parish, aiming to provide for material, spiritual, social and intellectual needs.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Liverpool had only two Catholic parish churches - St Peter's and St Mary's - but by 1872 Hugh Heinrich was able to boast to his Dublin readership:

There are twenty-three Catholic churches, ten convents, and seven monasteries in Liverpool. These have all, or nearly all, been built, and are now supported, by the zealous charity of the Irish people. The rich contribute their pound; the poor, their pence; and so churches and schools have risen in evidence of the constancy in faith and the loving thirst for mental cultivation which has ever distinguished the Irish people. The church accommodation - one church to 8,000 population - can scarcely be deemed sufficient; but the school accommodation is almost, if not entirely, equal to the requirements of the time. A careful examination of the School Board statistics show that the Catholic population of Liverpool have provided school accommodation in elementary schools, industrial schools, and reformatories, for 22,369 children; or for about one in eight of the Catholic population - a proportion which in a community such as this, where a larger proportion of the people remain unmarried than in most towns - is found to be ample for present requirements.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁵ The Church of England oversaw religious instruction and provision in all municipal institutions including elementary schools, industrial schools, the workhouse and the female penitentiary, no provision being made for other forms of observance. See Burke, *Catholic History of Liverpool*.

⁴⁸⁶ Heinrich, *A Survey of the Irish in England*, p. 93.

The densely populated parishes produced large congregations and demanded equally large churches. The combined pennies of the poor managed to provide the means to build and furnish churches in a grand style far removed from the grime and poverty which lay outside. By 1914 their number had grown to twenty four, sixteen of which lay in the strongly Irish wards of Vauxhall, Scotland and Everton. Increasingly, the parish - with its church, presbytery and school - took on an important role as the centre of the social as well as the religious community, particularly for women. This was because few of the secular societies and organisations were open to women, there was a lower rate of trade union involvement, and the public house was often considered 'out of bounds'.⁴⁸⁷ Consequently, as Ann Rossiter points out, it was the Catholic Church which 'occupied a pivotal position in the lives of Irish women immigrants' who 'formed the backbone of church-based activities' although 'the magnitude of their work is, as yet, hidden from history'.⁴⁸⁸ Amongst the parish-based organisations for females was the Guild of St Agnes, which aimed to encourage schoolgirls to take monthly Communion.⁴⁸⁹ In addition, there was a Girls' Club for poorer girls who could not afford the one penny per week subscription or the cost of the Guild's cloak.⁴⁹⁰ These, and other similar societies, encouraged regular church attendance and, with it, a greater observance of the Catholic faith.

⁴⁸⁷ For example, the Hibernian Mechanical Society and the Free and Independent Brothers, mentioned in Part One of this thesis.

⁴⁸⁸ Anne Rossiter, 'Bringing the Margins into the Centre', p. 193.

⁴⁸⁹ *Xaverian*, November 1886, pp 126-7.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid*, March 1888, p. 31.

Beyond the parish-based organisations were local branches of the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Catholic Benefit Society, as well as certified poor law schools for Catholic children under the authority of the poor law.⁴⁹¹ In 1895 there were no fewer than forty charitable institutions caring for Catholic children and young people within the Liverpool area. Those aimed specifically at girls and young women included the Catholic Children's Protection Society, the Catholic Orphanage for Girls, St Joseph's Home for Servant Girls, and St Vincent's Refuge for girls.⁴⁹²

In addition to the wide range of charitable institutions already described, Liverpool was home to a host of rescue and refuge societies aimed solely at women who had fallen foul of the law or broken society's mores. The Liverpool Female Penitentiary⁴⁹³ had been founded as early as 1811, and sought to take care of 'fallen' women, as did the Benevolent Institution and Rescue Home (1839), the Magdalen Institution (1855), the Home of the Midnight Mission (1875) and the Home of the Liverpool Rescue Society (1890). The Liverpool and Lancashire Female Refuge (established in 1823 and the oldest of its kind) provided for women leaving prison, whilst the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society did similar work on a more general scale. Meanwhile, the Liverpool Preventive

⁴⁹¹ See F. G. D'Aeth, *Report to the Chairman of the Liverpool Council of Voluntary Aid on the Charitable Effort in Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1911); Canon Bennett, *Father Nugent of Liverpool*; Burke, *Catholic History of Liverpool*.

⁴⁹² The minute books of many of these charitable establishments, their annual reports, and the reports provided by official inspectors, are available to researchers at the archives of the Liverpool Record Office.

⁴⁹³ Originally established at a house in Edge Hill, it later moved to Falkner Street/Crabtree Lane. Though sometimes referred to as the Magdalen Asylum, Home or Institution, it should not be confused with the Liverpool Magdalen Institution founded by the Church of England in 1855 at 8 Mount Vernon Green.

Home for Training Young Girls for Service aimed to ‘save’ those who were not guilty of vice or crime, but who were perceived to be ‘on the verge of ruin.’⁴⁹⁴

Nevertheless, Father Nugent - whose philanthropic efforts were largely focussed on the Irish migrant - considered it necessary to found further establishments aimed specifically at Roman Catholic women in Liverpool. As a result of increased police action against prostitution during the 1870s - as discussed earlier in this chapter - brothels were closed and prostitutes thrown out on the streets. Perceiving the women’s predicament, Father Nugent obtained premises which had formerly served as a public wash-house and baths in the Bevington Bush district, and set about founding a house of refuge and rehabilitation for these ‘fallen’ women, and those released from prison.⁴⁹⁵ Being of the opinion that the provision of active occupation was the best course of action, he arranged for the establishment to serve as a laundry, that the women might contribute to their own support, learn skills for future employment, and serve their community. In 1890 the home was opened as Saint Saviour’s Refuge, and the Sisters of the Poor Servants of the Mother of God religious order took charge of its running.⁴⁹⁶

In 1897 Father Nugent was again instrumental in founding a home for young unmarried mothers and their babies. Situated at in the suburb of Aigburth, under the care of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary, the House of Providence Magdalen

⁴⁹⁴ *Report of the Liverpool Preventive Home for Training Young Girls for Service, 1906*, p. 4, File 364 CHC/118, Liverpool Record Office.

⁴⁹⁵ J. Bennett, ‘House of Providence: A Brief History’ (File 282.05 CAT, Liverpool Record Office). See also http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mol/collections/liverpoollives/father_nugent.aspx.

⁴⁹⁶ See John Furnival, *Children of the Second Spring: Father James Nugent and the Work of Childcare in Liverpool* (Leominster, 2005), pp 224-5.

Asylum was envisioned as a place where a young woman might be helped to 'reclaim her character', and afterwards find a 'good and suitable situation.'⁴⁹⁷ Father Nugent reported that in the first year 33 mothers and babies were helped. Speaking in 1909 at the Liverpool Penitentiary's annual meeting of subscribers, the Church of England's Archdeacon Madden referred to this Roman Catholic institution, and expressed his wish to see a similar home where protestant girls 'who had sinned for the first time', might be sent instead of the workhouse.⁴⁹⁸ This reveals that both Catholic and Protestant rescue workers considered it necessary that young girls, pregnant for the first time, be segregated from women with several illegitimate children for fear their influence would corrupt those who might still be 'saved'.

Concern for the plight of the poor which had - as we have seen - already provoked numerous investigations into the conditions of their home and work-life, began to focus on the condition of inmates of religious and charitable institutions, many of whom were engaged in laundry work. In some cases this work was seen as a symbolic washing away of the sins of 'fallen' women.⁴⁹⁹ In others it may have presented an opportunity to train them for future livelihoods, or merely a convenient way for the institution to earn an income. Whatever the rationale, it meant that the women - often the most disadvantaged of society - endured long hours of strenuous labour whilst receiving only board and lodging in return. For example, a note made by an anonymous member of the

⁴⁹⁷ http://wooltonvillageuk.tripod.com/allerton_priory.htm.

⁴⁹⁸ 'Liverpool Female Penitentiary', *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury*, 19 February 1909 (no page number) (364 FEM 6 & 7, Liverpool Record Office).

⁴⁹⁹ See Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform*, pp 53-54.

Gentlemen's Committee of the Liverpool Penitentiary provides us with a glimpse of the institution's regime where work dominated the daily routine:

Work	7 am
Breakfast	7.30 - 8 am
Work	8 - 10.30 am
Rest	10.30 - 10.45 am
Work	10.45 - 1 pm
Dinner	1 - 2 pm
Work	2 - 5 pm
Tea	5 - 5.30 pm
Work	5.30 - 8 pm ⁵⁰⁰

Noting that there was no work carried out on Saturday afternoons or on Sundays, the gentleman declared the hours 'quite reasonable' (his emphasis).⁵⁰¹

In fact, working long hours in hot, steamy, ill-ventilated spaces, where pools of dirty water accumulated, damaged the health of laundresses, causing them to suffer rheumatism, ulcerated legs, bronchitis and other similar complaints.⁵⁰² But, since it was taken for granted that the charitable institution acted in the best interest of the inmates, these laundries were exempted from legislation regulating factory employment. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when attempts were made to bring institution laundries under factory act legislation at the turn of the twentieth century they were met with resistance. Even those institutions where inmates worked no more than factory hours and received regular breaks reacted with hostility to proposals that inspection be made mandatory.

⁵⁰⁰ Note found with *Minutes of the Gentlemen's Committee of the Liverpool Penitentiary, July 1897* (File 364 FEM 2, Liverpool Record Office).

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰² Bartley, *Prevention and Reform*, p. 58; Patricia Malcolmson, *English Laundresses: A Social History, 1850-1930* (Illinois, 1986), pp 93-94.

Meanwhile, commercial laundries protested that the exemption of institution laundries from regulation gave them an unfair advantage. In her study, of these laundries from 1850 to 1930, Patricia E. Malcolmsom provides us with some idea of the scale of operations:

Commercial opposition seems to have been strongest in Liverpool, where launderers felt that institutional competition was cheating them of lucrative shipping contracts, which could involve 10,000 to 20,000 items per voyage. While these launderers' fears may have been exaggerated, there were at least ten institutional laundries there in 1902, and the Liverpool Magdalen Institution announced in its 51st Annual Report that it had updated its laundry with modern machinery 'to undertake the washing from ships, steamers, factories, hotels, cafes and hospitals, both promptly and efficiently'.⁵⁰³

Yet, despite such protests, the hours and conditions of work in institution laundries were not included in the Factory and Workshop Act of 1901, and it was not until the introduction of the new Factory and Workshop Act of 1907 that they were eventually brought into line. Nevertheless, the rush to wash, dry and iron as many as 9,000 items within the few hours when a ship was in dock continued to cause the abuse of workers⁵⁰⁴ and one year after regulation of the industry the Lady Inspectors reported some inmates still began work as early as 4am in order to light laundry fires.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰³ Malcolmsom, *English Laundresses*, pp 81-83.

⁵⁰⁴ *Annual Report of Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops, 1907*, Report of the Lady Inspectors.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 1908.

2.4 POOR LAW PROVISION: THE 'STIGMA OF PAUPERISM'

By 1911 the total number of charitable societies - denominational and non-sectarian - operating in Liverpool had risen to 241 and, with an annual income of £460,991, they were involved in 357 branches of work.⁵⁰⁶ Yet the tide of poor and needy remained practically undiminished. For those who had exhausted the help of family, friends and community - or simply had no one to turn to for help - the only alternative was the Poor Law. However, the harsh regime in operation meant that the dread spectre of the workhouse loomed large in the psyche of the poor (**Figure 9**).



Figure 9 - Aerial view of Liverpool Workhouse from the west, 1929.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁶ D' Aeth, *Report to Liverpool Council of Voluntary Aid*, pp 18-9.

⁵⁰⁷ Aerial view of Liverpool workhouse in 1929. It was demolished in 1931 and the site purchased for the building of the (Roman Catholic) Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King. Image accessed on <http://userdoc.ancestry.com/userdocstore/download> (10 January 2009).

During the first three decades of the twentieth century the Poor Law was ‘gradually dismantled’. In 1908 the Children’s Act provided local government with powers to prevent underprivileged children from going into the workhouse. The following year saw old age pensions introduced and labour exchanges established. As noted, the 1911 National Insurance Act provided sickness and maternity benefit, and in 1913 the term ‘workhouse’ was officially dropped in favour of ‘Poor Law Institution’, with indoor relief confined to those termed the ‘helpless poor’ - children, elderly and the sick.⁵⁰⁸

Miss Thorburn, member of the Select Vestry of Liverpool, thus described women admitted to the workhouse during the early 1900s:

Then there are the respectable ins and outs who really work at bag making or mending, at the cotton, at chip selling or at hawking when there is work to be got, and who turn to the workhouse regularly and cheerfully whenever it fails. These women are rough and noisy, and they are so ignorant of domestic work or sewing that they are of little use in the work of the place. A large proportion of them are Irish. When they quarrel their language is more than strong, but I doubt whether they really understand or mean what they say. Many of these are fond of children and kindly to others.⁵⁰⁹

Yet, contrary to Miss Thorburn’s impression of ‘cheerful’ resort to the workhouse when work failed, admittance to the workhouse was not to be entered into lightly. Along with the removal of responsibility went the removal of all freedom and, once admitted to the workhouse, an inmate might only be released if one could prove an ability to provide for

⁵⁰⁸ M. W. Royden, ‘The Nineteenth Century Poor Law in Liverpool and its Hinterland: Towards the Origins of the Workhouse Infirmary’, a lecture given at the Liverpool Medical History Society/Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire Conference, *The Poor Law and After: Workhouse Hospitals and Public Welfare*, at the Liverpool Medical Institution, 1999 (Liverpool, 1999), pp 5-22.

⁵⁰⁹ PP, *Royal Commission of the Poor Laws, 1909*, Appendix, vol. IV, Minutes of Evidence, ‘Evidence of Miss J. S. Thorburn, Cd. 4835 (HMSO, 1909).

oneself on the outside.⁵¹⁰ According to Pat O'Mara who, as a child, experienced at first-hand the regime of the workhouse and remembered the shame of wearing its uniform, the institution represented a last resort for those who had lost all hope: 'It is occupied mostly by wretches tired of battling for existence on the outside, who have come here to stop worrying, to work and to die. It is a lost city...Despair is in the air...'⁵¹¹

Meanwhile, the inadequacy of state provision outside the workhouse for widows with children was revealed in yet another of Eleanor Rathbone's reports. In particular, she highlighted the disparity in payments made by the Liverpool Union (which covered the city centre) and that of neighbouring West Derby (which covered Liverpool's north-eastern districts), where amounts received by widows were much lower:

There is, so far as we know, nothing in the circumstances of West Derby that makes it in the least probable that the widows in that Union stand as a whole in need of less relief than those in other large urban communities, where far higher rates are and have long been given. On the contrary, it is notorious that the demand for women's work both skilled and unskilled is smaller, and its remuneration lower than in most Lancashire and Yorkshire towns. The low rate is bound to stand out the more conspicuously now that the Select Vestry has so greatly increased its relief. The Orangeman or Welsh Nonconformist of Everton or Kirkdale cannot be expected to relish the knowledge that if misfortune and an untimely death should oblige his widow and children to appeal for help, they will in all probability receive just half as much out of the public purse as they would have done if they had been Irish Roman Catholics living in a slum near the Vauxhall Road.⁵¹²

⁵¹⁰ O'Mara, *Liverpool Irish Slummy*, p. 44.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp 5-6.

⁵¹² 'We do not mean of course that either Board discriminates between applicants of different religions in deciding the amount of relief. We are merely pointing out one undeniable result of the difference of policy between the two Boards' (Rathbone's footnote). Rathbone, *The Condition of Widows in Liverpool*, p. 27.

Rathbone went on to demonstrate how, during the previous fifteen years, a variety of parliamentary acts had provided for the unemployed, the sick and the aged, removing them from the ‘stigma of pauperism’. Yet those most in need of relief and least able to provide for their own needs - the widowed mothers of young children - remained under the authority of the Poor Law with its ‘humiliating conditions’. She suggested that the reason for such treatment was clear – namely, that since all widows were women they were exempt from voting in parliamentary elections. As evidence she pointed to the ‘Colonies and American States’ where women had been enfranchised and where, subsequently, widows received a pension (though she objected to the term ‘pension’ since it suggested that the woman’s work was completed). She asserted that the work undertaken by such women – washing, sewing, cooking and cleaning for children – was of equal benefit to the nation as that of a dock-labourer, a plumber or a soldier, and perhaps even as valuable as that of ‘the Relieving Officer of Poor Law Guardians who browbeats or patronises her.’⁵¹³ It was not until 1925 that the Widows, Orphans and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act was passed, making provision for the most disadvantaged.

⁵¹³ *Ibid*, p. 32.

CONCLUSION

The years encompassing the close of the nineteenth century, and the beginning of the twentieth, witnessed changes and developments in many aspects of life. However, change was not experienced uniformly in all quarters and by all sections of society. With regards to Irish migration patterns, rising numbers travelling to the USA meant a corresponding reduction in numbers travelling to Britain. However, this shift in numbers was accompanied by an increase in the proportion of women migrants to the extent that at times they outnumbered men. This was in response to changes in Irish social structure and practice during this post-famine era when primogeniture inheritance and dowries were adopted. With few other options available, some women sought to improve their marriage prospects through their own endeavours, and since earning power increased with improved occupational status, and better access to social amenities improved the chances of meeting potential marriage partners, migration served both purposes. Therefore, in the debate regarding whether marriage or status was the primary motivation for women's migration, it would appear that the two objectives were very closely linked.

This abandonment of traditional farming, inheritance and marriage patterns formed a process which might be described as conforming to the world systems theory of migration. Faced with few alternatives, the surplus workforce this produced, many of them women, migrated in a continuation of the 'family survival through diversification' strategy (new economics theory) noted earlier. In the host society, their frequent employment in occupations deemed unattractive by the native workforce points to dual

systems theory. Thus, once again, the complexity of Irish migration patterns precludes its convenient assignment to a single theory model.

In Britain, evidence for continuing gender prejudice is seen in the prevalence of notions surrounding women's primary role as mother, demonstrated in the 'negligent working mother' theory which blamed hard-pressed working-class women for the high rates of mortality amongst their children. It is also found in the workings of both the Poor Law and the National Insurance Act (1911) which discriminated against women in refusing to acknowledge them as individuals, and in the reduced rates paid to them. Similarly, racial prejudice continued for, despite the slowing of the migrant influx from Ireland and the arrival of other immigrants from Europe, the perception of the Irish people as 'other' remained. This is seen in Carlyle's poor opinion of Catholic teachers, for example, and in discriminatory recruitment practices amongst hospitals.

In Liverpool, chronic male underemployment created tensions between native-born and migrant workforces, and increased the reliance on female earnings. The dominance of domestic service as a field of female employment continued long after it began to decline in other areas. The availability of this work attracted Irish migrant women since it enabled them to gain a foothold where other forms of occupation were sometimes barred to them. For some this paved the way for advancement in the socio-economic hierarchy and for marriage, but for others there was little prospect of release from grinding poverty yet it ensured their economic survival, aiding their families both in Liverpool and often in Ireland. Others, particularly married women, took in washing or engaged in work outside

the home such as in street trading and lodging-house keeping - work which came to be associated with Irish women. The poverty suffered by large sections of Britain's population was highlighted by the poor condition of volunteers at the outbreak of the Boer War, and was explained by reports such as Rathbone's, which minutely detailed the miserable bread-and-tea diets on which labourers' families often survived.⁵¹⁴ Gradually, official acknowledgement that poor diet, housing and working conditions had rendered large numbers of the working classes undersized and undernourished, and that medical and social care was totally inadequate, prompted a range of interventions and initiatives. But the benefits of these improvements were not experienced equally by all and the spectre of the workhouse was never far away. The response of Liverpool's Irish community was two-fold; on a public level it sought to develop and extend its own social care network, catering to what it considered to be its most pressing problems and removing the influence of outside authorities. On a private level, migrant women continued to draw on the support of friends and neighbours, developing and reinforcing networks of mutual reliance which stretched beyond Liverpool to Ireland and further afield in the hope of securing a future for themselves and their families.

⁵¹⁴ Rathbone, *How the Casual Labourer Lives* (Liverpool, 1909).

PART THREE

THE DEPRESSION, THE WAR EFFORT, AND
POST-WAR REDEVELOPMENT - 1930s-1950s

INTRODUCTION

The third and final part of this thesis focuses on the period from the 1930s to the 1950s, an era encompassing the Great Depression, the Second World War, and the beginning of Britain's post-war recovery. These events influenced changes in the rate and composition of Irish migration, the choice of Britain as a destination, and responses towards migrants in both Ireland and Britain. Therefore, this section will begin with an assessment of Ireland between the World Wars, considering the impact of the Free State's post-independence assertions of identity, its view of female citizenship, and women's responses to these developments. In assessing Liverpool during the inter-war period, consideration will be made of mounting fears regarding the threat to local resources posed by rising migration levels, and the expressions of hostility this provoked.

Moving on to the years of the Second World War, an examination will be made of Britain's need to supply the war effort, and the resultant change in attitudes towards migrants as a source of labour. On the other hand, the conflict between Eire's official position as a neutral state and its need to offload a surplus workforce will be addressed. Northern Ireland's role in supplying female labour will also be considered.

Finally, in the post-war period, Britain's need for labour in her attempt to re-build and re-develop is set against the Irish Republic's struggle to halt surging migrations levels.

In addition to the range of sources utilised earlier - the census, reports of government investigators, journalists and social commentators - oral testimony will provide an insight into the experience of Irish women who migrated to Liverpool during the 1950s, giving a voice to at least part of a long-neglected social group.

3.1 MIGRATORY PATTERNS I: INTERWAR AND WORLD WAR TWO

The First World War saw the significance of Ireland's industrial and agricultural exports increase due to wartime shortages in Britain, and demand remained high in the immediate post-war years. Nevertheless, this was a period of political instability in Ireland which resulted in economic hardship particularly in many rural areas. The post-war boom was also short-lived, the 1920s bringing an economic slump and with it rising unemployment.⁵¹⁵ In 1922 the partition of Ireland saw the newly formed Free State cut off from the major industrial and manufacturing base in the north east. Just 10 *per cent* of workers in independent Ireland were employed in manufacture, two thirds of this number being involved in the processing of food and drink. By contrast, more than half the labour force was engaged in agriculture, making the Free State heavily reliant on this sector. Having inherited high rates of unemployment and underemployment, the Free State's difficulties were such that in 1924 Patrick McGilligan, Minister for Industry and Commerce, told the Dail, 'There are certain limited funds at our disposal. People may have to die in this country and may have to die through starvation.'⁵¹⁶ In response the Cumann na nGaedheal government⁵¹⁷ chose to maximize agricultural trade to such an extent that by 1930 almost 90 *per cent* of agricultural produce went to export.

⁵¹⁵ In 1922, 22.9 *per cent* of Northern Ireland's total population was unemployed, whilst in Great Britain the average rate was 14.1 *per cent*. By 1938 figures had reached 28 *per cent* and 12.8 *per cent* respectively. Myrtle Hill and John Lynch, 'Ireland: Society and Economy' in *The Pursuit of Sovereignty and the Impact of Partition, 1912-1949*, part of the Multitext Project in Irish History series (Cork, no date), pp 4-5, accessed on http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Ireland_society-economy-1912-49, 26 September 2011.

⁵¹⁶ Dail Eireann Debates, 30 October 1924, vol. 9, no. 6, col. 562 accessed on <http://historicaldebates.oirseachtas.ie>, 26 September 2011.

⁵¹⁷ The Cumann na nGaedheal Party, under the leadership of W. T. Cosgrave, came to power in the Irish Free State's first general election in 1923, and remained in government until 1932.

The land acts of 1881 and 1903 granted Irish tenant farmers the right to buy their holdings and, during the early years of the twentieth century, the British government had made loans available to facilitate their purchase. Under the terms of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, it was agreed that the Irish Free State would collect repayments of these Land Annuities and forward them to Westminster. However, upon the election of his Fianna Fail party in March 1932, Eamonn de Valera ceased these repayments and a trade war followed.⁵¹⁸ In an attempt to recoup lost revenue the British authorities imposed a 20 *per cent* tariff on Irish goods. The Free State government retaliated by introducing the Emergency Imposition of Duties Act (1932), allowing the application of import duty to British goods. This duty amounted to 5 shillings per ton on coal and coke, and 20 *per cent* on iron, steel, cement, machinery and electrical goods. However, it was the Free State's economy which suffered most severely for whilst Ireland received less than 10 *per cent* of Britain's exports, Britain was the market for 96 *per cent* of Ireland's exports. The result was a limited outlet for Irish produce as well as shortages of raw materials, each of which exacerbated the unemployment problem. The value of Irish exports fell from £43.5 million in 1929 to £18 million in 1935, with the cattle trade being particularly affected.

In 1935 a Coal-Cattle Pact was agreed whereby Britain pledged to increase its import quota of Irish beef in return for assurances that Ireland would import coal only from British sources. But it was not until 1938 that the signing of a general trade treaty

⁵¹⁸ The Fianna Fail Party, lead by Eamonn de Valera, defeated the Cumann na nGaedheal government in the general election of March 1932. They remained in power until 1948.

eventually brought the stand-off to an end and unrestricted trade recommenced.⁵¹⁹ Nevertheless, despite efforts to increase agricultural and industrial output, promote self-sufficiency, and establish new export agreements with the United States, Germany and France, the Irish Free State remained uncomfortably dependent upon Britain for both raw materials and export markets. In fact, as late as 1950 almost 90 *per cent* of Irish exports were still bound for the British market, with live animals and food representing three quarters of the total.

In Northern Ireland the economy was dominated by manufacture which represented two thirds of exports. Linen and shipbuilding were major contributors, but heavy reliance on exports exposed manufacturers to market fluctuations. For example, the linen trade was affected by technological advances as new synthetic fabrics revolutionised clothing manufacture and aluminium replaced linen and resin in aircraft fuselage construction.⁵²⁰ Similarly, although naval shipbuilding had not been a primary occupation of the Belfast shipyards, they had become a major centre for ship repair during the First World War. Naturally, the demand for repairs fell once hostilities ceased, but orders for new ships also declined as merchant vessels returned to commercial use. Moreover, the war years had seen the shipyards' overseas customers seize the opportunity to develop their own shipbuilding industries and Belfast, along with Britain, faced major competition which would lead eventually to long-term decline.⁵²¹ By 1926, 11 *per cent* of Northern Ireland's active male workforce and 9 *per cent* of the female were registered as

⁵¹⁹ Hill and Lynch, 'Ireland: Society and Economy', p.4.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*

unemployed.⁵²² Despite earlier prosperity, the province found itself increasingly reliant on subsidies from Westminster.⁵²³ Nevertheless, by 1932 the number of registered unemployed reached 72,000, with a further 30,000 unregistered, of a total population of 1.3 million.⁵²⁴

Ireland's economic difficulties in both the north and south of the country impacted significantly, and for many this period represented a time of hardship. The assertion made by economic historian David Landes that 'the best clue to a nation's economic growth and development potential is the status and role of women' appears particularly poignant in relation to this era.⁵²⁵ In Northern Ireland the Poor Law remained in operation until the implementation of the welfare state.

Although the Cumann na nGaedheal government provided a degree of stability in the Free State after the struggle for independence, hoped-for prosperity did not follow and living standards remained low. Unemployment and underemployment levels were a particular problem, yet provision for the poor was meagre. The old poor law system was abolished in 1923, its network of union workhouses being replaced with outdoor relief for the able-bodied poor. But this remained locally-funded; it was not until November 1933 that the Fianna Fail government's Unemployment Assistance Act made available nationally-funded provision for the unemployed.

⁵²² A. M. Gallagher, *Report on Employment, Unemployment and Religion in Northern Ireland, Majority Minority Report Review Two* (Coleraine, 1991) (accessed on <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/csc/reports/majmin2.htm>, 10 October 2012).

⁵²³ Hill and Lynch, 'Ireland: Society and Economy', p.3.

⁵²⁴ Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000* (London, 2004, paperback edition 2005), p. 438.

⁵²⁵ David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some Are So Poor* (New York, 1999), p. 413.

However, the benefits of the new system were extremely limited since only a small number of people met the qualifying criteria, and even then payments were only received for the first six weeks of unemployment. Furthermore, in Ireland as in Britain, women were not entitled to unemployment assistance on the same basis as men since - as with the 1836 poor law - it was generally assumed that male relatives would provide for them. For example, under the new system, a man with no dependents received a maximum of 9 *shillings* per week, though a woman in identical circumstances received just 7*s* 6*d*. Similarly, a man with a dependent wife and five or more other dependents was entitled to a maximum of £2 per week; a woman with a dependent husband and the same number of other dependents was only entitled to 18*s* - less than half the man's allowance.⁵²⁶ Furthermore, in addition to the general statutory conditions, a widow or spinster with no dependents was required to have made no fewer than fifty two contributions to the insurance scheme during the four years immediately preceding her claim for assistance, although no such restriction was placed on a man's claim.⁵²⁷ Thus, women had to satisfy more stringent entitlement criteria in order to receive significantly lower rates of benefit.

In this arrangement the architects of the Free State's 1933 act appear to have followed the precedent set by its British counterpart - the Unemployment Insurance Act of 1920 - which differentiated between males and females in both eligibility criteria and rates of benefit. The rationale behind these lower rates for women - and for young people - in the British system was explained by the 1930-32 Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance:

⁵²⁶ PP, *Unemployment Assistance Act, 1933*, Schedule, 'Rates of Unemployment Assistance', Acts of the Oireachtas (accessed on <http://acts.oireachtas.ie/framed/em.act.1933.0046.7.html>, 11 October 2012).

⁵²⁷ *Ibid*, Section 15, Article 1, item f.

As regards this differential treatment according to age and sex, the legislature appears to have been guided by the principles that, so far as is practicable with flat rates, contributions and benefits should be adjusted in accordance with the broad differences of wage earning capacity so that contributions should not constitute an undue burden on relatively small earnings and that rates of benefit should not be so high in relation to the usual earnings as to constitute an encouragement to prefer benefit to work.⁵²⁸

Clearly, both Irish and British governments considered it prudent to discourage women from claiming unemployment assistance. Those women who persisted found that because they were denied equal pay when in work they were not entitled to equal treatment when unemployed.

Few women in Ireland qualified for unemployment insurance as the 1926 census - the first taken in the newly-formed Free State - revealed that relatively few women were engaged in paid employment. Instead, large numbers - both married and single - remained at home undertaking unpaid work on family farms and in family businesses. Ten years later the number of employed women stood at 226,816 compared with 552,176 who remained at home. Those who were in paid employment were largely confined to agriculture and domestic service, yet opportunities in these areas were diminishing. In fact, between the years 1926 and 1939 the total number of men and women engaged in agriculture fell from a little over 644,000 to approximately 605,000.

However, the inter-war era saw an expansion of light industry - particularly in the fields of processing, assembly and packaging - and by the time of the 1936 census women's representation in the manufacturing workforce had risen from 26.6 *per cent* to 31.3 *per*

⁵²⁸ PP, *Report of the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance, 1930-1932* (London, 1932), p. 216.

cent.⁵²⁹ This increase, in the face of rising unemployment amongst men, fuelled hostility towards women workers. Steps were taken to safeguard male employment, including the imposition of a public service marriage bar in 1932, which was not entirely abolished until 1973. This meant that women working in the public sector - for example, the civil service, teaching and nursing - were required to retire from employment upon marriage.⁵³⁰ In fact this feature was not unique to the Irish Free State, for both Britain and Germany operated a similar public service marriage ban during times of high unemployment.⁵³¹ But in 1936 Ireland also introduced the Conditions of Employment Act, Section 16 of which set out restrictions on the type of work opportunities open to women as well as the number of women to be employed in certain industries.⁵³² Despite protest from the Irish Women Worker's Union, the Irish Trades Union Congress supported this move. Speaking at the 1935 Congress, Senator Tom Kennedy declared it to be 'the first measure to give male labour their rightful place in the new industries.'⁵³³ Meanwhile, Sean Lemass, Minister for Industry and Commerce, maintained that whilst male workers tended to be married with dependents, women worked only until they married, allowing them to accept a lower rate of pay than their male counterparts could possibly survive on. Therefore, he insisted, the purpose of section 16 of the act was not

⁵²⁹ Occupation Tables, *Census of Ireland, 1936* (Stationery Office, Dublin, 1938). See J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1922-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 190.

⁵³⁰ The marriage bar was partly relaxed in 1958 when female primary teachers were permitted to continue in employment after marriage, but restrictions for female civil servants were not fully lifted until July 1973.

⁵³¹ The British industrialist, Sir Herbert Austin, expressed his views on female employment, 'I don't think a woman's place is in industry. If we were to take women out of industry I believe we could absorb all the unemployment, I think men ought to be doing the work instead of women.' *The Times*, 25 September 1933.

⁵³² The Conditions of Employment Act enabled the Minister for Industry and Commerce to exclude women from industrial work or to set a limit on the proportion of women workers in industrial employment, 'after consultation with representatives of employers interested in such forms of industrial work and with representatives of workers so interested.' *Conditions of Employment Act, 1936*, Part II, Section 16.

⁵³³ Senator Tom Kennedy speaking at the Irish Trades Union Congress, Guild Hall, Derry, 1935 (quoted in K. Allen, *Fianna Fail and Irish Labour: 1926 to the Present* (London, 1997), p. 59).

to bar women from the workplace, but to prevent employers from replacing male workers with cheap female labour.⁵³⁴

The act received the support of the Labour Party in the Dail and Seanad and was passed with section 16 intact. Although it saw some success in regulating the number of hours women might work and prohibited them from working at night,⁵³⁵ Daly argues that there is little evidence that the restrictive measures outlined in section 16 were actually applied.⁵³⁶ Nevertheless, the fact that the right to limit female employment levels was written into legislation serves as an indicator of prevailing ideology in Ireland at that time which, despite the denial of Lemass, sought increased control over women. This ideology was summed up in the words of one male delegate at the 1935 Irish Trades Union Congress who said, 'Women are the queens of our hearts and our lives, and for God's sake let us try to keep them there.'⁵³⁷ The passing of the Conditions of Employment Act also resulted in Ireland being blacklisted by the International Labour Organisation in Geneva in 1937, indicating that such strictures were not seen as the European norm.

In spite of such measures, earnings remained low; farm labourers earned less than 15 *shillings* per week, and levels of poverty in rural areas were high by Western European standards. Discontent amongst the rural population led to a drift towards the towns

⁵³⁴ Sean Lemass, Seanad Eireann *Debates*, 12 December 1935, vol. 20, col. 1423-4.

⁵³⁵ *Conditions of Employment Act, 1936*, Part III, Section 46.

⁵³⁶ Mary E. Daly, 'Women in the Irish Free State, 1922-1939: The Interaction Between Economics and Ideology' in Joan Hoff and Maureen Coulter (eds), *Irish Women's Voices Past and Present: Journal of Women's History*, vol. 6, no. 4.vol. 7, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 1995), pp 99-116.

⁵³⁷ S. E. Lloyd, representative of the Belfast Typographical Association, speaking at the Irish Trades Union Congress, Guild Hall, Derry, 1935, reported in 'Women's Part in Industry - Divided Views at Trades Congress', *Irish Press*, 3 August 1935, p. 9.

which, in turn, resulted in 800,000 people living in overcrowded conditions in urban areas in the late 1930s.

The low standard of living amongst the poorer classes fostered poor health, with high rates of tuberculosis. The era saw infant mortality rates rise from an average of 68 per thousand live births in 1928 to 79 per thousand in 1944, the causes being cited as ignorance on the part of mothers, as well as poor diet and living conditions.⁵³⁸ The maternal mortality rate was 4.44 per thousand births,⁵³⁹ while male survival rates exceeded those of females in all age ranges, a trend which was unique in Western Europe.

Thus socio-economic factors, together with political circumstances, rendered the prospect of emigration from Ireland an attractive one. This represented an embarrassment to the Free State authorities since British colonialism had long been hailed as the root cause of emigration. The belief that Ireland could support a far larger population, and that political independence would naturally result in rapid increase through declining emigration rates, had been a 'fundamental principle of nationalism', yet the reality of the Free State did little to stem the tide.⁵⁴⁰ In an attempt to explain this continued outpouring of her people, the 'myth of exile' was exchanged for the 'myth of holy Ireland'.⁵⁴¹ That

⁵³⁸ See J. P. Neary, 'Protection, economic war and structural change: the 1930s in Ireland' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. xxvii, no. 107 (May 1991), pp 250-266, p. 250; Ruth Barrington, *Health, Medicine and Politics in Ireland, 1900-1970* (Dublin, 1987), pp 104 and 131; Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, pp 394-5.

⁵³⁹ Barrington, *Health, Medicine and Politics*, p. 132.

⁵⁴⁰ See Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora*, p. 215; Kieran A. Kennedy, Thomas Giblin and Deidre McHugh, *The Economic Development of Ireland in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1988), p. 150.

⁵⁴¹ See Louise Ryan, 'Female Emigration in the 1930s: transgressing space and culture' in *Gender, Place and Culture*, vol. 8, no. 3 (September 2001), pp 271-282

is to say, mass emigration was no longer presented as the result of economic hardship, but as the abandonment of the simple virtues of home for the brash materialism of the wider world.

The emigration rate amongst women caused particular concern for it was not merely high but, as we have seen, had actually exceeded that of men in every intercensal period since 1871 except those containing British wars when large numbers of men joined the British armed forces. Most disturbingly, for politicians and commentators alike, this female majority had continued to rise after Ireland gained independence.⁵⁴² As a result, female emigration became the subject of much discussion in letters and articles appearing in the press during the 1930s.⁵⁴³ One worry was that having a population with the lowest ratio of women to men in Europe would mean fewer marriages, and that this would contribute to the already falling birth rate. The Bishop of Ross was thus prompted to write, 'one may well ask where the Irish mothers of the future are to come from.'⁵⁴⁴ As we have seen, the emphasis on the role of mother, and the elevation of this role above all others so that it is deemed a woman's sole purpose for existence, was not new. Nor was its linking to ideals surrounding the shaping of national identity and its transmission to the next

⁵⁴² During the intercensal period 1926-36 the ratio of female migrants was 1,298 per 1,000 male. Data sourced from *CEOPP*, Table 86, p. 115. See also Diamaid Ferreter, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century* (accessed on <http://www.gov.ie/en/essays/twentieth.html>, 26 September 2011).

⁵⁴³ 'Our Emigrants', Editorial, *Cork Examiner*, 15 April 1936; 'Those Emigrants', Editorial, *Ibid*, 6 November 1936. Columnist Gertrude Gaffney wrote a series of articles entitled 'Irish Girl Emigrants', published in the *Irish Independent* throughout December 1936 (7 December, p. 5; 11 December, p. 6; 8 December, p. 8; 9 December, p. 7; 10 December, p. 7; 14 December, p. 5; 15 December, p. 7).

⁵⁴⁴ Editorial, *Irish Press*, 28 August 1936, p. 8; Dr Casey, Bishop of Ross, 'Why the young people are forced to emigrate', *Irish Independent*, 20 November 1936, p. 8.

generation restricted to Irish society, being evident in newspaper representations of women during the Spanish Civil War, for example.⁵⁴⁵

National identity is not merely a matter of shared language or culture, but a continuously re-negotiated construct involving ongoing re-definition and assertion of difference against those perceived as 'other'.⁵⁴⁶ However, this concept of a unified national identity would seem to suggest a degree of homogeneity which does not exist in reality, and it is the struggle with internal 'difference' that results in degrees of inclusion and exclusion, the internal 'other' being precluded from full participation or privilege. Since gender has been one of the determiners for inclusion - along with class, ethnicity, religion and sexuality - women have historically been assigned a marginal position within power structures, if admitted at all. For the most part, women's admittance to the national discourse of independent Ireland was as 'mothers of the nation'. Characterised as sacrificing and protective it is, nevertheless, essentially a passive role 'fundamentally governed by the needs of men.'⁵⁴⁷ However, this representation meant that those women who did not fulfil this role were perceived as rejecting their primary responsibility to their country. The fact that the Irish authorities - church and state - took steps to encourage women to remain 'at home' whilst men were free to migrate might be seen as a manifestation of the employment of gender difference to negotiate the seemingly

⁵⁴⁵ Elena Cabezali, Matilde Cuevas and Maria Teresa Chicote, 'Myth as suppression: Motherhood and the historical consciousness of the women of Madrid, 1936-9' in Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (eds), *The Myths We Live By*, part of the 'History Workshop' series, R. Samuel (gen. ed.) (London and New York, 1990), p. 162.

⁵⁴⁶ See Lloyd Kramer, 'Historical Narratives and the Meaning of Nationalism' in *Journal of the History of the Meaning of Ideas*, vol. 58, no. 3 (1997), p. 526.

⁵⁴⁷ Cabezali *et al*, 'Myth as suppression', p. 162.

contradictory roles of the nation as preserver of tradition and agent of change, women being associated with tradition and continuity and men with progress and change.⁵⁴⁸

Whilst Judith Brown asserts that the assignment of these roles amounted to the restriction of women's participation in the national arena, Mrinalini Sinha acknowledges that in charging women with the 'preservation and transmission of the national language and national culture', various nationalist projects allowed women to 'emerge as national actors - as mothers, educators, workers, and fighters'.⁵⁴⁹ However, she points out that promises of full citizenship - and the rights and responsibilities it brings - were conveniently forgotten by Irish Nationalists once independence was gained, the 1937 Constitution ushering in a 'repressive gender regime'.⁵⁵⁰

In her examination of official responses to female migration during this period, Ryan suggests that young Irish women, invariably described in the press as 'girls', were used as symbols of a form of Irish identity that encompassed religion, culture and a sense of place.⁵⁵¹ Therefore, in leaving Ireland women transgressed not merely physical space but imaginary space - passing from the safety of the rural to the danger of the urban. In choosing to leave home, they appeared to reject its strict social structures, allowing their morality to be called into question. In this way the blame for migration was shifted away from the authorities and onto the naïve country girls who were lured away by the bright

⁵⁴⁸ See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather; Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, 1995), p. 359.

⁵⁴⁹ Sinha, 'Gender and Nation', p. 258.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 264. See Brenda Gray and Louise Ryan, 'The Politics of Irish Identity and the Interconnections between Feminism, Nationhood, and Colonialism' in Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhury (eds), *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race* (Bloomington, 1998), pp 121-38.

⁵⁵¹ Ryan, 'Female Emigration in the 1930s', p. 281.

lights of empty consumerism. Therefore, far from being the passive victims of enforced migration, Irish female migrants were depicted as ‘active agents’ freely opting to leave. And since leaving their homes was often interpreted as abandoning their Irish identity, they were perceived as having abdicated their responsibility - biological, cultural and religious - to ensure the continuation of their nation.

Perhaps the greatest fear - particularly for the Catholic Church - was that the large number of young women leaving their homeland might bring about a breakdown in personal morals and family values.⁵⁵² For example, in 1937 the Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise warned that young women were migrating to Britain ‘in circumstances of dubious advantage to their welfare, temporal or spiritual’, where ‘modesty and virtue may be exposed to great dangers.’⁵⁵³ Thus, the double meaning attributed to the word ‘home’ - used to signify both the land of Ireland and the domestic realm - underlined the warning that danger of corruption awaited the emigrant. Because Irish women were represented as belonging to the private and domestic, their emigration destabilised the social order. Therefore, Ryan argues, once beyond the influence of home, family and community ‘the only hope for her redemption, containment and salvation was to confine her within safe places - the domestic sphere and the Catholic Church.’⁵⁵⁴

Despite the supposed role of Irish women as guardians of religion and morality, young female migrants were depicted in the press as very easily ‘losing their religion’ once

⁵⁵² See Dr Gilmartin, Archbishop of Tuam, ‘An alarming evil’, *Irish Independent*, 5 February 1937, and Dr McNamee, Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise, ‘Matrimony and emigration’, *Irish Independent*, 8 February 1937, p. 6.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁴ Ryan, ‘Female Emigration in the 1930s’, p. 281.

removed from the influence of family and community.⁵⁵⁵ This suggests a fear that the people's religion was not so deep-rooted in the first place; a model imposed upon them rather than an embedded personal belief. In order to counteract any tendency to drift away and fall in with what were considered unsavoury characters, a whole host of societies were mobilised to meet young women as they stepped from the boat or the train in Britain. In Liverpool this work was undertaken by volunteers of the Liverpool Port and Station Work Society.⁵⁵⁶ They operated in conjunction with the local branch of the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society, the Legion of Mary, plus a number of hostels and employment registries. Too frequently they encountered young women totally unprepared for migration, arriving in a strange city with no money, no contacts, and no training, with only a vague hope of finding employment. It was in the hope of dissuading such girls from speculative migration that Gertrude Gaffney produced a booklet in 1937, *Emigration to England: What You Should Know About It - Advice to Irish Girls*, which offered advice and instruction, and a warning to those who encountered the unprepared.

Furthermore, as the work of the voluntary organisations often testified, the depiction of Ireland as a haven of religion, morality and tradition amid the corrupting influences of the wider world was at odds with the high number of unmarried pregnant women fleeing their homeland. Witnessing the work of these volunteer organisations in Liverpool, Gertrude Gaffney was appalled at 'the alarming number of unmarried mothers, running away from Ireland to save their reputations' who, arriving 'penniless and friendless',

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.* See Gaffney, 'Irish Girl Emigrants', *Irish Independent*, 14 December 1936, p. 5; *Emigration to England: What You Should Know About It - Advice to Irish Girls* (Dublin, 1937), p. 17.

⁵⁵⁶ This was one of the activities of the Liverpool Society for the Prevention of Traffic in Women and Children. Gaffney, *Emigration to England*, p. 10.

threw themselves on the mercy of English rescue societies and maternity hospitals.⁵⁵⁷ Obligated to migrate in order to preserve the illusion of purity, ‘morality and respectability’ of Ireland, these emigrant girls ‘simultaneously embodied both the fragility and hypocrisy of that moral code.’ The revelation of the plight of unmarried mothers, forced to leave Ireland and cast themselves upon English charity, questioned the veracity of the ‘holy Ireland’ image as well as that of ‘corrupt England’.⁵⁵⁸ It also highlighted the ‘complex cultural, ethnic and religious dynamics’ which faced Irish migrants in Britain.⁵⁵⁹

The views expressed in the press regarding women’s migration relate closely to those evident in the wording of the *Bunreacht na hEireann* - the new constitution of 1937. Under the 1922 declaration of the Free State equal rights and equal opportunities had been guaranteed for all citizens, ‘without distinction of sex.’ But in the new constitution this was changed, Article 40.1 announcing that whilst all were equal under the law, the state could show ‘due regard to differences of capacity, physical and moral, and of social function.’ It went on to declare, ‘the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.’⁵⁶⁰ Although this was presented as recognition of the valuable, yet hitherto unacknowledged, labour of unwaged women, to some it seemed that the message being proclaimed by church and government alike was clear - that an Irishwoman’s first duty was to marry and produce children, and that her rightful place was at home taking care of

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 8.

⁵⁵⁸ Louise Ryan, *Female Emigration in the 1930s*, p. 279.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 280.

⁵⁶⁰ *Irish Constitution*, Article 41.2.1.

her family. In May the same year Gertrude Gaffney expressed her view of this narrow ideal through her column in the *Irish Independent*:

The death knell of the working woman is sounded in this new constitution...[Mr de Valera's] aim ever since he came into office has been to put us into what he considers to be our place and keep us there.⁵⁶¹

Just a few days later the same publication carried a letter from political activist Hanna Sheehy Skeffington in which she warned:

The 1916 Proclamation, with its explicit guarantee (without limitations of any kind) of equal citizenship [...] is being scrapped for a Fascist model, where women are relegated to permanent inferiority, their avocations and choice of callings limited because, apparently, of an implied permanent invalidism as the weaker sex.⁵⁶²

But perhaps the loudest response was that of the rising number of women who chose to leave Ireland and attempt to make a future for themselves abroad. In allowing their absence to speak volumes in silent protest, they made a stand without openly defying the moral code.

In a continuation of migration patterns established during the late nineteenth century, the period 1901 to 1931 saw the USA remain the primary destination of choice for almost 90% of Irish migrants. However, in October 1929 American stock prices crashed with such ferocity that the affects were felt globally. World trade contracted, ushering in the

⁵⁶¹ Gaffney, *Irish Independent*, 7 May 1937, p. 5.

⁵⁶² Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 'Debt of Gratitude' in *Irish Independent*, 11 May 1937, p. 12.

longest, most wide-spread and deepest depression of the twentieth century. One result was that the United States imposed more rigid immigration restrictions so that the quota for entrance from the Irish Free State - which from 1924 to 1928 had stood at 28,567 per year - was reduced to 17,853 in 1929. Just one year later the American authorities took further steps to limit immigration, only granting admittance to those bringing considerable sums of capital with them, or providing a guarantor. Furthermore, anyone induced, assisted or encouraged to emigrate through the offer or promise of manual labour of any sort, whether skilled or unskilled, was refused entry.⁵⁶³ This vetting of potential immigrants with regards to 'health, suitability for employment, and freedom from criminality' rankled with the British authorities who viewed it as America 'skimming the cream.'⁵⁶⁴

So stringent were the USA's requirements that the new quota of 17,853 per year was never met. Whereas the Irish had accounted for 45 *per cent* of all migrants entering the USA in the mid nineteenth century, their representation was to fall to just 2 *per cent* of the total by the 1930s.⁵⁶⁵ With migration to the United States severely limited, Irish unemployment rates began to rise to such an extent that the growing surplus population felt compelled to look to alternative destinations.

⁵⁶³ *CEOPP*, Appendix V, 'Summary of Immigration Policy of the United States of America', p. 266.

⁵⁶⁴ Canon Charles E. Raven, 'The Irish Problem' in *Liverpool Review*, vol. 6 (1931), pp 166-7.

⁵⁶⁵ During the years 1847 to 1854 45 *per cent* of migrants entering the USA were Irish. During the period 1931 to 1946 just 2 *per cent* originated in Ireland. *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (US Census Bureau, 1976) (accessed on <http://library.w/u.edu/details.php.resID=568>, 5 October 2010).

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the British authorities kept no accurate statistics with regards to the number of migrants entering the country from Ireland. However, movement between Ireland and Liverpool was examined as part of a series of investigations conducted by Liverpool University during the 1930s, published under the banner, *The Social Survey of Merseyside*.⁵⁶⁶ Analysis of data provided by the Irish Free State Department of Industry and Commerce, and by the shipping company operating between Northern Ireland and Liverpool, revealed that by 1929 there was a decline in arrivals from Northern Ireland (although the cause was not reported it was possibly linked to a more varied economy in the north, and also the continuance of the Poor Law). However, this decline was more than compensated by the rise in numbers entering Liverpool from the Free State (see **Table 3.1**).

Table 3.1 - Balance of Irish Migrants Entering Liverpool, 1927-1929.⁵⁶⁷

Place of Origin	Year		
	1927	1928	1929
Irish Free State	+ 4,828	+ 4,752	+ 6,015
Northern Ireland	+ 1,907	+ 1,421	- 925

This trend continued, with the total number of steerage passengers landing at Liverpool from Ireland in 1930 being reported as 25,000 which was a significant increase on previous years.⁵⁶⁸ As in the mid nineteenth century, the growing number of arrivals saw

⁵⁶⁶ David Caradog Jones (ed.), *The Social Survey of Merseyside Part 2: A Study of Migration to Merseyside with Special Reference to Irish Immigration* (Liverpool, 1931).

⁵⁶⁷ Data from *ibid*, p. 7.

⁵⁶⁸ Raven, 'Irish Immigration Into Merseyside' in *Liverpool Review*, vol. 6 (1931), pp 268-271.

a corresponding rise in expressions of hostility towards migrants. As early as 1927 concerns were raised regarding the rate of immigration from Ireland and by 1931 articles began to appear in local journals expounding upon Liverpool's 'Irish Problem', a topic which was to become a recurring theme throughout the decade.⁵⁶⁹ It was not only local journalists who regarded Liverpool's Irish as an undesirable element responsible for unemployment and low living standards. Visiting the Scotland Road district in 1933, the author J. B. Priestley noted his impressions of the 'slum streets, dirty little pubs, and the Irish.' Perceiving the Irish as responsible for Liverpool's ills, he expressed a wish to see them deported and supposed that the city 'would be glad to be rid of them...what a fine exit of ignorance and dirt and drunkenness and disease.'⁵⁷⁰

Some of what Priestley depicted was due to the port of Liverpool facing long-term decline. Where 40 *per cent* of the world's trade had once passed through Liverpool's docks and warehouses, the period 1919 to 1939 saw the city lose an average of 1 *per cent* of trade each year. Similarly, the city had once been the nation's principal passenger port, but by the 1930s much of this trade was lost to Southampton which was promoted as being more convenient to London.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁹ In addition to the articles by Raven, see G. R. Gair, 'The Irish Immigration Question' part 1 in, *Liverpool Review*, vol. 9 (1 January 1934), pp 11-13; part 2 in, *Liverpool Review*, vol. 9 (2 February 1934), pp 47-49; part 3 in, *Liverpool Review*, vol. 9 (3 March 1934), pp 86-88. Also, Dr Albert David, Anglican Bishop of Liverpool, *The Guardian* (Anglican church newspaper), (no date) April 1937, File LAB 8/16 (National Archives) accessed on <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>, 25 July 2011. This publication - which was established in 1846 and ceased production in 1951 - is not to be confused with the current national newspaper *The Guardian* which was known as *The Manchester Guardian* until 1959.

⁵⁷⁰ J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London, 1936, revised 1994), pp 248-9 (quoted in Frank Boyce, 'From Victorian 'Little Ireland' to Heritage Trail: Catholicism, community and change in Liverpool's docklands' in R. Swift and S. Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Victorian Britain: The Local Dimension* (Dublin, 1999), pp 277-297, p. 281.

⁵⁷¹ *Board of Trade: An Industrial Survey of Merseyside* (London, 1932), p. 19.

With unemployment levels high, the provision of work for ‘our own ex-servicemen’ returned from the First World War was viewed as a primary obligation.⁵⁷² Consequently, to some it appeared ‘a little incongruous’ that the entrance of unskilled labour from Ireland should remain unrestricted, especially when the British government - along with several charitable societies - were encouraging skilled workers to emigrate to the colonies through assisted passage schemes.⁵⁷³ Suspicion and rumour abounded amongst those who feared for the security of their employment, the payment of Unemployment Assistance Benefit to ‘aliens’ becoming a particular point of contention.⁵⁷⁴ For example, it became widely believed that certain employers had an arrangement whereby Irish migrant labourers were taken on and kept just long enough to qualify for this National Insurance-related benefit.⁵⁷⁵ Once the qualifying conditions were met, it was claimed, the worker was discharged to claim his ‘dole’ and the vacancy filled by a new migrant.⁵⁷⁶ The validity of this charge was, and remains, difficult to establish. The fact that the belief was widely held - and the level of consternation it raised - reveals a reprise of attitudes evident during the migrant influx of the mid-nineteenth century, so that the observations made by Karl Marx more than sixty years earlier remained relevant.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷² Raven, ‘Irish Immigration Into Merseyside’, p. 271.

⁵⁷³ Caradog Jones, *Social Survey of Merseyside No 2*, p. 9.

⁵⁷⁴ Being called upon to clarify the situation, the Ministry of Labour explained that the Unemployment Insurance Scheme did not differentiate between British citizens and aliens, both being eligible on the same footing, i.e. contributions made. Therefore, in the absence of discrimination against aliens, it was considered ‘hardly possible’ to introduce special discrimination against immigrants from the Irish Free State. See *Memorandum by the Ministry of Labour, 16 June 1938*, pp 6-7, Irish Situation Committee, Immigration from the Irish Free State, LAB 8/16 (National Archives).

⁵⁷⁵ An insured worker was eligible for what was termed ‘transitional’ unemployment benefit once they had paid eight contributions within the previous two years. See Caradog Jones, *Social Survey of Merseyside No 3: Poverty on Merseyside, Its Association with Overcrowding and Unemployment* (Liverpool, 1931), p. 9.

⁵⁷⁶ Raven, ‘Irish Immigration Into Merseyside’ p. 166.

⁵⁷⁷ See observations of Karl Marx quoted in Chapter I, p. 49.

Linked to the question of ‘dole’ for migrants was the issue of repatriation, for although British Dominions had the right to return to Britain all migrants unable to support themselves, the British authorities were unable to do likewise.⁵⁷⁸ In his 1939 report to the City of Liverpool Finance and General Purpose Sub Committee, the Public Assistance Officer explained the position:

No provision is contained in the Poor Law Act, 1930, which would enable the Local Authority to compel the return of destitute persons to the Irish Free State and there is no legislation which provides for such persons being treated differently to persons arriving in Liverpool from any other British possession or dominion to which the English Poor Law does not apply.

Hence, all persons returning to the Irish Free State do so through the offices of a voluntary agency, the Local Authority making contribution to the cost of the service which is conditional upon the individual’s expressed willingness to return. By this method, during the past five years, 922 men, 117 women and 125 children, a total of 1,164 persons, have been assisted to return. This service [...] has cost the Local Authority a total sum of £581 7s 10d.⁵⁷⁹

Indeed, it was against government policy to exclude or deport any British subject from the motherland, and since the Irish Free State remained part of the Commonwealth⁵⁸⁰ - and its citizens British subjects - they could not be removed.⁵⁸¹ Therefore, the system dictated that if a needy individual did not qualify for Unemployment Assistance Benefit (funded through National Insurance contributions), or their entitlement to benefit was

⁵⁷⁸ Raven, ‘Irish Immigration into Merseyside’, p. 269. See also, ‘The Influx of Irish into Liverpool’ (author unknown) in, *Liverpolitan*, May 1939, pp 19 and 31, p. 19.

⁵⁷⁹ G. W. Molyneux, Public Assistance Officer, ‘Report of the Public Assistance Committee, Submitted to the Meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Sub-Committee, 3 April 1939’ in, *City of Liverpool Public Assistance Committee, Reports Regarding Natives of Eire in Receipt of Public Assistance* (Liverpool, 1939), p. 4.

⁵⁸⁰ It was not until 1948 that Eire formally left the British Commonwealth and adopted the name ‘Republic of Ireland’.

⁵⁸¹ PP, *Minutes of Interdepartmental Conference* held on 27 July 1937 on the subject of Irish immigration: comments of Whiskhard (Dominions Office), p. 2; *Ibid*, comments of Prestige (Home Office), p. 2, LAB 2/1346 (National Archives).

exhausted, responsibility for their provision fell to the locally-funded Public Assistance Committee. As a result, the city consistently appeared amongst the four or five districts in the country with the highest ratio of poor relief to population.⁵⁸²

Information supplied by Ellinor Isabella Black in her 1934 report for the *Social Survey of Merseyside* provides valuable insight into the situation at that time. Her investigations suggested that the incidence of poverty was closely linked to male unemployment, since it was most evident where the (male) 'chief bread-winner' was unemployed or absent, or where 'only women or juveniles were capable of earning'.⁵⁸³ The fact that a family's 'chief earner' was assumed to be an adult male - despite plentiful evidence to the contrary - bears testimony to the poor earning potential of women workers as much as it does to patriarchal ideology.⁵⁸⁴ In particular, the survey revealed the high number dependent upon poor relief to 'top up' low rates of pay and underemployment. For example, on 1 January 1933 the number of persons in receipt of institutional care on Merseyside due to sickness, mental infirmity or some other reason was 7,763.⁵⁸⁵ Yet this figure is dwarfed by the 87,119 individuals in receipt of out-door relief, 46,173 (or 53 *per cent*) of whom required assistance due to unemployment.⁵⁸⁶ When we consider the population of Merseyside conurbation (based on the 1931 census) as 1,346,662⁵⁸⁷ it becomes apparent

⁵⁸² Ellinor Isabella Black, *The Social Survey of Merseyside No 9: Public Assistance on Merseyside*, Caradog Jones (series ed.) (Liverpool, 1934), p. 15.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid*, pp 6 and 8.

⁵⁸⁴ See Caradog Jones (series ed.), *Social Survey of Merseyside No 3: Poverty on Merseyside (Its Association with Overcrowding and Unemployment)*, (Liverpool, 1931), p. 6.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid*, Table II, Analysis of Destitute Population in Receipt of Institutional Relief at 1 January 1933, p. 9. In this report the term 'Merseyside' was used to denote Liverpool, Bootle, Birkenhead and Wallasey jointly.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid*, Table III, Persons in Receipt of Out-door Relief, January 1 1933, p. 14.

⁵⁸⁷ *1951 Census of England and Wales, Preliminary Report* (London, 1951), Part II - Statistical Notes, Table J, 'Population of 5 Provincial Conurbations'.

that the total number supported at the expense of the local authority represented a significant proportion of the district's population. Furthermore, this figure was in addition to those in receipt of National Insurance-funded benefit. It is thus understandable why unemployment was described as being 'most definitely the most pressing social problem to be solved on Merseyside.'⁵⁸⁸

As the economic depression wore on high levels of underemployment saw national insurance contributions dwindle. Levels of long-term unemployment soared and the burden placed on the benefit system developed into a funding crisis. Those who had exhausted their entitlement to unemployment benefit, or who did not qualify in the first place, were forced to turn to locally-funded poor relief. This brought them into direct competition for funds with newly-arrived destitute Irish migrants. In response to public feeling Liverpool City Council sought to reduce expenditure and in February 1939 issued orders that the Public Assistance Committee monitor poor relief provision for 'natives of Eire' and compile regular reports.⁵⁸⁹ Subsequently, the report for the week ending 29 April of that year recorded a total of 20,703 cases in receipt of assistance, sixty seven of which were arrivals direct from Eire who had less than five years' unbroken residence in Liverpool. It was noted that most of these were destitute upon arrival and applied for assistance immediately. These sixty seven cases comprised forty one men, sixty three women and eighty four children - a total of 188 individuals.⁵⁹⁰ This suggests an average

⁵⁸⁸ Caradog Jones, *Social Survey of Merseyside No 3*, p. 11.

⁵⁸⁹ Although the Irish Free State was renamed 'Eire' in the 1936 Constitution, use of the original terminology continued alongside the new for some time.

⁵⁹⁰ Molyneux, 'Report of the Public Assistance Committee, 8 May 1939' in *City of Liverpool Public Assistance Committee, Reports* (1939), p. 7. Their failure to satisfy the five years residency condition would have precluded them from any claim to assistance. Therefore, during that week alone, 188 Irish people were receiving support which they were not entitled to.

of 2.8 persons per case which, if applied to the 20,703 cases recorded, provides a rough estimate of the total number of individuals receiving poor relief from the City Council during that week alone - more than 58,000 persons.⁵⁹¹ Faced with such high levels of long-term poor provision, it is not surprising that ratepayers resented the presence of the migrant pauper and grew weary of the additional burden they placed on funds.

However, this anxiety was not confined to Liverpool for similar concerns had been mounting in other areas, most particularly in the industrial areas of western Scotland where high levels of Irish immigration were also experienced. Increasingly, the subject was raised in House of Commons questions and in correspondence with MPs. For example, it was reported in the Irish newspapers that Sir Robert Rankin, MP (Conservative) had asked the Dominions Secretary in the House of Commons whether he was aware that during the past three years nearly 73,000 young people had left the Irish Free State for work in England, and what was to be done about it? The Secretary answered that the Free State government had recently instituted an enquiry into certain aspects of migration.⁵⁹² The 'recently instituted enquiry' referred to was an Inter Departmental Committee headed by Malcolm MacDonald, Secretary of State for the Dominions. Its primary aim was to re-examine the unrestricted access policy.⁵⁹³ In August 1937 the committee released an initial report in which it announced, 'There is no evidence that [the Irish] come here with the specific purpose of obtaining, when

⁵⁹¹ These figures refer only to the administrative area covered by Liverpool City Council, and do not include the Boroughs of Bootle, Birkenhead and Wallasey.

⁵⁹² 'Irish Emigrants to Britain: Commons Question', *Irish Press*, 12 November 1937, p. 9.

⁵⁹³ See *Irish Free State: enquiry on immigration to Great Britain, 1937-1939*, LAB 8/16, p. 2 (National Archives) (accessed on <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>, 25 July 2011).

unemployed, assistance from public funds.⁵⁹⁴ The committee also proclaimed that the rise in numbers arriving from the Irish Free State had not severely impacted upon British unemployment levels.⁵⁹⁵ Curiously, these declarations conflicted with information provided by the Ministry of Labour which stated:

It is probable that the Irish Free State workers in this country, by their liability to unemployment and poverty, impose a disproportionate burden both on the unemployment fund and on the Public Assistance Authorities.⁵⁹⁶

These documents also reveal that, due to the ‘congested state of the labour market’, the government was considering several possible plans of action, one being the repatriation of all migrants born in the Irish Free State. In support of this option, the Ministry of Labour advised that it foresaw no difficulty in replacing them with British-born workers. However, it warned that some ‘temporary dislocation’ might be experienced by employers in areas such as Liverpool and Glasgow which had a particularly high percentage of Irish labour. Significantly, the only real problem it foresaw lay in recruitment into private domestic service,⁵⁹⁷ a declining occupation choice amongst British women and a long-established area of employment for Irish migrant women. In the event, the wholesale repatriation option was never acted upon; a decision no doubt influenced by the fragile economic relationship which then existed between the two nations. However, the Irish Situation Committee continued to monitor events until 1939.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁵ PP, *Migration to Great Britain from the Irish Free State*, Report of Inter-departmental Committee, August 1937, p. 3 LAB8/16 (National Archives) (accessed on <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>, 25 July 2011).

⁵⁹⁶ PP, *Memorandum by the Ministry of Labour, 16 June 1938*, Irish Situation Committee, Immigration from the Irish Free State LAB 8/16, pp 4 and 5 (National Archives) (accessed on <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>, 25 July 2011).

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

These events were taking place at a time when Britain - still recovering from the effects of the First World War - experienced a fall in exports of 50 *per cent*. By 1930 British unemployment had more than doubled from 1 million to 2.5 million - a figure equal to 20 *per cent* of the insured workforce. Poverty continued to take its toll in spite of earlier legislation and on-going schemes aimed at improving the state of the nation's health and social security.⁵⁹⁸ Rowntree's second survey of poverty, undertaken in the mid 1930s, estimated that one quarter of the United Kingdom's population existed on a subsistence diet with evidence of malnutrition rife in the form of scurvy, rickets and tuberculosis.⁵⁹⁹ The North West of England was affected badly, Merseyside in particular seeing unemployment run at approximately double the national average.⁶⁰⁰ Liverpool's manufacturing base remained limited, 63 *per cent* of the city's workforce being engaged in commerce, transport and distribution, and various forms of private and public service so that, in the words of Caradog Jones:

The great bulk of industrial activity on Merseyside is dependent upon world conditions, upon the magnitude of the imports exports which pass through the port of Liverpool, and upon the trade and commerce to which they give rise.⁶⁰¹

The contraction of world-wide trade meant that Liverpool paid dearly for her continued over-reliance on her docks. The region remained severely depressed until the end of the

⁵⁹⁸ For example, the establishment of Infant Welfare Centres and Milk Depots during the early years of the twentieth century, along with the passing of the National Insurance Act (1911), the Maternity and Child Welfare Act (1918), the Widows, Orphans and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act (1925) and the Local Government Act (1929), each of which aimed to raise the standard of living amongst the nation's most disadvantaged citizens.

⁵⁹⁹ Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, *Progress and Poverty: A Second Survey of York* (London, 1941).

⁶⁰⁰ *An Industrial Survey of Merseyside, made for the Board of Trade by the University of Liverpool* (London, 1932), p. 14.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 15.

decade for, although national unemployment rates began to fall slightly between 1934 and 1936, the effects were mainly confined to southern regions of the country where a major building boom boosted recovery.

That is not to say Merseyside was bereft of inter-war development. Indeed, Liverpool Corporation set about providing new social housing at developments within the city and on the urban fringe, with more than 22,000 new homes being built during the 1920s.⁶⁰² Work continued throughout the 1930s and included city centre projects of four and five-story open-deck access blocks of flats - such as those at Kent Gardens and the Bullring - as well as schemes comprised of flats and houses at the outlying districts of Norris Green and Speke. These schemes, along with industrial developments at new sites on the outskirts of the city, resulted in Liverpool almost doubling its built-up area.⁶⁰³ The new industrial estates in the outlying districts of Aintree and Speke offered purpose-built premises with easy access to transport networks, but although some of the city's established firms were prompted to relocate, few new businesses were attracted to the area.⁶⁰⁴

Despite efforts to expand opportunities, poverty and poor housing remained particular concerns on Merseyside. Part of the *Social Survey of Merseyside's* investigations involved the targeting of every 30th house throughout the entire area for enquiry, which

⁶⁰² See D. E. Baines, 'Merseyside in the British Economy: the 1930s and the Second World War' in R. Lawton and C. M. Cunningham (eds), *Merseyside Social and Economic Studies* (London, 1971), pp 65-66.

⁶⁰³ *Liverpool Part 2 - National Museums Liverpool* (accessed on www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mol/collections/historic-characterisation-project/liverpool-Part-2.pdf, 29 November 2012).

⁶⁰⁴ For example, Schweppes Mineral Waters Ltd already operated from several sites scattered throughout the city, and relocated to new purpose built premises at Aintree.

revealed that 27 *per cent* of houses surveyed in Liverpool and Bootle were shared by two or more families.⁶⁰⁵ In addition, interviews with nearly 7,000 families found that in Liverpool 17 *per cent* fell below the ‘poverty line’, and in Bootle the figure was 15 *per cent*.⁶⁰⁶ Amongst families with at least one male earner in regular work, poverty was described as being ‘practically negligible’ at less than 1.5 *per cent*.⁶⁰⁷ In contrast, amongst families where the chief (male) earner was unemployed, two thirds were in poverty, and where he was only casually employed the figure was one third. This led Caradog Jones to conclude that, ‘poverty is very definitely associated with lack of employment.’⁶⁰⁸ The investigation’s focus on male unemployment and its direct link with family status is telling since it does not merely underline wide-spread adherence to an ideology which assumed family dependence upon a male breadwinner, but also confirms the lack of opportunities and poor pay available to women faced with the task.

By 1939 an Irish Immigration Investigation Bureau had been established in Liverpool to discuss the question of unrestricted entry of Irish migrants and subsequent absorption into insurable occupations. Declaring themselves to be non-sectarian, non-political and ‘in no way concerned with the promotion of discord on the grounds of race or religion’, the founders of the bureau felt that ‘present conditions’ justified their calling for ‘the closest supervision of any encroachment upon the volume of employment on offer in the city of

⁶⁰⁵ Caradog Jones, *Social Survey of Merseyside No 3*, p. 4.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid*, pp 4-5. As an indicator of the level of allowance adopted in determining a ‘poverty line’, Caradog Jones provides a few examples from his calculation scale: food for a man was calculated at 6s 3d *per week* (or just under 11d *per day*), and for a woman it was 5s (8 ½d *per day*) (by way of comparison, it was noted that a single meal on a train journey might easily cost 6s 3d). Clothing, cleaning and light was calculated at 1s 5d *per week* for a man and 1s 9 ½ d for a woman (the extra 4 ½d being allowed for dress).

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 6.

Liverpool.’⁶⁰⁹ After several months ‘collecting and sifting’ information supplied by concerned Liverpool ratepayers, the Committee of the Bureau raised a petition to the House of Commons demanding the restriction of immigration from Eire and the amendment of the Act of Settlement - issues which, as we have seen, were already receiving government consideration.⁶¹⁰

Another attempt to stem the migrant influx involved a letter being sent from the Liverpool Branch of the St Vincent de Paul Society to every Irish branch of the society, requesting that they do their utmost to deter migration to Britain by warning of the poverty which, in all likelihood, was to be the result. Despite the society’s alleged co-operation, as well as that of the Irish press and many parish priests, the scheme was without success.⁶¹¹

But the entire migrant situation was to take a very different turn for, in the autumn of 1939, Britain declared war on Germany. Initially, large numbers of Irish migrants left Britain for their homeland which had declared neutrality. As a result, where pre-war net outward movement from Ireland had been in the region of 20,000 to 30,000 per year, 1939 saw a net gain of 15,934, and in 1940 the net gain was 11,497.⁶¹² This return exodus across the Irish Sea was commemorated in Dominic Behan’s verse:

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁰ The bureau’s objectives were to be overtaken by international events later that year.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9. Attempts to trace this letter, either in the archives of the Liverpool Record Office, the Society of St Vincent de Paul, or those of Irish newspapers, proved unsuccessful.

⁶¹² A. V. Judges, *Irish Labour in Great Britain, 1939-1945* (Official Histories (Civil), Manpower Section, 1949), Table I - ‘Direct Passenger Movement by Sea, 1939-45’, Section 4, p. 8, LAB 76/26 and CAB 102/398 (National Archives) accessed on <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>, 26 January 2011.

It was in the year of '39,
The sky was full of lead.
Hitler was headed for Poland,
And Paddy for Holyhead...⁶¹³

However, this reaction was short-lived and the tide of migrants soon turned again as Irish labour, both male and female, was actively recruited to supplement Britain's workforce. As a result, in 1941 movement in and out of Eire produced a net loss of 17,606.⁶¹⁴ The extent of this influx to Britain was revealed by the 1951 National Census when the number of Irish-born was found to have practically doubled since 1931, and their representation amongst the population of Merseyside was 2.3 *per cent*.⁶¹⁵ Most importantly for the purposes of this study, the war years and immediate post-war period saw high rates of female migration from Ireland.

In Northern Ireland agricultural production was not merely increased but adapted to meet the demands of wartime. For example, while the production of cereals and potatoes was increased substantially, as was the number of cattle and poultry, the number of pigs was reduced by more than 50 *per cent* due to difficulties importing feed. In addition, the region's shipyards, engineering workshops and textile mills turned over production to the

⁶¹³ Verse written in the early 1960s by author and songwriter Dominic Behan as a spoken introduction to his song *McAlpine's Fusilliers* (Harmony Music Ltd) which commemorates the vast number of Irish migrants entering Britain during and after World War II.

⁶¹⁴ Judges, *Irish Labour, 1939-1945*, Section 4, p. 9 and Table I, Section 4, p. 8.

⁶¹⁵ *Census 1961, England and Wales, Birthplace and Nationality Tables* (London, 1964), Table 7, 'Birthplaces of the Population at Selected Census, 1851-1961' and *Census 1951, England and Wales, County Report, Lancashire*, (London, 1954), Table H - 'Population by Area of Birthplace: Distribution by Division in which Enumerated', p. civ.

On the night of 19 December 1942 fire broke out at the warehouse in which the 1931 census records were stored, and all records were destroyed. Although a preliminary report had been published in July 1931 further analysis of the material had not been undertaken before it was lost. Therefore, the availability of data from the 1931 census is limited.

supply of Britain's war effort. As a result, unemployment in the province - which had stood at 95,000 in January 1939 - fell to 63,000 by September of that year.⁶¹⁶ However, whilst employment became more plentiful, women found their earnings routinely set at a lower rate than men's, with men frequently receiving 50 *per cent* more for equally skilled or even identical tasks.⁶¹⁷

This increased activity in the North contrasted with the situation in Eire, where de Valera had declared neutrality. Here, initially, the unemployment situation was exacerbated by the outbreak of war, first by a contracting export market and then by difficulties in obtaining raw materials. Gradually, the effects of the war did lead to the creation of jobs in areas such as the defence forces and agriculture, but although this benefited male workers, female unemployment worsened. For example, a comparison of unemployment figures for the years 1939 and 1943 reveals a fall of 36 *per cent* amongst men, whilst for women the figure rose by 100 *per cent*.⁶¹⁸ This increase was aggravated by the restrictions placed upon women workers under the aforementioned Conditions of Employment Act (1936) and by the Public Service Marriage Bar.⁶¹⁹ Furthermore, 1941 saw the introduction of the Wages Standstill Order under the Emergency Powers Act, the scope of which was described by Thomas Foran of the Irish Labour Party as 'almost all

⁶¹⁶ Hill and Lynch, *Ireland: Society and Economy*, p. 6.

⁶¹⁷ See Muldowney, *The Second World War and Irish Women*, p.50 and Appendix 4 - Rates of Pay set by Northern Ireland Trade Boards, 1939-45, p. 212. In February 1938 the Trade Board Act governing production of linen and cotton handkerchiefs (NIHMG 62-73) ruled that female workers be paid 24s 5 ¾d for a 47 hour week while male colleagues receive 41s 1 ½d (68 *per cent* more) for the same hours. In December 1941 the rates increased, but men still received 56.6 *per cent* more than women.

⁶¹⁸ Daly, 'Women in the Irish Free State, 1922-1939', p. 111.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.* Although Daley found no evidence that Section 16 of the Conditions of Employment Act (1936) was ever directly implemented, she observes that female unemployment doubled between 1939 and 1943. This leap in female unemployment figures might, in itself, be interpreted as a sign that sanctions were being placed on female labour.

embracing'.⁶²⁰ Initially implemented as a total wage freeze in the face of an escalating cost of living, pressure from the trade unions eventually secured regulated increases overseen by wages tribunals.⁶²¹ Although the order was lifted in 1946 pre-war rates of pay were not achieved again until 1949.⁶²² This combination of conditions contributed significantly to dissatisfaction and enhanced the appeal of emigration.

In recent years the release of British Intelligence files has, to some degree, revealed the extent of Eire's covert co-operation with Britain and the Allied Forces whilst it maintained formal neutrality.⁶²³ Publicly, the official response to emigration was ambivalent. Some viewed the British labour shortage as providing a convenient outlet for Ireland's unemployed, considering it 'preferable that workers should be allowed to obtain employment outside the country' rather than 'remain in idleness at home.'⁶²⁴ Certainly the remittances received from emigrants provided a welcome boost to the depressed Irish economy as the year 1939 alone saw more than £1 million in money orders and postal orders arrive from Britain and Northern Ireland, and by 1941 this amount doubled.⁶²⁵ Indeed, the Irish authorities did not merely tolerate emigration to Britain but actually assisted it. In spite of Eire's neutrality, in 1939 they allowed the British Ministry of

⁶²⁰ Seanad Eireann Debates, vol. 25 no. 14, col. 1373, accessed on

<http://debates.oireachtas.ie/seanad/1941/05/27/00010.asp>, 4 February 2013.

⁶²¹ For discussion see F. O'Shea, 'A Tale of Two Acts: Government and Trade Unions during the Emergency' in D. Keogh and M. O'Driscoll (eds), *Ireland in World War Two: Diplomacy and Survival* (Cork, 2004), pp 211-229; B. Girvin, *The Emergency: Neutral Ireland, 1939-45* (Basingstoke, 2006).

⁶²² Cormac O Grada, *A Rocky Road: The Irish Economy since the 1920s* (Manchester, 1997), pp 17 and 21.

⁶²³ See John A. Murphy, 'Irish Neutrality in Historical Perspective' in Brian Girvin and Geoffrey Roberts (eds), *Ireland and the Second World War: Politics, Society and Remembrance* (Dublin, 2000), pp 9-23, p. 15. Also Eunan O'Halpin, 'MI5's Irish Memories: Fresh light on the origins and rationale of Anglo-Irish security liaison in the Second World War', *Ibid*, pp 133-150, p. 136.

⁶²⁴ *Memorandum for the Government from the Department of Finance*, 19 September 1944, S11582 (Irish National Archives).

⁶²⁵ *Memorandum on Remittances from Emigrants*, Department of Industry and Commerce, D/T S12865 (Irish National Archives).

Labour to place recruitment posters in Irish Labour Exchanges and permitted British civilian companies to set up employment agencies.⁶²⁶ One female migrant from Cork recounts her experience:

I remember the day the Second World War started... Then the posters went up, at the Labour Exchange - 'JOIN THE WRENS', 'JOIN THE ATS', 'PLENTY OF WORK IN ENGLAND', 'COME TO ENGLAND AND SEE THE WORLD' - all that sort of thing... I didn't think it strange at that time, but I did afterwards when I thought about it, that the Irish government allowed all those posters to come out, although we were neutral. They allowed us to emigrate - there was thousands there was, emigrating from all over Ireland, because there was nothing there for us at all.⁶²⁷

This aiding of Britain's war effort prompted the use of such wry terms as 'friendly neutrality' towards Great Britain or - as some preferred to put it - 'being neutral against Germany'.⁶²⁸

The pre-war fear that 'the lifeblood of Ireland' was being 'poured into England',⁶²⁹ resurfaced, and by 1941 complaints began to escalate with articles appearing in the press criticising the stripping of Ireland's labour to the detriment of food and fuel production. The Irish government, not wishing to make public the extent of their involvement in the transfer of labour to Britain, was placed in an awkward position, but in October that year a solution was found. At a meeting in Dublin the Irish Minister of Industry and

⁶²⁶ Initially the Censor prohibited any advertisement for work outside the country from appearing in the national press, although the display of British Ministry of Labour posters was permitted in Irish Labour Exchanges (see E. Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish migration to Britain, 1821-1971* (Montreal, Kingston and Liverpool, 2000), p. 120).

⁶²⁷ Noreen Hill (interviewee) in Mary Lennon, Marie McAdam and Joanne O'Brien, *Across the Water: Irish Women's Lives in Britain* (London, 1988), p. 94.

⁶²⁸ See Seamus O'Neil, *Tonn Tuile* (1947), p. 211.

⁶²⁹ Gaffney, *Emigration to England*, p. 56.

Commerce announced that his government could not guarantee universal employment and, though they shared the dislike expressed in some quarters of the way in which many workers were leaving the country, they did not consider it right to use the Emergency Powers Act to prohibit emigration. Rather, they decreed that from that point on there were to be no more advertisements for work in Britain, and British agencies were to cease active recruitment. Instead, these were to take a more passive role, merely interviewing volunteers deemed eligible by the local officers of the Irish Department of Industry and Commerce.⁶³⁰

This eligibility was to be subject to certain restrictions. Generally speaking, only the unemployed were to be allowed to leave whilst those for whom suitable employment could be found in Eire, or who were under the age of 22 years, would not qualify.⁶³¹ In addition, anyone whose skills were deemed essential to the Irish state - primarily men living in rural districts and who had experience in agriculture and turf production - were to be refused permission.⁶³² In this way the Irish authorities were careful to be seen to maintain a workforce sufficient to supply the country's needs in the crucial areas of fuel

⁶³⁰ From December 1941 no offer of employment outside of Eire was to be published in Irish newspapers, nor was any offer to provide Irish citizens for employment outside the State to be advertised outside the State. Employment Exchange staff were prohibited from 'suggesting or encouraging emigration', and no publicity relating to the availability of employment in Great Britain was permitted on Employment Exchange premises. Rather, the participation of the Irish Employment Exchange Service in the emigration process was presented as (1) assisting the administration of emigration control and (2) assisting the British Liaison Officer in preventing indiscriminate recruitment of Irish workers for employment in Great Britain. The withdrawal of press and postal censorship in August 1945 saw these restrictions revoked. *CEOPP*, Appendix VII, 'Control on Emigration to Employment in Great Britain', Annexe 1, (5), p. 270. Also, see Judges, *Irish Labour, 1939-45*, p. 16.

⁶³¹ *CEOPP*, Appendix VII, p. 270.

⁶³² Between June and November 1944 restrictions were extended to men (other than professionals and migratory workers) resident in towns with a population of 5,000 and under. See *CEOPP*, Appendix VII, p. 268.

and food, and to retain 'essential skills'.⁶³³ Interestingly, the restrictions did not apply equally to all sections of the community since traditionally migratory workers were declared exempt, as were professional people such as clergymen, doctors, engineers, nurses and university graduates.⁶³⁴

Under these regulations, prospective migrants were obliged to obtain a Department of Social Welfare certificate confirming their exemption from emigration restrictions. Travel identity cards and a written offer of employment in Britain were also required.⁶³⁵ Meanwhile, those wishing to join the British armed forces were required to travel to Northern Ireland to enlist, with women facing the additional bureaucracy of having to obtain parental consent or, if married, written permission from their husbands.⁶³⁶ This expression of the overtly patriarchal nature of Irish society - with no notion of female independence - sought to deny women autonomy over their own fate even in a time of war.

However, in practice, the enforcement of these measures has been described as 'elastic' - especially with regards to age restrictions - only being tightened periodically when agricultural needs demanded.⁶³⁷ Certainly the records of the Irish authorities show that between the years 1940 and 1945 they issued a total of 198,538 permits allowing travel to Britain and Northern Ireland in order to take up work.⁶³⁸ Of particular interest are the

⁶³³ See *Memorandum for the Government from the Department of Industry and Commerce*, 1942, S11582 (Irish National Archives).

⁶³⁴ *CEOPP*, p. 268.

⁶³⁵ Connolly, 'Irish Workers in Britain during World War Two', p. 120.

⁶³⁶ Muldowney, *The Second World War*, p. 99.

⁶³⁷ Judges, *Irish Labour, 1939-45*, p. 17.

⁶³⁸ Data sourced from *CEOPP*, p. 128.

figures for the period 1943-45 which reveal that a large proportion of female migrants were very young, a yearly average of 63.5 *per cent* falling within the age group sixteen to twenty four years. And although this trend contrasts with patterns amongst male migrants - where the yearly average in that age group was 40.33 *per cent* (see **Table 3.2**) - both figures appear surprisingly high in the light of the government's official ban on emigration for those below the age of twenty two years.

Table 3.2 - Age Distribution of Recipients of Travel Permits, Identify Cards and Passports, 1943-1945.⁶³⁹

	Year	Age Group					Yearly Total
		16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35+	
Females	1943	3,863	7,462	3,507	1,734	2,437	19,003
	1944	1,312	2,284	1,068	524	702	5,890
	1945	3,094	4,320	1,555	728	912	10,609
Males	1943	2,027	7,737	6,120	4,262	9,166	29,321
	1944	943	2,228	1,400	1,010	2,142	7,723
	1945	1,692	4,454	2,360	1,658	3,021	13,185

⁶³⁹ Data sourced from *CEOPP*, Table 97, p. 129 and Statistical Appendix, Table 33, p. 329. A breakdown of yearly statistics according to age group or sex is not available for years prior to 1943. The Commission's Report took pains to point out that, for a number of reasons, the number of travel documents issued cannot automatically be assumed to be identical with the number of emigrants. Firstly, although the statistics refer to the issue of new documents and do not include renewals, there was a certain amount of duplication. For example, a person might obtain the various necessary documents in different administrative periods, thereby being counted more than once. Secondly, travel documents might be obtained but remain unused. In both cases the emigration figures would be artificially inflated (*CEOPP*, p. 128). However, these figures are all that are available for a year by year comparison and are, therefore, quoted with these limitations in mind.

Indeed, so great was the response amongst young women that a memorandum from Eire's Department of External Affairs, dated May 1944, referred to 'deep public uneasiness at the number of young girls in the late teens and early twenties being allowed to leave the country.' After noting the 'disturbing' fact that, despite the government's ruling, emigration was highest amongst women under the age of twenty two years, the memorandum stated:

We have had cases of Irish girls being sent back to this country by the British police on the ground that they were too young and immature to be away from home! The taking of employment in Britain by young girls of 18 and 19 may be justifiable on other grounds, but it is certainly not good for the girls themselves and, in many cases, it is very humiliating for the country.⁶⁴⁰

This communication would seem to suggest that part of the Irish government's concern was 'saving face' in their dealings with their British counterparts. We find no hint of earlier concerns regarding the possible long-term affects of mass female migration on future population decline, or fears for the failure of family values. Portrayed as foolish and immature, young female migrants appear merely as an embarrassment and an inconvenience to their country.

Certainly some were vulnerable and unprepared for life away from home. The immediate migrant experience of a great many of these women might be summed up in the words of

⁶⁴⁰ *Memorandum on new proposals regarding restrictions on travel permit issues to workers*, Department of External Affairs, 9 May 1944, p. 4 (written by J. P. Walshe, Secretary of the Department) File DTS 11582B (Irish National Archives). See also Lindsey Earner-Byrne, 'The Boat to England: An Analysis of the Official Reactions to the Emigration of Single Expectant Irishwomen to Britain, 1922-1972', in *Irish Economic and Social History*, vol. XXX (Dublin, 2003), pp 52-70.

one who recalls, 'In the May of 1939, I came by boat. Cried all the way. On the train and everything, cried and cried and more cried.'⁶⁴¹

Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland, Ministry of Labour advertisements were placed in the press. The following appeared in Belfast's daily newspapers on 6 October 1941:

In the hour of the Country's need, the women of Ulster have always responded, unselfishly and courageously, to the call of service. The hour of need is upon us NOW. ...At a Government Training Centre you will be taught a trade essential to the war effort. You will be paid well during the training period of four months and afterwards you will be placed in WELL PAID ESSENTIAL EMPLOYMENT.⁶⁴²

Nevertheless, the authorities had already taken steps to ensure their supply of labour lest such appeals to patriotism prove insufficient. Although conscription was not introduced to Northern Ireland, it would appear that a certain degree of coercion was used. For example, the introduction of the Unemployment Insurance (Emergency Powers) Order in 1940 enabled the authorities to deny unemployment benefit to anyone who refused to take up a job in Britain without 'good reason'. In September 1941 this was taken a step further when approval was given to a Ministry of Labour proposal that all single women over the age of twenty one who had been unemployed for five months or more should be offered employment in Britain. Refusal of such work was to result in a review of their entitlement to unemployment benefit.

⁶⁴¹ Anonymous female interviewee quoted in Lennon, McAdam and O'Brien, *Across the Water*, p. 38.

⁶⁴² *Training of Women for War Work*, Ministry of Commerce Files, COM 6113/649 (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland).

Successful applicants received four months training at a basic rate of 38 shillings per week for work in engineering and munitions. Subsequent placement saw wages rise and a cost of living bonus added, with larger firms paying between £3 and £4 7s per week in total. With expenditure on food and lodgings being calculated as 22s 6d per week at that time, these rates of pay compared favourably with women's wages in Northern Ireland at that time, and the response was considerable. Since the British authorities did not differentiate between arrivals from Eire and those from Northern Ireland a precise breakdown of numbers is impossible, but estimates based on Ministry of Labour statistics place the number of female wartime migrants from Northern Ireland in excess of 7,500 with the year 1942 seeing numbers peak at 2,536.⁶⁴³

As noted, the Irish government felt that they could not directly assist Irish migrants as this would be seen as approval of their migration. Instead, voluntary organisations and the Catholic Church became involved in their welfare. In 1942 John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin, set up the Emigrant Section of the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau (later called Emigrant Advice). Particularly concerned for female migrants - many of whom were very young and travelling alone - the bureau arranged contacts between migrants and parish priests in the new destinations. They also investigated the suitability of employment, ensuring that Catholics would be able to observe their religious duties.⁶⁴⁴ In some cases special arrangements were negotiated, such as those at the Royal Liverpool Hospital where - contrary to normal regulations - Catholic nurses were allowed outside

⁶⁴³ John Blake, *Northern Ireland in the Second World War* (Belfast, 1956), pp 61 and 396. See also A. Morrow, 'Women and Work in Northern Ireland 1902-1950' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Ulster at Coleraine, 1995), p. 105.

⁶⁴⁴ Connolly, 'Irish Workers in Britain', p. 131.

the nurses' home very early in the morning in order attend Mass before their duties began. Later, a chapel was established on hospital premises for their use. This reflects the social Catholicism noted earlier, where the church sought to meet welfare and recreational as well as religious needs, particularly for women, but such support was not extended to other areas of employment.⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴⁵ See Part Two of this thesis, p. 206.

3.2 TRENDS IN FEMALE EMPLOYMENT I: INTERWAR AND WORLD WAR TWO

At a time when the rate of Irish male migration into Liverpool was the subject of so much investigation, the arrival of female migrants appears to have caused far less debate. It seems likely that this was because Irish women had, for many years, made up a significant proportion of Liverpool's domestic servants and, as such, formed an almost-invisible element of the workforce. As noted, domestic service was also the only field of work the government thought might prove difficult to maintain if Irish labour were to be expelled.⁶⁴⁶ Furthermore, the fact that domestic servants did not qualify for unemployment benefit may have had some bearing on the case.

Since 1891 Britain had experienced a general decline in numbers employed in domestic service. In the wake of successive government inquiries into various aspects of this form of employment in 1913, 1919 and 1923, a bill was eventually introduced in 1931 which aimed at improving conditions through the establishment of a Domestic Service Commission under the Ministry of Labour. Its intention was to review conditions and to draw up a Servants' Charter relating to working conditions, hours, wages, holidays, accommodation and recreation. Though well intentioned, the bill was never passed. Servants thus remained outside unemployment insurance provision, with no minimum

⁶⁴⁶ *Memorandum by the Ministry of Labour, 16 June 1938*, Irish Situation Committee, Immigration from the Irish Free State, LAB 8/16, pp 4 and 5 (National Archives) (accessed on <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>, 25 July 2010).

wage or regulation of hours, and no system for inspecting the standard of accommodation or meals.⁶⁴⁷

Perhaps not surprisingly, growing numbers of young women sought other forms of employment, with office work being highly sought after, followed by shop and factory work. For example, between 1921 and 1931 the number of young girls (under 16 years of age) engaged in domestic service fell from 82,014 to 73,789. During the same period, the number of female shop assistants rose from 190,124 to 394,531 - an increase from 36.6 *per cent* of all shop assistants to almost 50 *per cent*.⁶⁴⁸ Although the quality of food and accommodation provided may have meant that a young woman in domestic service was materially better off than those in other forms of employment - rates of disease being lower and life-expectancy greater - the term 'servant' had begun to attract a degree of social stigma.

Nevertheless, mass unemployment during the inter-war period ensured that, to some at least, domestic service was better than no work at all, the census for 1931 recording 1,332,224 women so employed in private homes.⁶⁴⁹ Certainly in Liverpool - where the economy remained dock-centred - the shortage of manufacturing work for young women ensured that domestic service continued to represent a major field of employment during

⁶⁴⁷ Dawes, *Not In Front Of The Servants*, p. 150.

⁶⁴⁸ *Census of England and Wales, 1921*, Occupation Tables, 1924, Table 3; *Census of England and Wales, 1931*, Occupation Tables, 1934, Table 3.

⁶⁴⁹ *Census of England and Wales, 1931*, General Report (London, 1950), p. 151.

this era. In 1931 there were 20,046 female domestic servants employed in the city,⁶⁵⁰ an increase of 2,644 on the figure for 1841.⁶⁵¹

Table 3.3 - Occupational Structure of Liverpool's Female Workforce, 1921-1931.⁶⁵²

Occupational Group	1921(a)		1931(b)	
	No	%	No	%
Personal Services	31,202	29.0	37,746	30.9
(of which Indoor Domestic Servants)	(16,191	15.0)	(20,046	16.4)
Dealers/Shop Ass	15,822	14.6	19,202	15.7
Clerical/Local Gov	12,003	11.1	13,339	10.9
Professional	7,470	6.9	7,909	6.5
Manufacturing	28,789	26.6	24,594	20.2
Other	12,794	11.8	19,285	15.8
Total Women Occupied	108,080	100.0	122,075	100.0

(Note, a = 12 aged and over, b = aged 13 and over).

The situation was commented on in one of the reports which formed *The Social Survey of Merseyside* series:

The demand for juvenile female labour not being great in Liverpool, it is quite usual for young girls of the better artisan class to be kept at home to assist the mother for a few years after leaving school⁶⁵³ and it is from this class that domestic servants for private houses are mainly recruited.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵⁰ *Census of England and Wales, 1931*, Occupation Tables (London, 1934), Table 16.

⁶⁵¹ Fresh, 'Report to the Health Committee, 1851', pp 92-3.

⁶⁵² Data calculated from *National Census Occupation Tables*, 1901, 1911, 1921 and 1931.

⁶⁵³ Caradog Jones noted that this conclusion was borne out by the Household Census which recorded a large number of girls and women (apart from the housekeeper) supported by their father or other earning members of the family - living in fact as unpaid domestic servants.

⁶⁵⁴ Caradog Jones, *The Social Survey of Merseyside, No 4: Domestic Service* (Liverpool, 1932), p. 18.

Although Caradog Jones also acknowledged the high number seeking domestic work: ‘It is possible that in Liverpool under present trade restrictions the supply has come to exceed the demand.’⁶⁵⁵

In the early days of the Second World War women in Britain were not encouraged to engage in the war effort on a large scale. As far as the government was concerned, women were to ‘carry on as usual’, and instructions were issued urging them not to leave their current employment:

The life of the nation must go on and it will make for confusion if large numbers of women seek to change their jobs. The woman who remains at work and volunteers in her spare time for a part-time service which still needs recruits is doing her full part in national service.⁶⁵⁶

However, the combined obstacles of shortages in food and other items, bombing raids, the evacuation of children and mothers of infants from industrial areas, and the compulsory closure of cinemas and theatres brought extensive disruption, making it impossible for anyone to ‘carry on as usual’.

In 1940 Neville Chamberlain’s Conservative government was replaced by a coalition headed by Winston Churchill; emergency legislation was expanded to meet ever greater demands for troops and arms. Increasingly, women were called upon to replace men withdrawn from the workplace for active service, and in December 1941 the National Service (No 2) Act allowed the unprecedented step of female conscription into the

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 19-20.

⁶⁵⁶ *Bulletin No 22: Women and National Service*, Liverpool Council of Social Services, 5 September 1939.

auxiliary services and war-related production.⁶⁵⁷ Initially restricted to single women aged twenty to twenty one years in England, Scotland and Wales, married women were soon included and the age range extended to those aged between nineteen and thirty years. Women who were pregnant, or the mothers of very young children, were declared exempt - as were those who could prove that their conscription would interfere with their husband's war work - though all were strongly encouraged to volunteer to serve the war effort in some capacity (**Figures 10 and 11**).

As a result, the number of women in paid employment in Britain rose from 4.8 million in 1939 to a peak of more than 7 million civilian workers in 1943. By that point 90 *per cent* of single women and 80 *per cent* of married women in Britain were employed in essential war-related work, many of them involved in the production of munitions, tanks or aircraft while others were engaged in nursing, transport and other key occupations. This included 750,000 part-time workers (employed for thirty hours per week or less), a figure which rose to 900,000 in 1944. The railways employed 100,000 women, while the number working in local government more than doubled from 450,000 in 1939 to over 1 million by 1945. In addition there were approximately half a million serving in the Women's Auxiliary Services and a further 70,000 engaged in the civil defence, fire and police services.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁷ Pat Ayres, *Women at War: Liverpool Women 1939-45* (Liverpool, 1988), p. 22.

⁶⁵⁸ Dave Lyddon, 'Employment During the Second World War' in *The Workers' War: Home Front Recalled*, part of the Historical Perspectives series accessed on <http://www.unionhistory.info/workerswar/browse.php?irn=346>, 6 July 2012; Jenny Crang, 'Come into the Army, Maud: Women, Military Conscription, and the Markham Inquiry' in *Journal of Defence Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2008), pp 381-95.

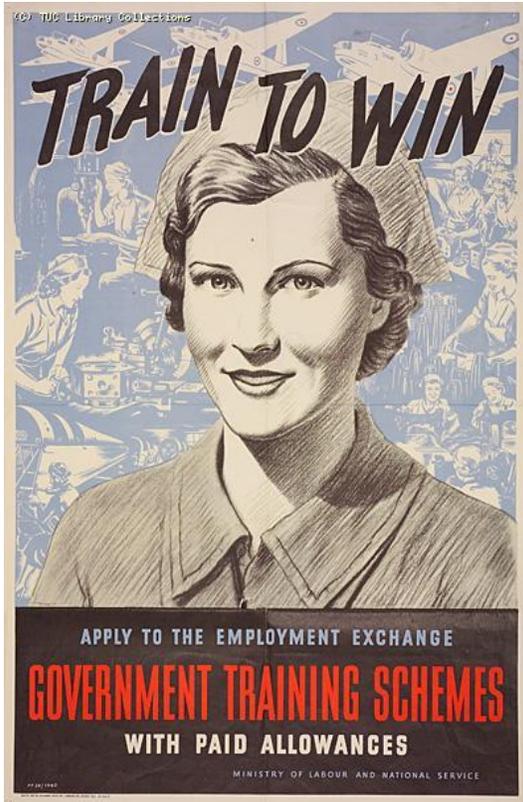


Figure 10 - 'Train to Win' recruitment poster, Ministry of Labour And National Service, 1940.⁶⁵⁹



Figure 11 - 'Come into the Factories' recruitment poster, Ministry of Labour and National Service.⁶⁶⁰

As noted, the war years saw more than 7,500 women leave Northern Ireland for Britain, many of them consigned by the Ministry of Labour to war-related occupations. Similarly, a significant number of the women who migrated from Eire chose to take up work critical to the war effort, despite their official classification as 'conditionally

⁶⁵⁹ 'Train to Win' recruitment poster, Ministry of Labour and National Service, Imperial War Museum collection accessed on <http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/war-work-during-the-second-world-war#lightbox-object-32137> (14 September 2012).

⁶⁶⁰ 'Come into the Factories' recruitment poster, Ministry of Labour and National Service, accessed on <http://www.iwm.org.uk.collections.item/object/38928> (14 September 2012).

landed' sparing them from conscription into war-related services or production.⁶⁶¹ In addition to engineering and munitions work, some women were placed in textile manufacturing or the staffing of NAAFI canteens for the troops.⁶⁶² Significant numbers also took advantage of the better pay, training opportunities and hours of work available to nurses in Britain.⁶⁶³ Yet, despite the war providing new and varied employment opportunities, it would appear that large numbers of Irish women - from both sides of the border - chose to work in what might be considered 'traditional' areas of female employment.⁶⁶⁴ A breakdown of female migration figures (classified according to last employment) confirms that although their involvement in nursing and factory work was certainly on the increase, they remained most highly represented within the realm of domestic service (see **Table 3.4**).

Whilst this trend has been interpreted by Mary Muldowney as evidence that 'The majority of women in both states did not challenge the identification of themselves as home-makers and mothers',⁶⁶⁵ we should guard against over-simplifying the case. These choices were made by women in a wide variety of circumstances for a complex range of reasons.

⁶⁶¹ British and Irish authorities co-operated to develop a controlled entry scheme under which labourers, teachers and midwives were landed conditionally. That is to say, they were required to register their presence with the local police and, provided they remain in Britain no longer than two years, were guaranteed exemption from conscription. These conditions did not apply to nurses and other professionals. See *Memo from Chief Inspector for Immigration*, 23 February 1942, HO 213/1870 (National Archives). Also Judges, *Irish Labour, 1939-1945*; Connolly, 'Irish Workers in Britain During World War Two', pp 121-122.

⁶⁶² *Ibid*, p. 104.

⁶⁶³ *CEOPP*, p. 138.

⁶⁶⁴ See Care O'Kane, 'To make good butter and to look after poultry': The Impact of the Second World War on the Lives of Rural Women in Northern Ireland' in Gillian McIntosh and Diane Urquhart (eds), *Irish Women At War: The Twentieth Century* (Dublin, 2010), pp 82-102.

⁶⁶⁵ Muldowney, *The Second World War*, p. 9.

Table 3.4 - Number of Female Irish Migrants (by Last Occupation) Receiving New Travel Documents for work in Britain and Northern Ireland, 1940-1945⁶⁶⁶

Year	Agriculture	Nursing	Domestic	Clerical	Other (including factory work)
1940	492	1,634	5,285	348	1,125
1941	176	785	1,343	179	789
1942	657	2,233	6,037	461	5,060
1943	422	2,838	9,125	363	6,255
1944	307	1,125	2,760	107	1,591
1945	466	3,523	4,719	207	1,694

Changes brought about by the economic depression of the 1930s had been reflected in the shift away from employing ‘live-in’ to ‘daily’ domestic staff. The *Social Survey of Merseyside* included a comparative study of ‘daily’ and ‘live-in’ domestic service, providing a valuable insight into pre-war terms of employment. For example, the report revealed that regular daily servants on Merseyside worked, on average, just over forty two hours per week compared with sixty two hours for resident domestics in ‘better class’ households. In return the daily domestic received on average 8s 2d per week for girls aged fourteen to twenty one years, rising to 12s for women aged twenty two to thirty nine years, and 15s 9d for those aged forty and over. Meanwhile, resident servants could expect between 10s and 11s 6d when aged eighteen to twenty years, rising to between 12s 6d and 17s 3d when aged twenty one and over.⁶⁶⁷ Once transport costs to and from work were taken into consideration, the lower real wages received by the dailies was found to largely offset any advantage they had in shorter working hours. Rather, their advantage

⁶⁶⁶ Data sourced from *CEOPP*, Statistical Appendix, Table 31, p. 322.

⁶⁶⁷ Caradog Jones, *Social Survey of Merseyside No 4*, p. 20.

lay in the relative freedom they enjoyed away from the regulation and censure of their employer.

At the outbreak of World War II there were still 2 million women employed in domestic service in Britain. But by 1942 the conscription of eligible women, and the social pressure to support the war-effort faced generally by those in occupations deemed ‘non-essential’, saw their large-scale movement into alternative areas of employment. The resultant shortage of domestic labour left the field open to Irish migrant women who seized the opportunity to ‘fill the gap’, evidence being found in the sharp rise in the number of female migrants from Eire describing themselves as ‘domestic servants’ in 1942 and in 1943, as seen in **Table 3.4**.

In spite of claims that rates of pay for domestic servants in Britain and Ireland were similar at just 5s per week,⁶⁶⁸ Caradog Jones’s 1932 survey had already indicated that domestic servants in Liverpool (and other parts of Britain) could expect to earn a good deal more, whilst in 1937 Gertrude Gaffney found that a ‘highly-trained, capable’ maid might command wages of £1 per week.⁶⁶⁹ Thus, whilst poor pay - coupled with the popular perception of domestic service as ‘a despised form of employment...requiring the minimum amount of skill or intelligence’⁶⁷⁰ - had persuaded large numbers of girls to reject domestic service in Ireland, similar work in Britain held more appeal.

⁶⁶⁸ *Rural Surveys*, MS 8306 (Marsh Papers, Trinity College Dublin).

⁶⁶⁹ Gaffney, *Emigration to England*, pp 6 and 17.

⁶⁷⁰ *CEOPP*, p. 179.

Between the months of May and August in 1945 the UK Liaison Officer for Labour in Dublin saw the number of successful applicants for domestic employment in Britain rise from fifteen to forty five per week. The increase was attributed to the Irish government's relaxation of restrictions on migration for those aged nineteen to twenty one. It was envisioned that numbers would continue to rise as those who had applied for nursing as a means of entering Britain might, if found unsuitable for nursing, divert to domestic service instead.⁶⁷¹

But, despite the high visibility of Irish women announcing their intention to work as domestic servants in Britain, once actually employed they became virtually invisible. This was due, in part, to the nature of their employment within private homes. It might also be attributed to the depiction of Britain's involvement in the war as being total, with the whole nation subjugating their private interests for the common good. In this climate of 'all in it together' altruism the keeping of servants may well have been construed by many as overtly extravagant, selfish, and even 'unBritish', encouraging employers, as well as their employees, to keep a low profile. Although private domestic service was to remain an important field of employment for Irish migrant women well into the 1950s, the sheer scale of social change after the Second World War eventually led to its decline, bringing to a close a long-standing key area of female migrant employment in Liverpool. However, the representation of Irish women within other areas of the personal services sector - catering and cleaning for example - remained high.

⁶⁷¹ Mary McKie, assorted correspondence pertaining to British Ministry of Labour recruitment in Dublin, October 1945, (document no. 5 of 29) 'Recruitment of nurses and volunteers for nursing in Eire', LAB 12/284 (National Archives).

Given the extreme concern for a moral decline it is unsurprising that there was an increase in the number of prosecutions related to prostitution during the war years. The search for statistics relating to prosecutions for prostitution in Liverpool has gone unrewarded, perhaps due to fire at the city's record office and library during war-time. However, Liverpool's role as home to the Royal Navy's Atlantic fleet, primary destination for trans-Atlantic supplies, and proximity to RAF Burtonwood – the USA's largest military installation in war-time Britain – suggests that prostitutes and 'good-time girls' made the most of their opportunities.⁶⁷² Yet, despite alarmist reports, a policeman from the 1940s recalls Liverpool's 'prostitute problem' quite differently:

When you see films with regards to prostitution, you get the impression it was a tremendous problem. Well, that didn't apply to Liverpool. The poor girls in Liverpool were just poor girls. In my day, a lot of them were just married women who were just bloody hard up.⁶⁷³

If this were indeed the case, the reported inadequacy of the army allowance may well have been partly responsible.⁶⁷⁴ When the average earnings of a man employed in the food, drink and tobacco-producing industries were estimated at £3 15s per week,⁶⁷⁵ a

⁶⁷² Concerns for the moral well-being of female migrants was an issue throughout the 1930s and was heightened during the war years, fuelled by a rise in the number of illegitimate births (recorded in the *Registrar-General's Statistical Reviews*, Part II, Tables, Population (London); *Registrar-General for Northern Ireland's Annual Reports* (Belfast); *Annual Reports of the Registrar-General, 1922-1955* and *Reports on Vital Statistics, 1953-1973* (Dublin). The increased rate in Ireland might be attributed in part to wartime restrictions preventing travel to England to procure abortion or adoption. Pregnancy amongst the Auxiliary Services caused particular concern. For discussion of this topic see Leanne McCormick, *Regulating Women in Twentieth-Century Northern Ireland* (Manchester and New York, 2009); S. Hylton, *Their Darkest Hour: The Hidden History of the Home Front, 1939-1945* (Stroud, 2001), pp 142-4; K. E. Kiernan, *The Illegitimacy Phenomenon of England and Wales in the 1950s and 1960s* (York, 1971).

⁶⁷³ Anonymous retired police officer, quoted on the BBC's 'Liverpool Local History' website accessed on http://www.bbc.co.uk/liverpool/localhistory/journey/lime_street/maggie_may/ladies.shtml (27 July 2010).

⁶⁷⁴ *Mass Observation, Report No 290, Women in Wartime*, July 1940.

⁶⁷⁵ Gertrude Williams, *Women and Work* (London, 1945), p. 70.

wife with two children was allocated just £1 5s from her husband's army pay.⁶⁷⁶ Little wonder, then, that some women sought to supplement their earnings by other means.

During the inter-war years there was a shortage of nurses in Britain. Where previously hospitals had waiting lists of applicants for training, in 1937 and 1938 the Matron of Liverpool's Royal Southern Hospital found it necessary to advertise in national nursing journals and newspapers. Her efforts yielded little response.⁶⁷⁷ This contrasted with the situation in Ireland where nursing places were relatively scarce.

The commencement of the Second World War did nothing to improve the situation. In the preceding years, hospital staff in Britain had been encouraged to join the army reserve and when war came they were called up immediately.⁶⁷⁸ This made the demand for nurses even greater and, in response, the standard of educational qualification required was relaxed. Meanwhile in Eire, the higher standard of entrance qualification was maintained and, in addition, the payment of training fees was required.⁶⁷⁹ Taken together, these differences in the British and Irish conditions meant that an increasing number of Irish prospective nurses chose to undertake their training in Britain.⁶⁸⁰ For example, examination of the Irish Nursing Register reveals that in 1929 15.3 *per cent* of

⁶⁷⁶ *Bulletin No 32, The Wife's Portion*, Liverpool Council of Social Services, 21 September 1939.

⁶⁷⁷ Pat Starkey, Ann Colman and Kate Morle, 'Uncommon entrance? The recruitment of probationers to Merseyside hospitals 1919-1938' in *International History of Nursing Journal*, vol. 2, no. 3 (Spring 1997), pp 5-16.

⁶⁷⁸ *Papers of the Oral History of Nursing on Merseyside Project*, D702, Informant Acc. No. 1/3 (Special Collections and Archives, University of Liverpool).

⁶⁷⁹ Before the Second World War, acceptance into British nursing had required the passing of the school leaving certificate or the General Nursing Council's own test. This requirement was relaxed during the war and was not revived for many years. Geoffrey Rivett, *National Health Service History*, accessed on <http://www.nhshistory-net.Chapter%201html#Nursing>, 14 October 2012.

⁶⁸⁰ Mary E. Daly, *The Slow Failure: Population Decline and Independent Ireland, 1920-1973* (Madison, 2006), p. 172; Bronwen Walter, *Outsiders Inside: Whiteness, Place and Irish Women* (London, 2000), p. 180.

its members had undergone their training abroad, the number increasing steadily throughout the war years and after; in 1951 it reached 26 *per cent*, the vast majority having trained in Britain.

It was not only prospective nurses who took advantage of the opportunities Britain had to offer, for those who had already qualified in Ireland were attracted by the prospect of better pay and greater chances of advancement. Available data indicates that between the years 1929 and 1951 the percentage of Irish-registered nurses working outside the country ranged from 8.5 *per cent* to 13.7 *per cent*. In 1929 Britain and Northern Ireland accounted for 96 *per cent* of these, and 89 *per cent* in 1951.⁶⁸¹ Indeed, records indicate that nurses made up a large proportion of the total number of female migrants during, and immediately after, the war years (as seen in **Table 3.4**). However, this data (along with that quoted in **Table 3.5**) does not reveal the full extent of their numbers since - as Nicola Yeates points out in her study of the relationship between migration and nursing - emigrating nurses did not always take the trouble to enrol on the Irish Register, particularly if they did not expect to return to Ireland.⁶⁸²

A closer examination of these figures in the light of changing official policy suggests the possibility that the sudden rise in the number of nurses migrating to Britain and Northern Ireland during the years 1942 and 1943 might be due - at least in part - to the introduction of restrictions on emigration. In the first instance, nurses and trainee nurses were exempt from the age restriction on migrants imposed by the government of Eire towards the end

⁶⁸¹ Yeates, 'Migration and Nursing in Ireland', p. 9.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

of 1941. Secondly, Irish nurses working in Britain were declared exempt from the ‘conditionally landed’ restrictions other migrant workers were subject to. Therefore, migrant numbers may have been swelled by young women who wished to leave Ireland and considered the nursing profession a convenient means to this end.

Table 3.5 - Number of Irish-Registered Nurses Migrating to Britain and Northern Ireland, 1940-1951.⁶⁸³

Year	Total Female Migrants	Number of Nurses	Nurses as % of Total
1940	8,884	1,634	18.4
1941	3,272	785	23.9
1942	14,448	2,233	15.5
1943	19,003	2,838	14.9
1944	5,890	1,125	19.1
1945	10,609	3,523	33.2
1946	19,205	3,893	20.2
1947	18,727	2,531	13.5
1948	18,353	912	4.9
1949	12,992	440	3.4
1950	8,832	321	3.6
1951	9,333	543	5.8

But whilst British nursing may have offered Irish women greater opportunities, there were obstacles to be negotiated. The research of Pat Starkey *et al* in the field of nursing recruitment reveals the existence of a strict hierarchy amongst the hospitals in pre-war Liverpool, with ‘voluntary’ establishments (those supported by charitable bequests and

⁶⁸³ Data sourced from *CEOPP*, Statistical Appendix, Table 31, p. 322.

donations) enjoying a higher status than ‘municipal’ (former workhouse infirmaries).⁶⁸⁴ The Liverpool Royal Infirmary’s position at the pinnacle of the local hierarchy was reflected in its recruitment of pupil nurses or ‘probationers’, where ‘respectability’ was considered at least as important as academic achievement.⁶⁸⁵ This meant that entrance into the training school was dependent upon a range of social factors which included social class, place of birth and religious affiliation.⁶⁸⁶

Social class was determined by father’s occupation, the matron at the Royal accepting only what she termed ‘gentlemen’s daughters’.⁶⁸⁷ This was because, in the first instance, the hospital wished to maintain its reputation by employing only those who were considered ‘nice girls’. Secondly, the level of family income was considered important since the training course at the Royal was longer than at other hospitals, during which time rates of pay were lower, so that families could not expect to receive financial input from the pupil nurse. Since the high incidence of low-paid casual male employment in the city made female wages an important part of family income, the majority of successful applicants were drawn from outside Liverpool. However, whilst Welsh applicants appear to have been deemed acceptable by the higher status hospitals, this was not generally the case with Irish applicants. They, along with many young women from working-class backgrounds in Liverpool, were usually directed towards the less

⁶⁸⁴ Starkey, Colman and Morle, ‘Uncommon entrance?’, pp 5-16.

⁶⁸⁵ In 1921 Miss Cummins, Matron at Liverpool Royal Infirmary, told the General Nursing Council they should remember that ‘moral and not theoretical qualifications went to make the nurse.’ *Nursing Times*, cited in R. Dingwall, C. Webster and A. M. Rafferty, *An Introduction to the Social History of Nursing* (London, 1988).

⁶⁸⁶ See Starkey, Colman and Morle, ‘Uncommon entrance?’; Marij van Helmond, ‘Nursing on Show’ in Starkey (ed.), *Nursing Memories: From Probationers to Professors* (Merseyside, Liverpool, 1994).

⁶⁸⁷ *Oral History of Nursing on Merseyside*, D702/3/33-34 (Special Collections and Archives, Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool).

prestigious municipal hospitals. Similarly, very few Roman Catholics were accepted at the voluntary hospitals, whilst their representation at municipal hospitals was much higher. Indeed, Walton Hospital - the municipal facility for the northern end of Liverpool - became noted for its recruitment of Irish probationers, and provided its own Roman Catholic chapel and priest. The probationers' dormitory was situated above the chapel, and was nicknamed 'Paddy's Garret'.⁶⁸⁸ It is not clear if this was a reference to the proliferation of Irish girls sleeping there, or attending Mass below.

Thus, although in 1939 the outbreak of war necessitated the relaxation of educational qualifications for entrance into nursing, many hospitals sought to maintain their own standards. It would appear that echoes of this customary discrimination continued to reverberate throughout the war years, perpetuating and reinforcing the city's ethnic and religious divisions.

Unsurprisingly, the sector of industry which saw the greatest increase in female labour during wartime was metalworking - which included munitions production - where numbers quadrupled from 400,000 in 1939 to 1.6 million in 1943. As the likelihood of impending war had grown in the late 1930s, a Royal Ordnance Factory was established at Fazakerley. In 1941 another was opened at nearby Kirkby,⁶⁸⁹ their location just beyond the northern perimeter of Liverpool being considered ideal since safety and security were paramount. At Fazakerley 12,000 people were engaged in the production of rifles and submachine guns; 70 *per cent* of the workforce was female. Similarly, 8,000 women and

⁶⁸⁸ See Starkey, Colman and Morle, 'Uncommon entrance?', pp 5-16; van Helmond, 'Nursing on Show', p. 25.

⁶⁸⁹ After the war the site occupied by Kirkby ROF became an industrial estate.

2,000 men were employed at the Kirkby site where they turned and packed explosive shells⁶⁹⁰ (**Figure 12**).



Figure 12 - Women Workers at the Royal Ordnance Factory, Kirkby.⁶⁹¹

In addition to purpose-built munitions factories, local firms turned their attention to production for the war effort. At the Rootes factory - situated at Speke on the south-eastern edge of the city - more than 13,000 people turned out sixty Halifax bombers per month, while local employer Littlewoods left its mail order and football pools operations

⁶⁹⁰ *'Spirit of the Blitz': Liverpool in the Second World War* exhibition, Merseyside Maritime Museum, Albert Dock, Liverpool, 10 July 2003-5 December 2004, information accessed on <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/exhibitions/blitz/munitions.asp> (4 September 2011).

⁶⁹¹ Women Workers at the Royal Ordnance Factory, Kirkby image access on *ibid* (4 September 2011).

in favour of producing shells, parachutes and barrage balloons. By 1944 it employed 14,000 workers at sixteen factories across the city, even taking over the premises of the Liverpool Racquet Club where the high ceilings proved ideal for the testing of barrage balloons.

Although security restrictions prevented the disclosure of location and specific purpose details, advertisements for ‘vital war work’ appeared in the local press:

Women over 31 urgently needed for vital work. If you wish to do a vital war job in one of the country’s most important factories, whether you have had previous factory experience or not [...]. Excellent working conditions, transport, entertainment and canteen facilities are provided and Trade Union rates of wages are paid, plus bonus in many occupations [...].⁶⁹²

In order to meet the high demand for labour experienced in the early years of the war, workers were also recruited directly from Eire. The Ministry of Supply’s Dublin office employed five women to deal solely with the recruitment of female workers for seven Royal Ordnance Factories at various locations in Britain. Successful applicants were consigned to a central pool and allocated as necessary to factories under the auspices of the Ministry.⁶⁹³ In 1942 Eire provided munitions producers and associated factories with 11,031 workers, 3,606 of them women. The records for the following year are incomplete, but those available suggest 5,305 women amongst a total of 11,633 workers. By 1944 recruitment in Eire was beginning to wane, but women still accounted for 43 *per*

⁶⁹² *Liverpool Daily Post*, 1 October 1942, p. 3.

⁶⁹³ Judges, *Irish Labour, 1939-1945*, Section 13, p. 28.

cent of the total.⁶⁹⁴ But whilst these general annual figures are available, employment records for individual factories have proved elusive, making it difficult to track individuals or even ascertain the distribution of Irish women throughout the munitions workforce.

It is, however, evident that employers unaccustomed to engaging Irish labour were at first reluctant and required a certain amount of persuasion. Judges attributes this, in part, to 'sheer prejudice', but also acknowledges their anxiety on the grounds of security.⁶⁹⁵

Field suggests that Irish workers located in places such as London and Cardiff (and Liverpool could be added to this list) - which each had established Irish communities - encountered less hostility than those sent to the Midlands where there was no tradition of Irish settlement. He suggests that this was due to a number of factors, amongst them the stereotyping of the Irish as dirty, drunk and disorderly. However, Eire's neutrality, and the fact that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) had commenced a bombing campaign in 1939, also played a part in colouring British perception of the Irish during war-time.⁶⁹⁶ This IRA action led to the Prevention of Violence Bill (1939) under which Irish migrants were required to register with the local police and notify the authorities of any change of address or of employment.⁶⁹⁷

Initially, the recruitment of volunteers into munitions work was difficult for a number of reasons. The work was considered dangerous, not merely due to the risk of explosion,

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 30.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid*, Section 16, p. 36.

⁶⁹⁶ Geoffrey G. Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil: Remaking the British Working Class, 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2011), p. 96.

⁶⁹⁷ Connolly, 'Irish Workers in Britain during World War Two', p. 122.

but because the corrosive chemicals used in production attacked skin and hair, causing dermatitis and discolouration. Furthermore, working hours were long yet required a high level of concentration. For example, a Social Services Bulletin from April 1940 recommended no more than a 48 hour week where a high degree of dexterity was required, and a 54 hour week for less intricate handiwork. A maximum of six hours overtime might be added to the working week, the 'incentive of patriotism' being employed to obtain 'a certain margin of extra effort'.⁶⁹⁸ However, the true extent of this 'extra effort' is revealed in a similar communication dated 1942, announcing that, since it was found that extended work hours resulted in reduced productivity and increased absence, men were to be restricted to 60-65 hours work per week and women to 50-60 hours.⁶⁹⁹ With sites located on the outskirts of town for reasons of safety, journey times of one and a half hours per day were the norm, leaving little time for anything else but sleep.⁷⁰⁰

Yet in spite of this, munitions work was considered poorly paid compared with other forms of employment since - as in most factories - women received lower rates of pay than men, even for identical tasks.⁷⁰¹ Although fears that women would be introduced merely as 'cheap labour' prompted some trade unions to intervene, their attempts to ensure that women received the 'rate for the job' enjoyed limited success. Despite

⁶⁹⁸ *Bulletin No 42, Hours of Work in Wartime*, Liverpool Council of Social Services, April 1940.

⁶⁹⁹ *Bulletin No 61, Hours of Work*, Council of Social Services, 18 May 1942.

⁷⁰⁰ V. Croot Stone, *A study of some social and industrial problems involved in modern, large-scale employment of labour in unskilled work, based on observation and investigation in a wartime filling factory* (unpublished MA dissertation, Liverpool University, 1945).

⁷⁰¹ Until 1942 ability pay in shell-filling factories was set at 2/-, 4/-, 6/- and 8/- for women and 2/-, 5/-, 7/6 and 10/- for men. See P. Inman, *Labour in the Munitions Industry* (London, 1950), p. 354.

theoretical agreements, in practice employers used various ploys to avoid having to pay equal rates. In the words of Eleanor Rathbone, MP:

...While women are supposed to be enjoying the rate for the job, we often find that when a job is offered to a woman, changes are made in the processes to enable the employers to say it is not the same job that a man was doing before, but a different one. Then changes are made in the rate of pay.⁷⁰²

In 1944 a Royal Commission on Equal Pay was established, its stated purpose being:

...to examine the existing relationship between the remuneration of men and women in the public services, in industry and other fields of employment, to consider the social, economic and financial implications of claims of equal pay for equal work.⁷⁰³

Evidence submitted revealed that amongst professionals in the fields of medicine, journalism and the law women already received equal pay. Similarly, local authorities were willing to extend equal terms to male and female teachers, with Liverpool City Council describing such reforms as 'justified' and 'welcomed'.⁷⁰⁴ Nevertheless, when the Commission published its report in October 1946 it recommended that the claim for equal pay be rejected, averring this was justified due to women being less efficient workers than men and more inclined towards marriage, family and home than to work. On the other hand, it argued, men had a 'moral responsibility...for founding and maintaining a family group'.⁷⁰⁵ Three female members of the Commission submitted a

⁷⁰² Rathbone, *Restoration of Pre-war Trade Practices Bill*, House of Commons Debates, February 1942, vol. 337, col. 1115.

⁷⁰³ Director of Education, *Report on the Subject of Equal Pay for Men and Women Teachers*, May 1944.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁵ *Royal Commission on Equal Pay, 1946, Report* (London, 1946) p. 117.

Memo of Dissent, protesting that single women who worked all their lives, often supporting elderly parents and other relatives, should not be penalized because of others who left paid employment to marry. The Commission's report did concede that equal pay was appropriate only for a small number of women in the 'common classes' of the Civil Service who carried out identical tasks to their male colleagues. However, upon the election of the Labour government in 1945, even this small concession was ignored. In a repeat of events seen at the end of the First World War, the interests of women workers were again abandoned once the urgency of war had passed, and any hope that their war-time endeavours would bring about a change in attitudes towards their status as workers was swept away.

3.3 MIGRATORY PATTERNS II: POST-WAR IRELAND AND THE EMIGRATION PROBLEM

Throughout the Second World War the Irish authorities were concerned at the prospect of sudden large-scale return migration and the pressures this would place upon Ireland's already limited resources. In 1942 F. H. Boland, Ireland's Assistant Secretary of External Affairs, described his fears for the future:

Immediately the 'cease-fire' order is given, the whole aim and purpose of the British authorities will be to rush all these workers back to this country as quickly as they can ... Therefore, no problem that we are likely to have to face during the war is likely to be so serious as the problem we will have when up to as many as a hundred thousand or more unemployed men ... are dumped back here... To have piled on top of them in the course of a short time afterwards all the Irish citizens demobilized from the British armed forces.⁷⁰⁶

It seems significant that returning women workers did not feature in this vision of the future. Perhaps this was because he imagined that marriage had been their main purpose in migrating and that, having found husbands in Britain, they would not return or because the status of women in Irish society rendered them neither potential jobseekers nor candidates for welfare benefits. It was also a possible combination of both.

In the hope of averting a sudden and catastrophic deluge, the Irish authorities sought assurance from the British government that the return of Irish migrant war-workers and demobilized troops would be controlled and gradual in order that the necessary preparations might be made. In addition, they requested that national insurance

⁷⁰⁶ File S12882 (National Archives of Ireland).

contributions made by Irish workers in Britain be transferred to Ireland's coffers. But when, in 1945, the war ended no such agreements had been reached. Although a proportion of war-time migrants did return to Ireland, the expected deluge did not materialize. On the contrary, as Britain set about rebuilding her economy and infrastructure the demand for workers became greater than ever, so that the closing years of the decade saw the arrival of a fresh wave of Irish migrants recruited to Britain's workforce. The initial response of the Irish authorities was reported in the British press: 'Worried by the mounting emigration from Eire, Mr de Valera is thinking of banning all ads offering jobs in Britain which appear in the Government-controlled newspaper.'⁷⁰⁷

In the event no such drastic step was taken and Irish migration levels were allowed to rise unchecked. Indeed, patterns of Irish migration established in the 1930s and continued through the war years - which had seen Britain become the primary destination for Irish migrants - were reinforced so that at least 80 *per cent* of Ireland's post-war migrants travelled to Britain.⁷⁰⁸ This trend was to continue throughout the 1950s, when more than 400,000 migrants left Eire.

One reason for this acceleration in the rate of migration was a narrowing of employment choices for men and for women which resulted from independent Ireland seeking to emphasise its break with Britain through the pursuit of a policy of political, economic and cultural self sufficiency. Speaking in 1927, de Valera had declared, 'I am not satisfied

⁷⁰⁷ *Reynolds News*, 2 October 1946, LAB 8/1301 (National Archives).

⁷⁰⁸ Brendan M. Walsh, 'Expectations, Information and Human Migration: Specifying an Econometric Model of Irish Migration to Britain' in *Journal of Regional Science*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1974), pp 107-120, p. 108.

that the standard of living and the mode of living in Western Europe is a right or proper one.⁷⁰⁹ Some forty years later Eire continued to resist a modern economy in favour of what has been termed ‘a parochial, rural, neo-Gaelic and Catholic arcadia.’⁷¹⁰ As a result her economy effectively stagnated whilst employment in agriculture, industry and the service sector declined⁷¹¹ (see **Table 3.6**). What work was available was often sporadic, offering little security or opportunity to plan for the future.

Table 3.6 - Reduction of Numbers within Main Fields of Employment in Eire, 1951-1961.⁷¹²

Field of Employment	Time Period	
	1951-56	1956-61
Agriculture	-66,000	-51,000
Industry	-14,000	-11,000
Services	-13,000	-10,000
Total	-93,000	-72,000

At the same time that the reality of an independent Ireland was proving a disappointment to many - particularly to women - greater employment opportunities were presented by Britain where wages were higher, as was the general standard of living. It also offered a greater variety of employment with better promotion prospects and access to pension

⁷⁰⁹ Eamonn de Valera in reply to a question from a *Manchester Guardian* journalist, 1927, cited in Tom Garvin, ‘The Destiny of the Soldiers: Tradition and Modernity in the Politics of de Valera’s Ireland’ in *Political Studies*, vol. XXVI (1978), p. 347.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹¹ The years 1947-1951 saw Ireland’s gross national product grow at just 3 *per cent* per annum, at 2 *per cent* between 1951-55, and at less than 0.5 *per cent* per annum in the period 1955-59. Gerry O’Hanlon, ‘Population Change in the 1950s: A Statistical Review’, in Keogh, O’Shea and Quinlan, *The Lost Decade*, p. 74.

⁷¹² Data sourced from *Ibid*, Table 3, p. 75.

schemes. But opportunities for work were not the only incentive for migration across the Irish Sea.

Tracey Connolly suggests that because the fifteen year period occupied by the Great Depression and the Second World War saw Irish emigration centred on Britain, chain migration to other destinations such as the USA and Australia was weakened. As Irish migrants tended to rely on family and friends for support, and these contacts and support networks were more readily available in Britain, this remained the most popular destination in the immediate post-war period.⁷¹³ The experience of relatives and friends, as well as radio and cinema representations, also raised awareness of the ‘the attraction of urban life’, which promised better housing conditions with running water and electricity supply. In addition, it offered the prospect of greater social and recreational amenities, and greater access to these through public transport.⁷¹⁴

The introduction of the Welfare State with its National Health Service may also have played a part for, once the qualifying employment criteria had been satisfied, access to sickness and unemployment benefits - as well free healthcare - provided a higher level of social security than that available in Eire.⁷¹⁵ Post-war Britain also offered greater access to secondary schooling, the Education Act of 1944 making this free to all pupils in England and Wales. In contrast, free secondary education was only introduced in the Republic of Ireland in 1967. Until then large numbers - especially those from poorer

⁷¹³ Connolly, ‘Irish Workers in Britain’ p. 132.

⁷¹⁴ *CEOPP*, p. 136.

⁷¹⁵ In July 1948 the National Insurance Act, National Assistance Act and National Health Service Act came into effect. Benefits included Unemployment, Sickness, Widows Benefits plus retirement pension.

backgrounds - were obliged to leave school upon completion of elementary level. As a result the mid 1950s saw approximately 66 *per cent* of young people in the Republic of Ireland leave school with only an elementary education and no qualifications.⁷¹⁶ The impact of this annual augmentation of the ranks of unqualified and unskilled labour in a country already suffering from high rates of unemployment and underemployment increased pressure on resources. The situation demanded an outlet, and Britain provided the most convenient.

The attractions offered by other countries contrasted starkly with life at home. In the words of the Irish Housewives' Association:

...the fundamental reason why so many Irish men and women export themselves, even if only temporarily, is an economic one: the search of a higher wage and better living conditions than at home. The fact that Britain can supply these, in spite of great rationing and housing difficulties, must be faced.⁷¹⁷

Indeed, despite post-war austerity, conditions in Britain compared so favourably with the simple rural idyll advocated by de Valera and his like that the resultant level of migration has been called a 'great haemorrhage of people from the land.'⁷¹⁸ This continued to be felt as a blow to national pride and self-confidence.⁷¹⁹ Enda Delaney suggests that, as a

⁷¹⁶ *CEOPP*, p. 177.

⁷¹⁷ *Memorandum submitted by the Irish Housewives' Association*, June 1948, File MS 8305 (Marsh Papers, Trinity College Dublin). The Irish Housewives' Association was established in Dublin in 1942 with the aim of protecting the rights of women as consumers amid food shortages and rising prices during 'The Emergency'. It placed pressure on the government to introduce price controls and ensure fair distribution of essential foodstuffs for all.

⁷¹⁸ Lennon, McAdam and O'Brien, *Across the Water*, p. 24.

⁷¹⁹ *CEOPP*, p. 141.

result, the official response of the Irish authorities throughout much of this period was to refuse to acknowledge that emigration posed any problem:

The policy on emigration followed by successive governments in the 1950s was not to have a stated policy on emigration...The reluctance to accept publicly that emigration was a central feature of Irish life might well have been politically expedient, and conveniently absolved the Irish state of the responsibility to care for its citizens living in Britain. This abdication of responsibility was rationalized on the dubious grounds that Irish emigrants in Britain would be returning home 'soon'.⁷²⁰

Those who acknowledged that the rate of migration represented a serious problem - amongst them the church hierarchy - frequently attempted to place 'blame' on the migrants themselves rather than on the society they left. Creating a false distinction between 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' migration, they claimed that many migrants went merely in pursuit of unrealistic expectations of high wages and material comfort.⁷²¹ At a time when the national ideal was presented as simple, rural and non-materialistic, this seeking of a higher standard of living placed migrants at odds with the prevailing ideology of the day. But it must be remembered that the idealisation of the frugal and the Spartan sprang from the ruling elite whose experience differed greatly from that of the rural working class, from which the majority of emigrants came.⁷²²

The escalating rate of post-war migration drew some response from those in authority: in April 1948 Eire's first inter-party government launched a commission to enquire into

⁷²⁰ Enda Delaney, 'The Vanishing Irish? The Exodus from Ireland in the 1950s', in Keogh, O'Shea and Quinlan, *The Lost Decade*, p. 84.

⁷²¹ J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1989), pp 374; see also Lee, 'Continuity and Change in Ireland, 1945-70' in *idem* (ed.), *Ireland, 1945-70* (Dublin, 1979), pp 166-77.

⁷²² Delaney, 'The Vanishing Irish?', p. 85.

‘Emigration and Other Population Problems’. Headed by Dr J. P. Beddy, former Senior Inspector of Taxes,⁷²³ the commission consisted of twenty four members and included economists, sociologists, statisticians, government officials, clergymen, medical doctors, trade union officials and writers.⁷²⁴ The stated aim of the enquiry was:

To investigate the causes and consequences of the present level and trend in population; to examine in particular, the social and economic effects of birth, death, migration and marriage rates at present and their probable course in the near future; to consider what measures, if any, should be taken in the national interest to influence the trend in population; generally, to consider the desirability of formulating a national population policy.⁷²⁵

Although the commission was instructed to investigate all elements of change in the size of population, the title reflected the government’s wish that particular attention be paid to emigration as the principal cause of Ireland’s population decline over the previous century and its failure to increase in latter years. Indeed, in her examination of the Commission’s Report, Tracey Connolly notes that the inclusion of the term ‘and other problems’ in the title confirms the negative light in which emigration from Ireland had come to be viewed.⁷²⁶

⁷²³ In 1949 Beddy was appointed Chairman of the newly established Industrial Development Authority (IDA).

⁷²⁴ The Commission consisted of the following persons:- Dr J. P. Beddy (Chairman), Dr W. R. F. Collis, Rev Father T. Counihan, S J, Rev Father E. J. Coyne, S J, A. De Blacam, Mr W. Doolin, Prof G. A. Duncan, Mr A. Fitzgerald, Dr R. C. Geary, Mr W. A. Honohan, Dr J. D. Hourihane, Rev A. A. Luce, Rev Father C. Lucey, Mr S. Lyon, Prof M. D. McCarthy, Mrs Agnes McGuire, Mr J. McElhinney, Mr A. Marsh, Mr J. F. Meenan, Mr P. J. Meghen, Mr P. O’Donnell, Mr J. Richards-Orpen, Mr R. Roberts, Mrs Frances Wrenne. Mr J. J. Byrne was appointed to act as Secretary. The Commission lost the services of A. De Blacam due to his death in January 1951, and Prof G. A. Duncan resigned in December 1948. *CEOPP*, p. xi.

⁷²⁵ *CEOPP*, p. 1.

⁷²⁶ Connolly, ‘The Commission on Emigration’, p. 87.

The commencement of the commission was welcomed in some quarters; Professor George O'Brien of the Department of Economics, University College Dublin, claimed that it, 'showed an end of the apparent indifference of the government on this central problem',⁷²⁷ and the *Irish Times* declared that the setting up of the commission was a 'brave departure' and an 'admission that things were gravely wrong.'⁷²⁸ However, the opposition party - Fianna Fail - questioned the point of the exercise, claiming that 'The causes of these trends in population are well known, and it is unlikely that the new commission can add much to our knowledge in that respect.'⁷²⁹ Meanwhile, the way in which the commission was composed drew protest from the Irish Housewives' Association. They asserted that, since the rate of male migration had decreased since the end of the war and had been overtaken by that of females, women were in a better position to provide the answers the commission sought. Yet, they pointed out, women were severely under-represented since just two of the commission's twenty four members were female - Mrs Agnes McGuire and Mrs Frances Wrenne.⁷³⁰ It would seem that these women were selected on the grounds of their expertise in the feminine realms of social care and household management, Agnes McGuire being Head of Practical Social Work Training at University College Dublin, and Frances Wrenne a teacher of Domestic Science at the Municipal Technical Institute in Cork.⁷³¹ In spite of protest, the composition of the commission remained unaltered.

⁷²⁷ *Irish Independent*, 24 March 1948.

⁷²⁸ *Irish Times*, 23 April 1948.

⁷²⁹ *Irish Press*, 25 March 1948.

⁷³⁰ 'Letters to the Editor', *Irish Press*, 26 April 1948.

⁷³¹ *The Kerryman*, 7 March 1942, p. 1.

In order that the commission's findings might be reported as soon as possible, they were instructed to make full use of existing sources of data and to hold no new large-scale statistical enquiries. Nevertheless, during the course of their investigations it became apparent that considerable demographic changes had taken place since the last census in 1946, and it was deemed necessary that another be organised in 1951. Data was collected from government departments, employment exchanges and other statutory bodies, and advertisements in the press were used to invite interested organisations and individuals to contribute memoranda of evidence. Other research methods included a survey of migrants living in areas of Britain with a significant Irish population.⁷³²

The topics investigated were varied and wide ranging, including the nation's rates of illegitimacy, maternal mortality and domestic employment, and the comparison of numbers of males and females employed in farming and stock-rearing. Studies were also made of marriage rates, the ages of men and women at marriage, and the age difference between husbands and wives. As a result of encompassing such a broad spectrum, the enquiry lasted six years, the report being completed in 1954. However, it was another two years before this was published in book form and a symposium convened in January 1956 to discuss its findings.⁷³³

As the Irish Housewives' Association had anticipated, the commission's report contained comparatively little regarding female migrants, the main focus being placed on male migration. Tracey Connolly suggests that, in this, the commission reflected the

⁷³² *CEOPP*, Introduction, pp 1 and 2.

⁷³³ The symposium was convened in January 1956, headed by C. F. Carter.

preoccupations of a society where women were viewed primarily as mothers and home-makers - their role prescribed in the nation's Constitution - rather than as contributors to society in other ways.⁷³⁴ However, she also notes the scant attention given by the report to the subject of 'young' migrants, and appears at a loss to explain it. In fact, closer inspection of the report reveals this omission to be attributed to a wish to avoid duplicating the investigations of a separate commission set up with regard to 'juvenile employment and unemployment'.⁷³⁵

With regard to female migration, the commission's report appears to have oversimplified the complex factors revealed in the evidence submitted. For example, one memorandum submitted by the Irish Housewives' Association asserted that 'mass emigration of women, low marriage rate of women [and] high marriage age' were symptomatic of the 'condition' which created 'the inferior status of women in several aspects of the social and economic life, in spite of their recognised political equality in the form of the vote.'⁷³⁶ Yet, perhaps unsurprisingly, the report merely acknowledged that female migration - like that of their male counterparts - was the result of a number of causes, noting that the 'purely economic' rationale was 'not always dominant' since improved personal status and better marriage prospects were of equal importance to female migrants.⁷³⁷

⁷³⁴ Connolly, 'The Commission on Emigration', p. 95.

⁷³⁵ *CEOPP*, p. 171. See *Report of the Commission on Youth Unemployment*, 1951 (Dublin, 1952).

⁷³⁶ *Memorandum submitted by the Irish Housewives' Association*, June 1948, IHA Collection 98/17/5/13 (National Archives of Ireland).

⁷³⁷ *CEOPP*, p. 138.

Many of the submissions made to the commission echoed pre-war discussions of the perils awaiting young female migrants upon their arrival in Britain. Various welfare societies expressed concern regarding the ‘impact of a largely materialistic and alien way of life on girls from Irish rural districts.’⁷³⁸ In particular, there were fears that migrants would face ‘moral corruption’:

The majority of emigrants are young and inexperienced and have lived comparatively sheltered lives before emigrating. An abrupt change to a new environment, lacking the discipline and restraint of home surroundings and the vigilance of parents, constitutes in itself a real danger. In receipt of relatively large earnings to which they are unaccustomed, and often living in crowded hostels and lodging-houses, they may succumb to the temptations of city life.⁷³⁹

In a reflection of the nineteenth-century endeavours of Father Nugent and his contemporaries in Liverpool, it was suggested that a state funded ‘social bureau’ (similar to Archbishop McQuaid’s Catholic Social Welfare Bureau) be established in order to assist emigrants - particularly the young - to ‘organise their recreational life’ and to help them fit ‘into the social life of their parishes’. In order to give ‘more continuous attention’ to such problems it was proposed that a central committee, comprised of Irish societies and experienced individuals, would be formed.⁷⁴⁰ In this way, it was hoped that Irish innocents would be shielded from corruption.

⁷³⁸ *Communication from Department of Social Welfare, Employment Branch, to the Secretary, Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems, 5th November 1948, MS 8300 (Marsh Papers, Trinity College Dublin).*

⁷³⁹ *CEOPP*, p. 141.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

Tellingly, the report touched only very briefly on the issue of illegitimacy in Ireland; a social factor which affected a larger number of Irish women than the authorities would like to acknowledge.⁷⁴¹ Referring to the single women who left Ireland to hide their pregnancies, the commission recommended that, ‘The welfare and care of unmarried mothers and their children should be fully examined...so that the problems relating to illegitimacy in the twenty-six counties might be dealt with fully in our own country, instead of partly in Great Britain as at present.’⁷⁴²

This extremely scant mention masked a major trend which was not new, and which is still in evidence today. As first point of call on leaving Ireland, Liverpool was a prime destination for Irish ‘unmarried mothers’. Volunteers from the Port and Station Work Society and the Liverpool Vigilance Society met each boat from Ireland and, consequently, frequently became involved in arranging for their care. Other organisations, such as the Liverpool and County Aid Society and the Salvation Army also carried out similar work. Since few Irish women could be persuaded to return to their families - their families usually being unwilling to accept them - the usual course of action was to contact one of the rescue homes to arrange accommodation, maternity care, and subsequent adoption of the child.⁷⁴³

Significantly, the report made no mention of the women who travelled to Britain seeking abortions. Twenty years earlier, Ireland’s refusal to acknowledge the existence of this

⁷⁴¹ Lindsey Earner-Byrne notes that statistics for Ireland are distorted due to illegitimate births being under-registered as a result of social pressure. Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child: Maternity and child welfare in Dublin, 1922-60* (Manchester, 2007), p. 174.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁷⁴³ See Gaffney, *Emigration to England*, pp 10 and 47-51.

glaring social problem was observed by a Liverpool social worker who commented, 'These girls are the scapegoats of a tradition of Puritanism that will not admit that things are as they are.'⁷⁴⁴ There were few alternative choices available to unmarried pregnant women in Ireland, there being no legal adoption in Ireland until 1952, so that an orphanage for the child and an asylum for the mother were usually the only option at home. For many the only alternative was the boat to Liverpool.

Meanwhile, the marriage rate in Ireland was low at approximately 5 per 1,000 population and this, along with the trend for marriage at a late age, was considered problematic.⁷⁴⁵ Even more serious was the exceptionally high proportion of the population who never married - at one quarter, it was one of the highest rates in the world.⁷⁴⁶ Taken together, these two factors constituted what was described in the report as an 'unnatural and unwholesome phenomenon which darkens the lives of many people, particularly the young.'⁷⁴⁷ Declaring the desire to marry to be 'among the strongest of human instincts,'⁷⁴⁸ the commission believed that the tendency for substantial numbers of Irish men and women to remain unmarried must be due to either a 'wrong' attitude towards marriage, or material conditions being unable to facilitate it. Despite this assertion, the report had little to say on the nation's attitude towards marriage, except that Roman Catholic teaching should be the cornerstone on which it was built. However, with regards to material conditions, the commission viewed the problem as self-perpetuating since the low marriage rate contributed to emigration, which in turn kept the marriage

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁷⁴⁵ *CEOPP*, pp 181 and 182.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Addendum no. 3 by Mr Arnold Marsh, p. 211.

⁷⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

rate low.⁷⁴⁹ As a result the report concentrated on exploring opportunity for marriage and the means of facilitating it.

One submission to the commission from Connemara observed, ‘Girls want husbands. Therefore if men emigrate, girls must also.’⁷⁵⁰ A closer inspection of the statistics suggests that this reasoning was inverted, for examination of the net number of male and female emigrants between the years 1871 and 1951 reveals a female majority in 5 of the 8 intercensal periods. Furthermore, this female majority was on the increase, reaching 1,365 during the period 1946-51.⁷⁵¹ This would suggest that women were not merely following male migrants in search of marriage partners, but blazing their own trail.

Interestingly, the commission agreed that what it termed the ‘growing intrusion of urban values into rural life’ was a factor in female migration, identifying a ‘disinclination’ amongst many young girls to ‘undertake the arduous duties of a farmer’s wife and to accept the conditions of country life.’⁷⁵² Amongst the commission’s suggestions for a remedy was for married women to continue in gainful employment, the additional family income this generated enabling couples ‘to marry at an earlier age and with a feeling of greater security.’ Drawing attention to the existing marriage bar - particularly in the fields of teaching, banking and the civil service - the commission voiced its belief that removal of such regulations would bring about a rise in the marriage rate ‘in the classes so affected’. Furthermore, they recommended that where ‘by reason of their status’

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79. There was also an urban female majority in Eire.

⁷⁵⁰ *Summaries of Evidence*, File MS 8301 (March Papers, Trinity College, Dublin).

⁷⁵¹ The last intercensal period was slightly less than five years, the total net emigration for that period being 119,569. Data sourced from *CEOPP*, Table 86, p. 115.

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*

married women were specially suited to the requirements of a particular occupation, they should not be prevented from remaining in or returning to it.⁷⁵³ No clarification seems to have been offered as to which occupations this might involve so that, although on the surface this clause may appear radical, the use of rather vague terminology rendered the recommendation less than useful.

Even so, not all members of the commission concurred with this recommendation. In an addendum to the Report Rev T. Counihan voiced a far more restrictive view of the future role of women in Irish society when, with reference to proposed changes within the education system, he stressed:

It is money well spent to keep our girls at school up to sixteen and even seventeen years of age, provided they are equipped to be good wives and mothers, and kept out of the strain of industrial and commercial life.⁷⁵⁴

The more conservative vision for the employment of married women, particularly in the public field, was to hold sway in the Republic of Ireland for another two decades.

In short, the findings of the enquiry confirmed that mass migration from Ireland had resulted in a drastic decline in the rural population from 6,960,000 in 1841 to 2,283,000 in 1951. Although a rise in the urban population from 1,215,000 to 2,283,000 during the same period revealed some degree of internal drift towards the towns, the fact remained

⁷⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 81.

⁷⁵⁴ Addendum no. 1 by Rev Thomas Counihan, SJ, *ibid*, p. 192.

that the vast majority of migrants had left Ireland altogether.⁷⁵⁵ Indeed, during the previous century the population for the whole of Ireland fell from 8 million to 4.3 million - a trend which contrasted sharply with population increase seen in other Western European nations.⁷⁵⁶ The existence of similar patterns of depopulation in rural areas of both Eire and Northern Ireland was interpreted as indicating the presence of 'special factors' which operated over the entire country.⁷⁵⁷

Broadly speaking, the fundamental causes of emigration were held to be two-fold, the first of these being 'the absence of opportunities for making an adequate livelihood' and the second being 'a growing desire for higher standards of living.'⁷⁵⁸ Indeed, a decline in agricultural employment, the low marriage rate, late age at marriage and emigration were each identified as contributors to what was termed 'rural decay', which was viewed as a major push factor. Perhaps most significantly, the commission maintained that 'a steadily increasing population should occupy a high place among the criteria by which the success of national policy should be judged.'⁷⁵⁹

However, a symposium on the Report of the Commission - held by the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland in 1956, and headed by Professor C. F. Carter⁷⁶⁰ - argued that emigration 'should not be viewed in a negative light' and that 'there is nothing inherently wrong with having a small population and the fact that emigration is

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.10.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.3.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.12.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.135.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.186.

⁷⁶⁰ Former lecturer in statistics, and Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, Professor C. F. Carter was appointed to the Chair of Applied Economics at Queen's University, Belfast, in 1952.

possible should be a matter for rejoicing.’ At the same time, late marriage was viewed as representing more of a problem, being ‘...in a very real sense, unnatural, and there is tragedy in the cutting off of young people, in their years of greatest capacity for change, work and enjoyment, from the grace and joy of matrimony.’ Carter went on to express his wish that the commission had ‘got to the bottom of the sociological problem of Irish marriage.’⁷⁶¹ The unequal balance of the sexes was also considered to be problematic, especially the ‘exceptionally small female population in relation to the male population in rural areas.’⁷⁶² In particular it was noted that:

During the period the Commission was sitting the emigration of girls from the west of Ireland seemed to have taken on a new impetus. It is important to find employment for the girls and yet it seems to me that it is still more important to find employment opportunities for young men since it is they who will influence - largely - any improvement in marriage rates, it is they who are responsible for maintaining the family.⁷⁶³

As early as May 1937 Gertrude Gaffney, through her weekly column in the *Irish Independent*, had drawn attention to the existence of what Louise Ryan has called the ‘casual relationship between government policies, the roles ascribed to women in Irish society and female emigration.’⁷⁶⁴ Since then the rate of female emigration had continued to rise - indeed, it had reached the point of being identified as a cause for national concern - yet ideology surrounding female identity in Ireland remained so centred on marriage and motherhood that the only remedy which occurred to the

⁷⁶¹ Contribution by Professor C. F. Carter, *Symposium on the Report of the Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems*, read before the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, 27 January 1956, p. 105, Department of the Taoiseach, Cabinet S13386B (National Archives of Ireland).

⁷⁶² Contribution by Donal Nevin, *ibid*, p. 113.

⁷⁶³ Contribution by Professor Liam O Buachalla, *ibid*, p. 119.

⁷⁶⁴ Louise Ryan, ‘Leaving Home: Irish press debates on female employment, domesticity and emigration to Britain the 1930s’ in *Women’s History Review*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2003), pp 387-406, p. 393.

commission was the improvement of marriage prospects, and this was to be achieved through increased *male* employment. For example, the main strategy it proposed for the areas of heaviest migration along the western seaboard was the provision of supplementary wages through projects involving land reclamation, farm improvements and the construction of tourist roads. In this way, it was hoped, ‘their sons might no longer turn, as a matter of course, to employment in Britain.’⁷⁶⁵ Despite the rate of female migration being highest from these western counties, there was no suggestion of development projects aimed at the profitable employment of women in order to dissuade them from leaving.⁷⁶⁶ On the contrary, the report clearly stated its view that ‘the provision of work for men would be more advantageous, from the demographic point of view, than the provision of work for women.’⁷⁶⁷

The commission’s acknowledgement that the fundamental cause of emigration from Ireland was economic came as no surprise.⁷⁶⁸ Similarly, there was nothing new in its emphasis on the essential need for concerted effort in the development of agricultural, industrial and other resources if an increase in population was to be achieved.⁷⁶⁹ Although the report stressed the primary importance of demographic considerations rather than purely economic ones in any subsequent development of the nation’s resources, its recommendations in relation to how these might be achieved - accompanied

⁷⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 167.

⁷⁶⁶ The Commission recommend that the number of young women employed as domestic servants be increased through the granting of a ‘Housekeeper Allowance’ to married couples paying income tax (*CEOPP*, pp 172-3). However, this met with some protest on the grounds that it would effectively mean the employment of servants by high-earners being subsidised by the larger community, including those who did not earn enough to pay Income Tax. See Reservation no. 11 by Mr Ruaidhri Roberts, *Ibid*, pp 253-4.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 171.

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 134.

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 185.

as they were by repeated assertions that such matters fell ‘outside the scope of [their] terms of reference’⁷⁷⁰ - proved disappointing.⁷⁷¹

In 1938 Ireland’s national income represented just over £50 per head of population per annum, and in 1952 it represented approx £136 per head. Taking into consideration the rise in cost of living, it is estimated that real national income rose by approximately one sixth during this period.⁷⁷² 52,000 young people were entering the labour market each year, and the rise in the birth rate during the war - from 19.3 births per 1,000 population between 1940-41 to 21.9 between 1949-50⁷⁷³ - meant this number would increase to approximately 60,000 within five years. Since there appeared to be a fixed number of jobs available in Ireland, and a trend for the surplus population to be lost to migration, it was projected that the number of migrants would inevitably rise unless there was considerable economic development to prevent it.⁷⁷⁴ Comparison of the fields of employment held by women in Ireland, the number choosing to take up work in post-war Britain, and the fields of work they left (and which most, presumably, went to) provides some indication of where Ireland’s need was greatest (see **Tables 3.7, 3.8 and 3.9**).

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid*, pp 1, 145, 146, 149, 156, 157, 158, 187, 188.

⁷⁷¹ See the contribution made by Donald Nevin, *Symposium on the Report of the CEOPP*, pp. 113-4.

⁷⁷² *CEOPP*, p. 56.

⁷⁷³ See Finola Kennedy, *Family, Economy and Government in Ireland* (Dublin, 1989, reprinted 1991), p. 32.

⁷⁷⁴ *CEOPP*, Addendum no. 2 by Dr R. C. Geary and Dr M. D. McCarthy, p. 202.

Table 3.7 - Primary Fields of Female Occupation in Ireland, 1926-1961.⁷⁷⁵

Occupation	Year			
	1926	1936	1946	1956
Total Number of Adult Women	1,127,077	1,072,204	1,081,362	1,001,095
Total women engaged in home Duties	550,147	552,176	589,461	601,392
Total women gainfully employed	343,894	351,367	334,862	268,579
Total women in agriculture	121,957	106,723	81,526	42,111
Total women in domestic service	87,553	86,102	78,522	39,971
Total women in shop service	17,382	19,879	21,450	24,670
Total women in industry	32,601	36,532	35,252	43,496
Total women in white collar/ Secretarial work (including post office and telephonists)	17,679	25,425	32,602	48,442
Total women in the professions	29,505	32,937	36,806	41,176

Table 3.8 - Number of Female Irish Migrants (by Last Occupation) Receiving New Travel Documents for Employment in Britain and Northern Ireland, 1946-1951⁷⁷⁶

Year	Agriculture	Nursing	Domestic	Clerical	Other (including factory work)
1946	322	3,893	12,077	254	2,659
1947	205	2,531	13,166	292	2,533
1948	201	912	12,353	429	4,458
1949	136	440	8,274	403	3,739
1950	179	321	5,249	271	2,822
1951	207	543	5,122	317	3,144

⁷⁷⁵ Data sourced from Irish Census, 1926, 1936, 1946 and 1961.⁷⁷⁶ Data sourced from *Ibid*, Table 31, Statistical Appendix, p. 322.

Table 3.9 - Age Distribution of Recipients of Travel Permits, Identity Cards and Passports, 1946-1951⁷⁷⁷

	Year	Age Group					Yearly Total
		16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35+	
Females	1946	6,099	7,979	2,663	1,168	1,296	19,205
	1947	6,231	7,155	2,810	1,161	1,370	18,727
	1948	5,525	6,546	2,857	1,435	1,990	18,353
	1949	4,677	4,806	1,625	661	1,223	12,992
	1950	3,593	2,969	1,063	397	820	8,842
	1951	3,900	3,094	1,044	512	783	9,333
Males	1946	1,159	3,782	2,416	1,461	2,011	10,829
	1947	1,512	4,409	2,804	1,614	2,172	12,511
	1948	2,747	7,716	4,705	2,713	3,841	21,722
	1949	2,100	4,995	2,375	1,100	1,929	12,499
	1950	1,704	3,318	1,547	677	1,268	8,514
	1951	2,189	3,875	1,542	900	2,407	10,913

The desirability and feasibility of state intervention in order to prevent emigration was considered and, once again, rejected as an infringement of civil liberties except in extreme circumstances, such as during a time of war. This is an interesting clause since, as we have seen, the high number of migrants leaving Ireland during World War II provoked no large-scale government action. Furthermore, it was suggested that such restrictions might lead to increased hardship which, in turn, might bring about ‘discontent and social disorder’.⁷⁷⁸ In short, the removal of large numbers of unproductive citizens

⁷⁷⁷ Data sourced from *CEOPP*, Table 97, p.129 and Statistical Appendix, Table 33, p. 324.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 143.

was considered no great loss since it was maintained ‘at the expense of the community at large.’ However acknowledgement was made that this was a short-term view, and that in the long-term this may well come to represent a ‘serious loss of economic potential.’⁷⁷⁹ Similarly, whilst in response to the claims of some witnesses that emigration deprived the country of its best people, the commission declared there was no evidence to support this contention. Furthermore, they found nothing to suggest that emigration had resulted in either improvement or deterioration in the home population, nor that a selective policy of emigration had resulted in a ‘tendency to physical or mental stagnation.’ Yet, it conceded that emigration did ‘deprive the country of large numbers of its young people, resulting in an undesirable age-distribution of the population.’⁷⁸⁰

In the short term emigration acted as a ‘pressure valve’ removing the ‘urgent necessity’ for the development of resources which the pressures of population increase might normally bring about.⁷⁸¹ But, at the same time, it might be said that it ‘reduced the potential for development, creating a more conservative society that was less amenable to change’.⁷⁸² In the long term, emigration unbalanced the age distribution of Ireland’s population, the removal of large numbers of those most economically productive hindering economic and social development and increasing dependency on those who remained.⁷⁸³

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 141.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 140.

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid*, pp 139-140.

⁷⁸² Connolly, ‘The Commission on Emigration’, p.98.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 99.

Although many recommendations were made, the commission did not fulfil its main objective which had been ‘to consider the desirability of formulating a national population policy.’⁷⁸⁴ However, its examination of the circumstances relating to emigration confirmed that ‘it was no longer valid to blame Ireland’s colonial experience for the high rate of emigration.’ Dr R. C. Geary, director of the Central Statistics Office, remarked:

The present attitude was an inheritance from the long period of the independence struggle, when it was an effective argument...it is high time that the Irish people examined the validity of their traditional attitude towards emigration.⁷⁸⁵

Yet, attitudes seemed slow to change. The period 1946-51 saw eight out of ten Irish migrants head for Britain.⁷⁸⁶ Whilst for many European countries the early 1950s were a time of economic boom, the experience in Ireland was very different. As approximately 40,000 people left Ireland each year the effects upon communities were profound and the fact that migration was extremely high amongst women led to a change in the balance of the population.⁷⁸⁷ Amongst the population of the twenty six counties which would later make up Eire/Republic of Ireland, women outnumbered men at every census from 1821 to 1901, but at the censuses of 1911, 1926 and 1936 this trend was reversed. The imbalance was particularly pronounced in Dublin City and County where women continued to outnumber men throughout these years revealing the existence of internal

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 1.

⁷⁸⁵ *Irish Independent*, 10 May 1954.

⁷⁸⁶ *CEOPP*, Table 87, p. 116.

⁷⁸⁷ Daly, *Social and Economic History of Ireland since 1800*, p. 163.

migration from rural to urban areas amongst women, as well as to emigration from Ireland altogether.⁷⁸⁸

Migration would remain a major feature of Irish life for many years to come. Writing in 1964, Donall MacAmhlaigh recorded his view of post-war employment opportunities in Britain compared with those in Ireland:

There's work for everyone in this country now, thanks be to God, and long may it last, even if it is a result of a dreadful war. But God help our own poor country that has nothing in it now but unemployment and despair.⁷⁸⁹

But did Irish women who arrived in Liverpool during the late 1940s and 1950s share MacAmhlaigh's negative view of 'home'? The experiences they described in research interviews provide valuable insight into the range of contributing factors which influenced the decision to migrate.

Pat was born in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, the youngest of five children.⁷⁹⁰ Initially torn between following her mother into teaching or her sister into nursing, she eventually chose the latter profession and in 1953 left her family's farm for the Stanley Nursing School in Liverpool. After four years of training Pat gained her qualification as a Staff Nurse and, like her sister, chose to continue her nursing career in Liverpool. She acquired several years experience as a Staff Nurse before undertaking further training in

⁷⁸⁸ *Ireland, Census of Population, 1936*, vol. 1 (Dublin, 1938), Table 2 - Population of Each Province and County in Saorstát Éireann as Constituted at each of the Twelve Censuses from 1821 to 1936, p. 3.

⁷⁸⁹ Donall MacAmhlaigh, *Irish Navy: The Diary of an Exile* (Cork, 1964), p. 36.

⁷⁹⁰ See biographical details for 'Pat' in Appendix 1, p. 365.

midwifery, and worked in the city's Mill Road Maternity Hospital until her retirement in 1991. Pat's sister married and had children, but Pat remained single. When asked about this she answered plainly, 'I was married to my profession, I think.'⁷⁹¹

Interestingly, the theories which Diner and Nolan applied to the emigration of Irish women to the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, might be said to apply here. Pat's experience appears to support Diner's assertion that Irish women's migration was primarily for economic reasons, better employment opportunities making them self-sufficient and removing the need for marriage.⁷⁹² Meanwhile, the experience of Pat's sister seems to support Nolan's argument that Irish women migrated in order to improve their marriage prospects.⁷⁹³ However, in reality, we have no evidence as to either woman's long-term objective in opting to leave Ireland. Indeed, we do not even know that the relative merits of career over marriage were ever consciously considered, so that any attempt to link the outcome of their life choices with prescribed models would be a purely speculative exercise. Therefore, we should guard against an over-simplistic approach, reducing the vast complexity of female migration merely to a matter of marital status versus monetary gain, since a whole range of unquantifiable factors were at work and must be taken into consideration.

An example of the interplay of circumstances and relationships, and the impact these may have on a woman's decision to migrate, is illustrated by the experience of Maureen from

⁷⁹¹ Interview with 'Pat', 6 October 2011, used with permission.

⁷⁹² Diner, *Erin's Daughters*.

⁷⁹³ Nolan, *Ourselves Alone*.

Co. Mayo.⁷⁹⁴ Leaving Ireland for the first time in 1954 at the age of twenty, she joined her sisters in Croydon, Surrey. Three years later their mother was taken ill and it was decided that Maureen should return home to care for her. A short time later she married, but found living with her in-laws difficult:

We went to live with his mother and father in Mayo. Need I say more?...But [my family] knew what was going on. I won't say any more about that, but they knew what was going on. He was the darling son and I was the other thing...So, I was pregnant with my first baby and we came over [to Liverpool] and stayed with [husband's brother and sister-in-law]. No, no, [our reasons for leaving] weren't for work at all, because he was doing work in Ireland. He was a joiner.⁷⁹⁵

In this case the primary motive for leaving Ireland did not involve the improvement of occupational status or marriage prospects, but intra-family dynamics. Such problems - particularly those of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law occupying the same home - had long been recognised as factors contributing to Ireland's low marriage rate.⁷⁹⁶ Clearly, as far as Maureen was concerned, her husband's steady job and regular income did not sufficiently compensate for the difficulties of living under the same roof as his parents. Here the decision to leave Ireland was a conscious one, made jointly with her husband, and prompted by family issues. Family relationships were also a deciding factor in the

⁷⁹⁴ See biographical details for 'Maureen' in Appendix 1, p. 366.

⁷⁹⁵ Interview with 'Maureen', 15 September 2011, used with permission.

⁷⁹⁶ As a remedy de Valera favoured the 'dower house' strategy, which aimed to encourage earlier marriage through the provision of a separate dwelling on the family holding. Originally suggested in the 1920s, the idea was raised in the 30s, and again in 1942 when it got as far as the establishment of an interdepartmental committee to explore its possibilities. Encountering obstacles, the report was set aside. The idea was revived once more in the 1950s, but the practicalities of such a scheme proved too problematic and again it was abandoned. For a fuller discussion of this problem and suggestions for its remedy see P. Travers, '“There Was Nothing For Me There”: Irish female emigration, 1922-71' in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish World Wide: History, Heritage, Identity*, vol. 4, *Irish Women and Irish Migration* (Leicester, London and Washington, 1995, reprinted 1997), pp 146-167.

choice of destination, since the young couple went to stay with relatives already living in Liverpool, indicating the continuing significance of chain migration.

However, some cases reveal that migration was not always the result of definite intention, but something that was drifted into. For example, in 1949 sixteen year old Kathleen⁷⁹⁷ - also from Co. Mayo - came to Liverpool to visit her brother who was on leave from the British Army:

I came over and stayed about three weeks, and my brother used to say, 'You could get a job, you know. You'd be able to send me mam some money.' But at sixteen you couldn't get much of a job... So anyway, I came - I think about twice - to visit my brother when he was [on leave] and eventually, the last time I came...well, I've been here ever since! [laughs] I only came here for a holiday!⁷⁹⁸

Although economics influenced Kathleen's migration, her primary concern was the easing of her family's circumstances rather than her own personal advancement. Born on a farm in Co. Mayo, she was only five years old when her father died. Her mother struggled to run the family farm and bring up seven young children, and found it necessary to take on extra work as a cleaner at a local convent in order to make ends meet. Kathleen left school at the age of fourteen and entered domestic service. Employed some distance from her family home, she managed to get home for twenty four hours at weekends, but her earnings (£1 per week) were a help to her mother.⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹⁷ See biographical details for 'Kathleen' in Appendix 1, p. 363.

⁷⁹⁸ Interview with 'Kathleen', 15 September 2011, used with permission.

⁷⁹⁹ Although much is made of the importance of migrants' remittances, financial support was, at least in some cases, reciprocated. Whilst several of the women interviewed mentioned sending money home, one recalled an instance when this trend was reversed. She explained that her husband's wage packet had been

She had been in this post for two and a half years when her brother suggested she might earn more in Liverpool. Through family contacts she secured work as an office junior at the Dunlop factory in Speke, and was eventually promoted to wages clerk.⁸⁰⁰ She remained in this employment until she married in 1958, and only left then because the journey to work from her new marital home in Bootle was long and arduous.⁸⁰¹

Family economics was also the reason for Maggie's migration from her family's small farm in Co. Cavan.⁸⁰² When asked if she came to Britain in order to find work she answered, 'What other reason? ...I didn't come for a holiday, put it that way.'⁸⁰³ At the age of eighteen she left home to join relatives who ran a public house in London, where she worked for three years doing domestic chores. Then her elder sister, who was in private domestic service in Liverpool, found Maggie a position with her own employer's neighbour:

[My sister] was living here in Liverpool - working in Liverpool - and she thought it would be nice for us to be together... We didn't actually live in the same house. She did the same work as myself, she worked for a doctor and his wife...and I worked for this lady - did similar work as I did in London, though...job-wise it didn't change...it was 1953. She didn't employ anybody else - she didn't need anybody else, just somebody to help her along. She was an older lady. She was good to me, indeed she was, you couldn't say anything but. I couldn't say I had a bad experience wherever I was, job-wise.⁸⁰⁴

stolen from the kitchen drawer, leaving the couple and their young family to face the week ahead without a penny. The very next day she received a letter from her mother who, without knowing anything of her daughter's predicament, had enclosed two pound notes. Interview with 'Maureen' 15 September 2011.

⁸⁰⁰ In the immediate post-war years Dunlop took over the premises formerly occupied by the Rootes factory at Speke. Dunlop produced a wide range of goods in Liverpool, from tractor tyres to Wellington boots, and from latex foam mattresses to golf balls.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰² See biographical details for 'Maggie' in Appendix 1, p. 362.

⁸⁰³ Interview with 'Maggie', 6 October 2011, used with permission.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

In Maggie's testimony there is nothing to suggest that she viewed her employment as a means of improving either personal economic status or marriage prospects. Rather, she appears to have been highly aware of the status of her work but, at the same time, accepting of her duty towards her family:

The job wouldn't be the kind of job young girls would be doing today but, needless to say, it was the type of job a lot of girls did when I was young. You lived in, and your parents at home were happy because they knew their children would be cared for. And most of them were - overall, I'd say most of them. [...] I tried to send a few pounds now and then to my dad. It wasn't big money you were sending, but the majority of Irish people tried to help their families out.⁸⁰⁵

In contrast, for some migration might be said to have been spurred by a spirit of adventure, such as that exhibited by teenagers Sheila from Co. Wexford,⁸⁰⁶ and Jean from Dundalk.⁸⁰⁷ Sheila remembered her arrival in 1952:

I came over...only 'cause my friend came over here and she said, 'Its great over here, why don't you come over?' Now, we lived on a farm - there was really no need for me to come [laughs]. But I said, 'Well, I'll go there,' so I came, and a month on...we had to look for work 'cause we had no money. We'd got to look for work so we went to about a dozen places and everybody said, 'Yes, can you start tomorrow?' We ended up by going to the Meccano - we were at the Meccano where they made the toys.⁸⁰⁸

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁶ See biographical details for 'Shelia' in Appendix 1, p. 364.

⁸⁰⁷ See biographical details for 'Jean' in Appendix 1, p. 367.

⁸⁰⁸ Interview with 'Sheila', 15 September 2011, used with permission. Liverpool-based 'Meccano' was the largest toy manufacturer in Britain, inventors and producers of 'Meccano' engineering construction kits as well as 'Hornby' train sets and 'Dinky' cars. 'Sheila' worked at the Binns Road factory, off Edge Lane, where 80 *per cent* of the 2,000 strong workforce was female. The company also operated sites at Speke and Aintree in Liverpool, as well as in Argentina, France, Germany, Spain and the USA.

For eighteen-year-old Sheila, Liverpool represented the chance for independence; she made it quite clear that she felt no economic pressure to leave home. Her friend does not appear to have been speaking of work opportunities when she reported, 'It's great over here,' for it was not until they had been in Liverpool for a month and their money ran out that they thought to look for work. But it is interesting to note that their quest for 'freedom' was tempered with caution; the first girl seems to have been keen to have her friend from home join her to share in the adventure. Consequently they searched for work together, each securing jobs at the Meccano factory off Edge Lane, and also socialized together in a form of mutual chaperoning, visiting the 'Shamrock Club' in Liverpool city centre and attending dances in the neighbouring town of Southport.

Similarly, Jean - the daughter of a Dundalk shopkeeper - displayed a restless desire to escape the confines of her home town:

I came to England in September 1957 on a holiday [laughs] with my fiancé...We stayed with my brother, and I just loved Liverpool. I thought, 'It's tops!' So I went back home - I had a job as a cashier in a large departmental store - and thought about Liverpool. I just loved Liverpool and I thought 'I'm going!' So I gave my notice in and told everyone, 'I'm off!'⁸⁰⁹

Once again, the move to Liverpool was not quite so drastic a step as it might first appear. In fact, Jean's grandfather had worked on the building of the first Mersey Tunnel during the 1930s, his daughter (Jean's mother) being brought up in Birkenhead until she was sixteen or seventeen years old. Although the family moved back to Ireland their sojourn in the Merseyside area clearly influenced the next generation, for both Jean and her

⁸⁰⁹ Interview with 'Jean', 6 October 2011, used with permission.

brother chose to live there as adults. In Jean's words: 'I suppose, to a point, coming to Liverpool was like coming home because, although I hadn't been to Liverpool, we knew quite a bit about it.'⁸¹⁰

Initially, Jean found familiar work at the city department store T. J. Hughes, and at the mail order firm John Moores. Shortly afterwards her fiancé - an engineer - followed her to Liverpool and they married, setting up home in Aigburth in the south of the city. Within a year she decided to follow her ambition to become a nurse, and commenced training at Saint Catherine's Hospital in Birkenhead. Did migration improve Jean's occupational status or increase her marriage prospects? In this case it would appear to be the other way round for, although migration provided the opportunity for a change of career, it was the financial security which marriage provided that allowed her to take the step towards nursing.

If we consider the socio-economic background of the women interviewed, five of the six came from farming families, and one from a small business background in a small town. This correlates with the report of the 1954 commission, which found that migration was greatest from rural areas. This trend continued throughout the 1950s, for between 1951 and 1961 Ireland's population decreased by 146,000 or 4.9 *per cent*. As a result, the population reached its lowest ever enumerated in a census and, since the population in towns remained stable, almost all of this movement was from rural areas.⁸¹¹ Perhaps most significantly, the number of family members providing unwaged labour on family

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹¹ See James H. Johnson, 'Population Change in Ireland, 1951-1961' in *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 129, no. 2 (June 1963), pp 167-174.

holdings - designated 'relatives assisting' - fell by approximately one third during the 1950s. Brendan M. Walsh suggests that the decade saw more than 130,000 'relatives assisting' emigrate, many of them to Britain.⁸¹² Since interviewees Maureen, Sheila and Maggie each provided unpaid domestic support on their family's farms prior to migration, they would be numbered within this category.

Examination of the interviewees' family dynamics is interesting for two of the women had lost their mothers, and another two had lost their fathers before they set off for Liverpool. This suggests that the weakening of family ties may have played a part in the decision to migrate, but also that the loss of a potential wage-earning parent may have increased pressure upon the children to become financially productive. In addition, the place occupied within the family might also have a bearing on who left and when. For example, the death of a mother would necessitate an elder daughter partially fulfilling the role, postponing or even preventing her migration. At the same time, the migration of a younger daughter might be viewed as doubly beneficial since her absence would 'lighten the load' at home whilst her remittances would contribute to the family income. Significantly, all of the women interviewed were younger children within their families. Also, evidence of chain migration is very clear since five of the women followed siblings to England, and the sixth joined a school friend. Furthermore, several were able to take advantage of wider support networks already established through the earlier migration of other relatives such as grandparents, aunts and sisters-in-law. These networks provided assistance in a variety of forms, both practical and emotional. They supplied

⁸¹² Brendan M. Walsh, 'Influences on Mobility and Employment in Irish Family Farming' in *Irish Journal of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1960), pp 13-24, p. 17.

accommodation for the new arrival, contacts in the job market and - perhaps most importantly - the emotional support of a friendly face from 'home'.

With regards to employment in Liverpool, two of the women (Pat and Jean) embarked on careers in nursing with one going on to specialise as a midwife. Significantly, both remembered hospital matrons from Britain, as well as representatives of religious orders, visiting their schools in order to recruit girls who were about to leave. Clearly, these visits exerted a considerable degree of influence since Jean recalled several of her classmates leaving Ireland to train in British hospitals, and supposed this was when the seed of the idea was first planted in her own mind. Sheila found work in a factory and although she continued to work after her marriage she left paid employment to start a family, as was customary amongst working-class women in Liverpool at that time. In contrast, Maureen did not seek employment upon arrival in Liverpool as she was already married and pregnant with her first child. However, after a few years at home caring for their young children, Maureen and Sheila each found it necessary to seek employment in order to supplement her husband's income. Both secured employment as part-time auxiliary nurses, taking permanent night shifts in order to accommodate the responsibilities of family life. In addition, Maureen took on part-time bar work in a social club.⁸¹³ Kathleen worked as an office clerk until her marriage and later, when her children reached school age, she worked in a dry-cleaners shop. After three years she left

⁸¹³ 'Sheila' left the Meccano factory whilst pregnant with her first child. She had five children in total and when they reached school age she became a part-time Auxiliary Nurse working two night shifts per week. Interview with 'Sheila', 15 September 2011, used with permission. 'Maureen' was a full-time mother to five children, but when the youngest was eight months old she began working part-time as an Auxiliary Nurse three nights per week. Four years later she also took on bar work at an Irish social club for three evenings per week. Interview with 'Maureen', 15 September 2011.

the shop for factory work, where she remained until retirement. Maggie entered private domestic service but ceased paid employment entirely once she had children.

All but one of the women married. All who married chose Irish husbands, endogamous marriage also being emphasised amongst Irish women in the United States.⁸¹⁴ All of those who married went on to have children, which may be indicative of the continued role of family.

All the women maintained links with Ireland and regularly visited family there, though none contemplated moving back even in retirement. Without exception, all said that their migration experience was positive. Although one woman said of her workmates, 'Oh, they'd make fun of your accent - Mickey-taking and things like that - yeah, but nothing upsetting, no',⁸¹⁵ none recalled ever feeling victimised or discriminated against on the grounds of race, either in the workplace or their host neighbourhood. Indeed, several vehemently defended their adopted home and its people against any suggestion of prejudice or discrimination. Remembering her years as an auxiliary nurse, Sheila said, 'I've loved Liverpool, absolutely loved it...The people were wonderful - a wonderful experience here! I've never had a cross word with a person - never, no. No one's ever said a word to me, and when you work in the hospital you meet all sorts.'⁸¹⁶ Meanwhile, Maureen recalled the support provided by Liverpoolian neighbours when she was a young wife and mother far from family and home:

⁸¹⁴ See Michael J. Rosenfeld, 'Racial, Educational, and Religious Endogamy in the U.S.: A Comparative Historical Perspective' in *Social Forces*, vol. 88, no. 1 (2008), pp 1-32.

⁸¹⁵ Interview with 'Kathleen', 15 September 2011.

⁸¹⁶ Interview with 'Sheila', 15 September 2011.

Oh no, I never thought at all about being different to them, and they didn't make me feel any different... they were very, very good to me. You know, when you don't have - like at home - family or anybody... they was like a mum to you... helping you, advising you, and caring about you. You know, they were wonderful.⁸¹⁷

But whilst the respondents remembered their early years in Liverpool favourably, with regards to their perception of self and experience, it must be acknowledged that the very process of migration impacts upon the concepts of place, home and belonging.⁸¹⁸ Initially, migrants might experience what President Higgins terms the 'dislocation of trauma experience' during which the sense of loss, displacement and anxiety is mingled with a sense of hope for new beginnings and a new life.⁸¹⁹ Looking to the long-term, Fitzgerald and Lambkin draw a distinction between those who feel themselves to be 'at home' (settled within the host society) and those who feel 'homeless' (either seeking arrival at a 'new world' or seeking return to the 'old world').⁸²⁰ Perhaps unsurprisingly, after fifty-five or sixty-five years spent in Liverpool, the women interviewed for this study considered themselves settled. Most had raised children in the city and now had grandchildren, some had buried husbands there, and none had plans to return to Ireland permanently. Interestingly, it would appear that for some migrants their perception of 'back home' stands still - even for those who revisit regularly. For example, when asked if she had ever contemplated a permanent return to Ireland, Maggie replied:

⁸¹⁷ Interview with 'Maureen', 15 September 2011.

⁸¹⁸ See Dinesh Bhugra and Oyedemi Ayonrinde, 'Depression in migrants and ethnic minorities' in *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, vol. 10 (2004), pp 13-17.

⁸¹⁹ Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland, 'Remarks by President Michael D. Higgins Reflecting on the Gorta Mor: The Great Famine of Ireland, some narratives, their lessons and their legacy', lecture given at Faneuil Hall, Famine Commemoration, Boston, U.S.A., 5th May 2012, accessed on <http://www.president.ie/speeches/remarks-by-president-michael-d-higgins-reflecting-on-the-gorta-mor-the-great-famine-of-ireland/> (20 May 2014).

⁸²⁰ Fitzgerald and Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History, 1607-2007*, p. 13.

No, I wouldn't gain anything, and I'd find the country life too quiet. When you think about the years I've spent here, and then go back to a rural area where there's no buses...life there would be very different.⁸²¹

When faced with the suggestion that life in Ireland might also have moved on, she appeared only to relate to change there in terms of the passing of old friends: 'Well, a lot of my friends are dead and gone. The people I grew up with at home are not there any more...' ⁸²² For Maggie, life had moved on and Ireland remained in the past.

Conversely, for other migrants it is the changes they observe in the Irish life-style which diminish the appeal of return. Kathleen offered her view of twenty-first century Ireland:

Years and years ago Ireland was lovely, a lovely place, but now its everyone for themselves. You know, you could always pop in the house - our back door, our front door, they were always open - anyone could just come and go. But now the doors are shut. Oh, and you couldn't just come in for a chat like you used to do in them days, no. Its changed so much - everybody, they want more than the next person, you know. Its very sad... None of them knew what a car was, but as they've grown up there's two or three cars in the family, you know, things like that. Big houses - they all want a big house.⁸²³

In fact, both Ireland and Liverpool have experienced unimaginable changes in the years since these post-war migrants exchanged one for the other. Therefore, this would seem to suggest that for these migrants, feelings of 'home' and 'belonging' are connected to bonds rooted in personal relationships and have little to do with actual place. Despite maintaining strong links with family and friends in Ireland over a lifetime, new

⁸²¹ Interview with 'Maggie', 6 October 2011, used with permission.

⁸²² *Ibid.*

⁸²³ Interview with 'Kathleen', 15 September 2011, used with permission.

relationships had been forged which tied them to the host society and these attachments superseded those with siblings and friends in Ireland.

Allied to the changing (self)perception of migrants is the issue of ‘ethnic fade’, a particularly interesting issue within the context of the Liverpool cultural and ethnic melting pot. During interviews questions were asked regarding the cultural identity of children born in Liverpool to Irish migrants. Several respondents admitted that their grown-up children did not consider themselves particularly ‘Irish’, despite having grown up within an Irish social community and participating in Irish cultural activities. However, it was clear that although the mothers had endeavoured to pass on elements of Irish culture and foster Irish identity to some degree, they understood the ambiguity of their children’s position. As Maureen explained it:

...they love Ireland - they go back over. But England has been good to them - as I say - Liverpool has been good to them. But I think if there was an argument about the Irish they’d stand up for the Irish ...⁸²⁴

This might be viewed as confirming Hickman’s assertion on the subject:

In northwest England the spread of Irish ancestry through outmarriage now includes a much wider section of the population than in other parts of England where settlement has been on a much smaller scale. Moreover, in Merseyside, a regional identity of ‘Liverpudlian’ is readily accepted by second-generation Irish people, in contrast to London where many remain firmly ‘Irish’.⁸²⁵

⁸²⁴ Interview with ‘Maureen’, 15 September 2011, used with permission.

⁸²⁵ M. Hickman, ‘A Study of the Incorporation of the Irish in Britain with special reference to Catholic State Education: involving a comparison of the attitudes of the pupils and teachers in settled Catholic schools in London and Liverpool’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Institute of Education, University of London, 1990), cited in Bronwen Walter, ‘The Irish Community in Britain - diversity, disadvantage and

Certainly the assertion is often made in Liverpool that, ‘Everyone had a ‘Ninny’ [Irish grandmother] who lived in ‘Scottie’ Road,’ the implication being that the entire population possesses some degree of Irish ancestry. Whilst an exaggeration, it may go some way to explaining the ‘ethnic fade’ effect, the Irish community gradually disappearing as descendents feel little need to assert a distinctive Irish identity.⁸²⁶

discrimination’, paper presented to the Commission on the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain, 18 June 1999, published on *Runnymede: Inteligencia for a Multi-ethnic Britain*, accessed on <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/byIrishCommunity.html>, 5 April 2012.

⁸²⁶ Ethnic fade also aided by the expansion of Liverpool., see section 3.5 for a discussion.

3.4 TRENDS IN FEMALE EMPLOYMENT II: LIVERPOOL'S POST-WAR REDEVELOPMENT

The war had provided women with wider work opportunities, but once the war was over pressure was placed on them to leave paid employment in order to free up jobs for men returning from active service to civilian life. In direct contrast to war-time recruitment drives, which had ushered female labour into industry, women were told that their services were no longer required. But a great number of women had experienced new kinds of employment, greater freedom and respect in the workplace, and the independence afforded by a wage packet of their own at the end of the week, and many were unwilling to relinquish them.

Although conditions in Liverpool immediately after the war were far from ideal, where there was a dire shortage of housing and supplies were still rationed, the recovery and re-development effort presented opportunities for work and with it the possibility of a more secure and comfortable future.

In the post-war years Liverpool Corporation recommenced its ambitious housing projects. These, along with private housing developments and large-scale rebuilding of the city centre, created ample opportunities for male labour in the field of construction during the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. At the same time, the freeing of the Atlantic trade routes meant increased activity on the docks. It also brought a rise in production in the sugar and tobacco refineries, which benefited female labour. But whilst

opportunities for women's work in Liverpool expanded somewhat after the war, for the most part they remained concentrated in the familiar areas of factory work, domestic service/cleaning, and nursing. As the testimony of interviewees indicates, for married women with children the part-time and evening work provided a degree of flexibility.

Liverpool hoped its investment in some of the country's first purpose-built industrial estates, at Kirkby, Aintree and Speke, would attract businesses into the area. Kirby and Aintree, in particular, were conveniently situated close to the East Lancashire Trunk Road, giving easy access to the national transport network, making it ideally placed for both manufacturing and distribution processes. Many of the firms which took up residence on these estates, such as Hartleys, Jacobs, Dunlop, and Metal Box, employed high ratios of women on their production lines. The work required dexterity and keen attention to detail - skills which many women had demonstrated in munitions and similar work during the war.

However, traditional areas of female employment continued to be important for migrant women in Liverpool. One consequence of the relaxing of travel restrictions between Britain and Ireland was that British people holidaying in Ireland began to register vacancies for private domestic employment with Ministry of Labour Liaison Officers there.⁸²⁷ Gradually, the role of the Liaison Office was phased out so that by 1947 the *Irish Independent* reported:

⁸²⁷ *British Ministry of Labour recruitment in Dublin*, document signed by signed by Mary Mackie, October 1945, number 5 of 29 under 'Recruitment of nurses and volunteers for nursing in Eire', File LAB 12/284 (National Archives, London).

The number of girls who go to work as domestic servants in English private houses is not easily checked, as most of these arrangements are made between the prospective employer and employee. Girls for factory work are still in keen demand.⁸²⁸

Almost ten years later the report of the commission on emigration found that there remained a demand for domestic labour in Britain, and Irish women were still keen to meet that demand:

As regards female labour, scarcity of domestic servants has brought about some improvement in the conditions and terms of their employment at home. This scarcity is the result of a number of causes, the growing dissatisfaction with the nature of the work itself which has substantially reduced the numbers entering the occupation, the increase in industrialisation at home and the great demand in Britain for female labour both in industry and in domestic service, where the conditions and terms of employment are generally more attractive than in this country, though even there girls are leaving domestic service in great numbers because of the attractions of industrial employment.⁸²⁹

Unfortunately, analysis of the type of work undertaken by Irish migrants in Liverpool during this period is hampered by official recording practices, the County Report for Lancashire using the combined heading 'Irish and Commonwealth'. However, the general migration experience of men and women frequently differed somewhat during this period, for whilst the status of Irish women in Britain was rising due to participation in professional occupations, that of large numbers of Irish male migrants remained low. Working as itinerant labourers they rebuilt war-ravaged Britain, frequently moving from place to place wherever the work took them, sleeping rough in the backs of vans or in poor quality lodging houses and receiving their pay cash-in-hand at the public house from

⁸²⁸ 'Britain Wants Irish Nurses and Miners' in *Irish Independent*, 9 January 1947, p. 5.

⁸²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

the ‘Ganger’.⁸³⁰ Sean, an elderly male migrant taking part in a community video documentary, observed of his working life in Britain, ‘I am a tramp - a working-man tramp. You had to tramp to get work - the best work, I mean. And I *mean* the best. England ain’t done me any harm ...’⁸³¹

Whilst there was work available to men it was not always well paid. This was confirmed by Sheila, whose husband and brother both worked in construction during this period, when she recalled, ‘There was plenty of work - not a lot of money...but it was steady work - always is.’⁸³² As a consequence, many women still found it necessary to take on paid employment to supplement the family income, particularly when there were young children to bring up. But the responsibilities of the wife and mother meant that, very often, low-paid part-time work was all that they could get. As Maureen remembers:

[My youngest child] was born in the January and I went to work in the September. I applied to the hospital [as an Auxiliary Nurse] and if you’d said you had 5 children all under 8 you know, there was no way. So I just put down ‘2 children’ and I got the job. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, 3 x 12 hour shifts - coming home then and feeding the children. [The pay] wasn’t much at all, but it was a help.⁸³³

Bronwen Walter suggests that male Irish migrants’ employment, which was frequently on building sites, isolated them from contact with people outside their immediate community. In contrast, female migrant’s engagement in the lower professions - such as

⁸³⁰ *Arise You Gallant Sweeneys*, documentary film collaboratively produced and owned by all participants in *The Long Distance Gang*, Nottingham, 2009.

⁸³¹ Sean, interviewee, *Arise You Gallant Sweeneys*, 2009.

⁸³² Interview with ‘Sheila’, 15 September 2011.

⁸³³ Interview with ‘Maureen’, 15 September 2011.

teaching and nursing - and in the service sector as domestics, cleaners and caterers, demanded a greater degree of contact not only with members of the host nation but also with members of other migrant communities.⁸³⁴ This is supported by the information provided by the interviewees taking part in this study who spoke of how their work in factories, shops and hospitals saw them engage with native Liverpudlians, and others, every day whilst their husbands' work on building sites amongst teams of other Irish men insulated them from such contact.⁸³⁵ Although women's greater level of contact with members of the host society - frequently on a one-to-one basis - sometimes exposed them to personal discrimination, it may, paradoxically, account for the amicable relations described by interviewees. The fact that male migrants were frequently encountered *en mass*, as 'gangs' of workers, may well have made them appear more of a threat.

For Irish women, the prospect of nursing in post-war Britain remained attractive. The creation of the National Health Service in 1947 saw a rise in demand for health personnel, and the relaxation of migration restrictions by the authorities on both sides of the Irish Sea enabled them to take advantage of the opportunity. The removal of war-time censorship in Eire allowed its promotion in the Irish newspapers, one article in the *Irish Independent* from January 1947 announcing:

English hospitals, seriously under-staffed, have a ready welcome for Irish girls who wish to take up nursing, and salaries are according to the Rushcliffe scale, which represents a considerable advance on nurses' remuneration in this country. The rate at which Irish girls go away has been as high as 50 or 60 a week⁸³⁶

⁸³⁴ Walter, *Exclusions and Inclusions*, p. 6.

⁸³⁵ Interview with 'Maureen', 15 September 2011 and with 'Sheila', 15 September 2011.

⁸³⁶ 'Britain Wants Irish Nurses and Miners' in *Irish Independent*, 9 January 1947, p. 5.

Later the same year the press reported that 12 *per cent* of all hospital nurses in England, Scotland and Wales were born in Eire.⁸³⁷ Indeed, between the years 1948-1951 13 *per cent* of female emigrants declared nursing to be their intended occupation,⁸³⁸ and by 1951 89 *per cent* of Irish-registered nurses working abroad were employed in Britain and Northern Ireland.⁸³⁹ In 1939 the total number of nurses in Britain had stood at 160,000. By 1952 the figure had risen to 245,000.⁸⁴⁰

Just as in the pre-war era, at least part of the attraction lay in the fact that nurses training in Britain received a salary, whilst those training in Ireland were not only unpaid but were required to pay training fees. Advertisements appeared in Irish newspapers promising trainee nurses £225 *per annum* in the first year, rising to £250 in the third year (less £108 deductions for board, lodging and uniform).⁸⁴¹ Couched in these terms, the rates appear quite startlingly high though, in fact, they are comparable with those recommended by the Rushcliffe Committee in 1943 (see **Table 3.10**).

⁸³⁷ 'London Letter', *Irish Independent*, 11 September 1947, p. 6.

⁸³⁸ *CEOPP*, Statistical Appendix, Table 32, p. 323, and p. 127.

⁸³⁹ Yeates, 'Migration and Nursing in Ireland', p.9.

⁸⁴⁰ Geoffrey Rivett, *National Health Service History*, accessed on <http://www.nhshistory-net.Chapter%201.html#Nursing>, 14 October 2012.

⁸⁴¹ Advertisement in *Irish Press*, 30 September 1954, p. 11. Advertisement in *Irish Independent*, 19 June 1956 (no page number) reveals that trainee fever nurses could expect approximately £20 per annum more than those seeking a general qualification. A 48-hour week was worked, and four weeks annual leave granted.

Table 3.10 - Recommended Pay Scales for Nurses, Rushcliffe Committee Report, 1943.⁸⁴²

Staff Grade	Annual Allowance	Salary & Emoluments
Student Nurse - 1 st Year	£ 40	£115-£145
- 2 nd Year	£ 45	
- 3 rd Year	£ 50	
- 4 th Year	£60	
(before State Registered)		
- 4 th Year	£ 70	
(after State Registered)		
(or if on 4 year contract)		
Staff Nurse	£100 rising by £5 per year to £140	£190-£230
Ward Sister	£130 rising by £10 per year to £180	
Qualified Snr Sister Tutor	£240 rising by £15 per year to £350	£380-£470

With regards to hours and conditions, a promotional pamphlet from the era explained that most hospitals allowed at least one day off per week, plus daily off-duty periods, in addition to twenty eight days holiday per year. It went on to announce, ‘More and more hospitals are arranging that their nurses shall not work longer than a 96-hour fortnight.’⁸⁴³

Once again, these conditions adhere to the recommendations made by the Rushcliffe

⁸⁴² In February 1943 the British Ministry of Health, under Lord Rushcliffe, published its *Report of the Nurses Salaries Committee* (London, 1943). This made far-reaching recommendations regarding improvements to training, working conditions and pay scales within the nursing profession. Data for table sourced from ‘Nurses Salaries: Rushcliffe Committee Report’ in *British Medical Journal*, 27 February 1943, p. 264.

⁸⁴³ During the 1920s it was not unusual for nurses to work 71 hours per week on day duty and 84 hours per week on nights. Striving to improve working conditions for her nurses, Martha Roberts - Matron at Liverpool’s Walton Hospital - introduced a 56 hour week. This schedule was considered revolutionary in that it allowed nurses on night duty a meal break in the middle of the night. Improvements to working hours remained ongoing with the Rushcliffe Committee’s recommendations in 1943 and those of the Whitley Council in 1958. See R. White, *Social Change and the Development of the Nursing Profession. A Study of the Poor Law Nursing Service, 1848-1948* (London, 1978), p. 169; Doreen McGiveron, *The Walton Experience: Contributions to Local and National Developments in Health Care, 1915 to 1945*, a paper presented to the Liverpool Medical History Society, 13 February 2002, p. 12, accessed on <http://www.evolve360.co.uk/Data/10/Doc3/14/14McGiveronpdf> , 12 October 2012.

Committee, and improvements continued with the further reduction of hours spent ‘on duty’. In 1957 the working hours of domestic and ancillary staff were reduced to 44 hours per week, and the following year the Whitley Council - the body with responsibility for nursing pay and conditions under the National Health Service - recommended an 88 hour fortnight for nurses.⁸⁴⁴ Whilst rates of pay and working hours saw improvements, other conditions remained restrictive. Discipline was strict and time off duty was limited. This, combined with the fact that residency within hospital accommodation remained compulsory for probationers and charge nurses - and strongly encouraged even amongst ward sisters - meant that they became reliant upon the hospital for social as well as professional needs. In effect, as noted in the oral testimony gathered for this study, the hospital became a replacement family.

Even when the status of the nursing profession began to decline in Britain, the work being perceived as arduous and poorly paid, in Ireland it was still considered a respectable middle-class career for young women.⁸⁴⁵ When, during the 1970s, large numbers of migrants began to return to Ireland, the existence of a ‘disproportionate’ number of professional females amongst their number was noted. This has been cited as ‘incontrovertible evidence’ of the improved status of the thousands of women who had taken advantage of the opportunities nursing in Britain had provided.⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴⁴ Brian Abel-Smith, *A History of the Nursing Profession* (London, 1960), p. 250.

⁸⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, chapters 12-13.

⁸⁴⁶ James A Walsh, ‘Immigration to the Republic of Ireland, 1946-71’, in *Irish Geography*, vol. 12 (1979), p. 109.

Divisions and hierarchies in existence amongst hospitals before the war continued to influence attitudes in the post-war era. Despite amalgamation within the National Health Service, those hospitals which were formerly 'voluntary' charitable establishments attempted to retain their higher status. Correspondingly, those which had been 'municipal' hospitals - originally workhouse infirmaries - struggled to shake off their less elevated reputation. However, the gradual decline of these attitudes is reflected in the fact that Pat commenced her training at the Stanley Hospital and Jean at St Catherine's, each of which had once been 'voluntary' hospitals.⁸⁴⁷

⁸⁴⁷ Although Maureen and Shelia undertook auxiliary nurse training at the Royal Liverpool Hospital, their employment commenced at Mill Road. Pat trained at the Stanley Hospital and later became a midwife at Mill Road, whilst Jean nursed at St Catherine's in Birkenhead.

3.5 POST-POOR LAW AND THE CHALLENGE TO MUTUAL SELF-HELP

The 1951 census revealed that 627,019 natives of Ireland were residing in England and Wales, representing 1.4 *per cent* of the total population. The 1950s influx of migrants meant that ten years later the Irish-born in England and Wales numbered 870,445 or 1.8 *per cent* - almost double the 1931 figure (see **Table 3.11**).

Table 3.11 - Birthplaces of the Population of England and Wales at Selected Censuses, 1911-1961.⁸⁴⁸

Birthplace	1911	1931	1951	1961
England & Wales	34,464,059	38,492,034	41,120,159	42,800,917
Northern Ireland	68,576	70,056	134,965	187,549
Eire	283,204	303,676	471,958	644,398
Ireland (part not stated)	23,545	7,357	20,096	38,498
Elsewhere	1,231,108	1,079,254	2,010,710	2,433,186
Total	36,070,492	39,952,377	43,757,888	46,104,548
(Irish as % of total)	(1.04%)	(0.95%)	(1.43%)	(1.88%)
(Irish as % of non-native)	(23.36%)	(26.09%)	(23.77%)	(26.34%)

⁸⁴⁸ Data sourced from *Census 1961, England and Wales, Birthplace and Nationality Tables* (London, 1964), Table 7, 'Birthplaces of the Population at Selected Census, 1851-1961'.

Table 3.12 - Birthplaces of the Population of Merseyside, 1951.⁸⁴⁹

Birthplace	Number Enumerated	per 1,000 Enumerated
England	1,262,274	913
Wales	30,890	22
Scotland	18,283	13
Ireland	32,231	23
Channel Islands & Isle of Man	4,189	3
Elsewhere	34,576	26
Total	1,382,443	1,000
(Irish as % of Total)	(2.33%)	

Table 3.13 - Birthplaces of the Population of Liverpool Borough, 1961.⁸⁵⁰

Birthplace	Males	Females
England	330,604	363,454
Wales	4,828	6,194
Scotland	3,284	3,416
UK (part not stated)	732	894
Northern Ireland	1,807	1,875
Eire	5,020	6,421
Ireland (part not stated)	284	280
Isle of Man	702	706
Channel Islands	58	64
Elsewhere	9,174	5,953
Total	356,493	389,257
(Irish as % of Total)	(1.99%)	(2.20%)

⁸⁴⁹ Data sourced from Census 1951, County Report, Lancashire (London, 1954), Table H, 'Population by Area of Birthplace: Distribution by Division in which Enumerated - Merseyside', p. civ

⁸⁵⁰ Data sourced from *Census 1961, County Report, Lancashire* (London, 1964), Table 8, p. 59.

Perhaps surprisingly, this trend contrasts with that recorded on Merseyside where, despite its long tradition as an area of high settlement, representation appeared to have declined from 2.3 *per cent* in 1951 to 2.1 *per cent* in 1961 (**Tables 3.12** and **3.13**). However, closer inspection reveals that figures provided in the 1951 census report refer to Merseyside conurbation (including Liverpool, Bootle and surrounding districts on the Lancashire side of the River Mersey, as well as Birkenhead, Wallasey and environs on the Cheshire side), whilst the 1961 figures refer only to Liverpool Borough. This disparity in the size of the catchment areas meant that the considerable relocation of inhabitants of the Irish-dominated city-centre and dockside districts to outlying estates and suburbs during the 1951-1961 intercensal period was not represented, creating the appearance of decline in the city's Irish population. In fact, successive waves of migration had maintained the Irish-born contingent's position as the city's largest minority - albeit a fraction of the proportion seen a century earlier.

By the late 1950s far more highly visible immigration from the British colonies appeared to overshadow that of the Irish. In fact, official statistics for 1959 reveal that the number of Irish entering Britain was almost equal to that of all other migrants combined, for whilst 64,494 workers joined the British National Insurance scheme from the Republic of Ireland, just 30,842 arrived from colonial territories and 35,198 from Commonwealth countries.⁸⁵¹ Although the arrival of West Indian and Asian migrants rendered the Irish less visibly 'foreign', so that they gradually became less of a 'prime target' for racism, they still met with some level of discrimination and hostility, and remained disadvantaged both economically and socially. Reports that throughout the 1950s the

⁸⁵¹ *Sixth Report of the Overseas Migration Board*, XI, 1960-61, Cmnd 1243, p. 13.

sign which read 'No blacks, No dogs, No Irish' appeared in lodging house windows continue, though evidence of this attitude is not reflected in the experience of the women taking part in this study.⁸⁵²

Yet, the traditional sites of Irish residency in Liverpool were changing. Before the Second World War Liverpool's housing situation had already been in crisis; in 1931 it was estimated that the city required the building of 8,550 new homes over the next five years in order to provide for its growing population, to abolish existing overcrowding, and to allow for demolition of old housing stock.⁸⁵³ Liverpool Corporation had duly responded by formulating plans for the construction of new social housing schemes, both within the city and on its outskirts. Suburban developments included Speke (to the south east) where building work began in 1936, and the Brook House housing estate near Huyton (to the east) commenced in 1939. Also near Huyton, the Woolfall Heath estate was newly completed when war broke out.⁸⁵⁴ Land for housing had also been acquired in other districts, but building schemes were shelved at the commencement of war.

Liverpool, as the nation's second port and home of the Atlantic Fleet, saw a convoy set off or arrive in dock every day during the war. It was also home to the headquarters of the Western Approaches Command, strategic base for the Battle of the Atlantic. This made Liverpool a prime target for enemy action. In 1940 alone the city sustained more than 300 bombing raids aimed mainly at her docks, becoming the most heavily blitzed

⁸⁵² Interview with 'Maureen', 15 September 2011, and with 'Sheila', 15 September 2011.

⁸⁵³ Caradog Jones, *The Social Survey of Merseyside No 3*, p.14.

⁸⁵⁴ It was promptly commandeered by the authorities for use as an interment camp for 'enemy aliens' - non-naturalised German and Italian residents of Britain and Northern Ireland - for the duration. B. Barton, *Northern Ireland and the Second World War* (Belfast, 1995), p. 30.

city outside London. In May 1941 just one week of bombing claimed nearly 2,000 lives, yet reports of Liverpool's suffering were repressed for reasons of security and propaganda. Liverpool, Bootle and adjoining areas of Litherland and Crosby had almost 90,000 houses destroyed or seriously damaged. In the dockside districts of Bootle 80 *per cent* of houses were affected by bombs, blast or fire.⁸⁵⁵ In Liverpool alone 51,000 people were left homeless.⁸⁵⁶ By the end of hostilities vast tracts of the city lay devastated, the areas of high Irish occupation close to the docks being particularly affected. With almost half of all dwellings in the entire metropolitan area damaged it became clear that the housing situation was now desperate (**Figure 13**).

In the post-war years Liverpool Corporation recommenced its ambitious housing projects. The new housing provided by corporation schemes promised a standard of living far higher than many working-class people could have hoped to experience previously. However, the benefits of smart new housing and improved tenant rights were offset by new problems. Pre-war schemes had seen 14,000 residents - 15 *per cent* of the city's total population - re-housed, many removed to far-flung suburban estates devoid of shops, schools, churches or transport links. This fragmentation and dispersal of long-established communities, both native and Irish-born, made it difficult to maintain family and neighbourhood links. Moreover, upon reaching maturity, the children of Corporation

⁸⁵⁵ S. C. Leslie (Ministry of Home Security), 'This Was Your Victory' in *Bombers Over Merseyside: The Authoritative Record of the Blitz, 1940-41* (Liverpool, 1943), p. 13.

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 16.

tenants were denied housing within their family neighbourhoods, further contributing to the breakdown of kinship groups.⁸⁵⁷



Figure 13 - Bomb-damaged house in Canterbury Street, Liverpool, 1946.⁸⁵⁸

Post-war, the combined affects of bomb damage and the recommencement of Corporation mass clearance ensured further dispersal. Having borne the brunt of the blitz due to their proximity to the docks, the Irish-dominated Vauxhall and Scotland Road districts were particularly affected. Earmarked for redevelopment, these neighbourhoods were broken up and the residents scattered to the numerous suburban housing estates

⁸⁵⁷ Madeline McKenna, 'The suburbanization of the working-class population of Liverpool between the wars' in *Social History*, vol. 16 (1991), pp 173-89.

⁸⁵⁸ Canterbury Street, 1946 image accessed on <http://streetsofliverpool.co.uk/Canterbury-street-1946> (5 June 2011).

which remained poorly connected and located far from all that was familiar. Their distance from the waterfront employment market, paucity of public transport links, and the relatively high cost of travel combined to make commuting between home and work problematic. For men - no longer able to present themselves at the hiring stands twice each day - casual dockside employment became impossible.⁸⁵⁹ For women the problems were two-fold since their low earning potential could not accommodate the additional travel expense, and the extra time spent in travel impacted on domestic and family duties which were still perceived as primarily a woman's responsibility.

With regards to community, though a large number had undoubtedly experienced poor housing standards, material comforts had often been considered less important than the support structures provided by family, friends and neighbours.⁸⁶⁰ This enforced relocation - with little or no say in the choice of location - shattered the networks of mutual support which had been so crucial to survival. The community breakdown was compounded by the loss of informal meeting places - where existing links might be reinforced and new ones formed - since lessons from the pre-war years had not been learned and the provision of local amenities still failed to keep pace with housing development. In some cases housing estates were inhabited for up to ten years before shops, schools, public houses and other public facilities were completed. Not only did this bring extra inconvenience and added expense in accessing amenities outside the immediate residential areas, but contributed to the severing of bonds of community solidarity and the collapse of support networks, creating for many a sense of dislocation

⁸⁵⁹ Baines, 'Merseyside in the British Economy', pp 65-66.

⁸⁶⁰ See H. Shimmin's reported conversation with an old woman who preferred the goodwill of neighbours to more comfortable lodgings (Part One).

and isolation. Despite this, clearance of inner-city neighbourhoods continued throughout the 1950s and '60s. Protest at the wholesale destruction of the old and familiar in favour of the sanitised and impersonal was expressed in the lyrics of a popular local song of the era:

...We'll miss the 'Mary Ellens' and me Dad will miss the docks
And me Gran will miss the wash house where she washed me Grandad's socks...

...They've pulled down Paddy's Market where me Ma once had a stall,
And soon them picks and shovels will be through our back yard wall...

...From Bootle to the Dingle you'll hear the same old cry,
Stop messing round with Liverpool at least until I die,
Don't wanna go to Kirkby, to Skelmersdale or Speke,
Don't wanna go from all I know in Back Buchanan Street.⁸⁶¹

The promise of a new house and updated facilities seems to have been cold comfort for many. The authorities were also keen for a return to 'normality' in the post-war period, part of which involved a return of women to the home. Fearful that having let the genie out of the bottle they were unable to master it, they turned to the Victorian ideal which portrayed woman as 'the angel of the home', and re-branded her 'the modern housewife'. With the promise of labour-saving technology and every modern convenience, domesticity was idealised in the press, cinema and on television throughout the 1950s (see **Figure 14**).

⁸⁶¹ Harry and Gordon Dison, *Back Buchanan Street* (original words and music, c1965, additional words and music by The Mersey Wreckers). One of 3,000 entries submitted to a BBC TV competition to find a topical song, judged by Sydney Carter, Geoffrey Beaumont and Yvonne Littlewood, it was chosen as one of several winners. Named after a back street off Catherine Street near the city centre, the song voiced the feelings of countless inner-city communities destroyed by progressive town planners throughout the 1950s and 1960s.



Figure 14 - The Dream: 'The Modern Kitchen', 1950s advertisement.⁸⁶²

But, contrary to its portrayal in the popular media, life for the majority of people in 1950s Britain was not all 'Hotpoint', 'Hoover' and gleaming 'Formica'. Since the 1930s had brought economic depression and the 1940s wartime shortages, many were long accustomed to humble living conditions; the 'austerity measures', rationing and housing shortage of the early 1950s simply promised more of the same (see **Figure 15**).

⁸⁶² The Dream - The Modern Kitchen, 1950s advertisement accessed on <http://www.advertisingarchives.co.uk/details/54518/1/Magazine-Advert/Leisure-Kitchens> (12 February 2012).



Figure 15 - The Reality: ‘Going to the Wash House’, Liverpool, 1955. ⁸⁶³

In recalling his childhood in post-war Liverpool, film-maker Terence Davies remarked, ‘I hated Thursdays - that was the day my mother went to the washhouse. We only had one set of curtains and the house looked so bare and empty. She worked so very hard.’⁸⁶⁴ In interview, Irish women who arrived in Liverpool during this period remembered their home-life experiences in a similar way. Sheila described people’s acceptance of poor conditions and facilities now considered primitive:

⁸⁶³ ‘Liverpool Women on the way to the Wash-house’, 20th Century Images, accessed on <http://www.liverpoolpicturebook.com/2012/02/liverpools-wash-houses.html> (12 February 2012).

⁸⁶⁴ Terence Davies, Honorary Professor of Media and Communication, University of Liverpool, Inaugural Lecture, 22 July 2010.

There was the church there, and 10 little houses - little terraced houses...no bathroom, no inside toilet. But that didn't bother you, 'cause that's how you grew up. That's what people had...it wasn't out of the ordinary.⁸⁶⁵

Maureen also described how she, her husband and their growing family lived in one rented room with very little space and no 'mod cons':

There was no room to hang out the nappies or anything else. There was a mangle and I used that, and my husband put a line up...and dried them that way. [...] We stayed there from 1959 until 1964, and by that time I had three children in one room.⁸⁶⁶

Meanwhile, Maggie reflected on the implications of her decision to remain at home once her children came along:

I don't regret it. I was happy to be at home. I mean, maybe I didn't get brand new furniture in the home - things had to come in its own time - but I wasn't bothered over that sort of thing.⁸⁶⁷

Family ties were also maintained by the arrival of new migrants. Following patterns established many years before, Irish migrants continued to take in relatives and friends as they arrived. Frequently it was the female members of a family who provided homes for new arrivals, providing support and guidance during their early days in a new and unfamiliar country.⁸⁶⁸ Indeed, Louise Ryan stresses the importance of family support structures amongst migrants in understanding patterns of migration, settlement,

⁸⁶⁵ Interview with 'Sheila', 15 September 2011.

⁸⁶⁶ Interview with 'Maureen', 15 September 2011.

⁸⁶⁷ Interview with 'Maggie', 6 October 2011, used with permission.

⁸⁶⁸ Lennon, McAdam and O'Brien, *Across the Water*, pp 24-6.

employment and links with 'home' since they depend upon, and reinforce, links between migrants and non-migrants.⁸⁶⁹ Just as the Monaghan sisters established their own transnational support network some fifty years earlier, evidence of the maintenance of familial bonds - migrant with migrant and migrant with non-migrant – is found in the testimonies of the 1950s migrants interviewed for this study.

Examples of both the receiving of assistance as new arrivals, and its provision once established in the host society, demonstrate how the chain of reciprocity is continued. Maureen originally joined her sisters in Croydon, and later - when she and her husband arrived in Liverpool - they lodged with his brother and sister-in-law for the first six months.⁸⁷⁰ Similarly, Maggie initially lived and worked with relatives at their public house in London before moving to Liverpool where her sister lived and had arranged employment.⁸⁷¹ Kathleen lived with her mother's aunt and found work through her contacts, and Jean stayed with her brother and his wife.⁸⁷² Once established, Maureen provided accommodation for her newly arrived brother and, later, for her husband's brother and his wife.⁸⁷³ In this way, areas with higher levels of migrant concentration were established and maintained through the workings of familial support networks.

⁸⁶⁹ Louise Ryan, 'Migrant Women, Social Networks and Motherhood: The experiences of Irish nurses in Britain' in *Sociology*, 41 (2007), pp 295-312.

⁸⁷⁰ Interview with 'Mary', 15 September 2011, used with permission.

⁸⁷¹ Interview with 'Maggie', 6 October 2011, used with permission.

⁸⁷² Interviews with 'Kathleen', 15 September 2011, and with 'Jean', 6 October 2011, used with permission.

⁸⁷³ Interview with 'Maureen', 15 September 2011, used with permission.

Meanwhile, just as in earlier generations, post-war migrant women maintained strong familial links of responsibility with those who remained at home.⁸⁷⁴ Although in interview several women spoke of providing financial assistance in the form of remittances - particularly before they were married - this was by no means the only form of support they provided.⁸⁷⁵ Several told of returning home to provide domestic and nursing care for relatives. For example, as a young woman Maureen was called back from Croydon to care for her sick mother, and Maggie regularly travelled home to provide domestic help for her father and, later, nursing care for her bachelor brother when he was elderly and in his final illness.⁸⁷⁶

This indicated that family remained important but, as the city was developed and communities dispersed, opportunities for more collective mutual aid diminished.

⁸⁷⁴ Like the Monaghan sisters, who juggled household and family responsibilities in order to provide regular domestic help for their bachelor brother in Ireland (discussed in Chapter II), post-war migrant women's engagement in 'transnational communities' sometimes meant demands were placed upon them from both sides of the Irish Sea.

⁸⁷⁵ Interview with 'Kathleen', 15 September 2011, and with 'Maggie', 6 October 2011, used with permission.

⁸⁷⁶ Interview with 'Mary', 15 September 2011, and with 'Maggie', 6 October 2011, used with permission.

CONCLUSION

The World-wide economic crisis of the 1930s effectively halted Irish migration to the USA, redirecting the main flow towards Britain. In Northern Ireland, the greater scale of industrial development and larger manufacturing base presented opportunities for female employment, resulting in declining migration figures. In Eire, however, a growing number of women were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the narrow view of womanhood presented to them by the church/state coalition. In turning to migration they demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the *status quo*, and their unwillingness to conform to the restricted role allotted to them. Although economic pressures and job shortages in Britain meant the presence of male migrants stirred resentment amongst the host society, female migrants attracted less hostility, largely due to the 'invisible' nature of their work.

The outbreak of the Second World War presented Irish women with further opportunity for migration. The authorities in Northern Ireland implemented schemes for the recruitment of female labour to the British war effort. In Eire, despite officially adopting neutral status, recruitment into Britain's armed services, factories and hospitals was not merely tolerated but sanctioned. In both cases, alongside those who opted to work directly for the British war effort were significant numbers who continued to work in more traditional roles in domestic service and similar fields vacated by British women conscripted into war work.

In the post-war years, British manufacturing increased its employment of women; even in Liverpool, where manufacturing had never formed a large part of the local economy, production grew and the newly operational industrial estates targeted the female workforce. Ostensibly due to their greater dexterity and attention to detail, in fact women were largely preferred by employers as cheap labour. This, however, allowed these women to make important contributions to the family income.

Throughout this era there is evidence for both migration systems theory and network theory at work via pre-existing contact and support structures, formal and informal. Through these networks information was disseminated and practical assistance received, influencing and facilitating migration in a self-perpetuating pattern. This, in turn, enabled the workings of the neo-classical theory 'push and pull' model, the relative benefits of home and host societies being weighed and the decision to migrate made accordingly.

However, despite acting as a safety valve for a society unable to provide adequate employment, housing or social care, migration represented an embarrassment to the independent Irish authorities. Having failed to establish a Eutopian independent state, and faced with the humiliation of a population dwindling largely due to the high rate of migration, church and state authorities chose to seek a scapegoat rather than admit their faults. Consequently, female migrants were regularly portrayed in the press as 'silly girls' who abandoned their duty towards their nation and their religion in favour of the tawdry glitter proffered by the former colonial ruler. Even the report of the Commission

on Migration and Other Population Problems failed to effectively identify the root cause of the mass migration of the 1950s, much less prescribe a decisive solution to the problems.

In 1950s Liverpool, as elsewhere in Britain, the growing number of migrants from Commonwealth countries presented a far more 'visible' element in British society, rendering Irish migrants less 'visible'. At the same time, Liverpool's gradual economic decline made the city less attractive to new Irish migrants, whilst the clearance and dispersal of dockland neighbourhoods - the scene of high levels of Irish occupation for well over a century - saw the established Liverpool-Irish become a vanishing community, absorbed into a more general 'Liverpudlian' identity.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this investigation was to explore the challenges which faced Irish women migrants in Liverpool during an era of significant change, and to assess the ways in which those challenges were met, thereby arriving not only at a better understanding of female migrant experience but also contributing to the wider history of the Irish Diaspora.

The range of challenges faced by Irish migrant women in Liverpool was diverse; some (such as the catastrophe of the Great Famine) were experienced in common with their fellow countrymen, whilst others (such as expressions of anti-Irish feeling) were faced alongside their fellow migrants. Some challenges (such as poverty) were endured by large sections of the working classes, whilst others (like gender discrimination) were shared with other women. Similarly, the ways in which these problems were met and, in some cases, overcome, were varied. Some were endured with quiet fortitude, some prompted action from individuals or as a group, and others attracted national attention resulting in wide-sweeping change.

One of the greatest challenges Irish migrants - male and female - faced in Britain was racial prejudice. The 1836 government enquiry into the condition of the poor in Ireland, and the ensuing Irish Poor Law of 1838, provide evidence that unfavourable British attitudes towards the Irish people, and Irish migrants in particular, were already long-established well before the onset of the Great Famine in 1845. Ideology relating to nationhood, race and religion combined in representations of the 'British' (in reality, the

English) national character, which was defined as Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, with the Irish - presented as Celtic and Catholic - providing a convenient (if inaccurate) binary opposite. Ireland's rural and largely pre-industrial economy was perceived as 'backward' - even primitive - when compared with 'progressive', urban and industrialised England.⁸⁷⁷ Often portrayed as coarse-mannered simpletons, happy to dwell in hovels along with their animals, Irish migrants were not only deemed culpable for their own misery but accused of dragging down the living standards and wages of their English neighbours. In this way the Irish in Britain came to be perceived as an internal 'other' whose outlook and lifestyle was considered a threat to the established social order; marginalised and stigmatised, they were made the scapegoat for every conceivable problem.

It was from this standpoint that many viewed the poverty of Irish migrant communities in urban slums and saw only idleness, imposture and crime. Liverpool's position as the primary point of entry into Britain from Ireland ensured it received and maintained a disproportionately large migrant population, particularly during the crisis caused by the Great Famine. Their presence in such high numbers, and the impact of that presence, meant that Liverpool was frequently at the extreme end of sentiments apparent in other areas of Irish settlement such as Glasgow and London.

Such attitudes were to affect the 'slummy' growing up in the courts and cellars as well as the new arrival as they stepped from the steamer. For women this impacted in manifold ways; they were barred from employment in certain households and accused of dishonest

⁸⁷⁷ See MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain*, p. 53.

applications for charity. They were harried when they turned to life on the streets and, finally, they had impressed upon them the great burden their imprisonment placed on the public purse.

Although racial prejudice affected both men and women - obstructing their access to employment, poor law provision and charity assistance - women faced the additional challenge of gender discrimination. This imposed restrictions on their actions and their access to resources, coloured their representation in contemporary accounts and official reports, and denied them a voice in the historical record. As independent, enterprising, hard-working women providing for their own needs and those of their families they presented an image at odds with representations of the social ideal.

The Irish case was unique amongst European patterns of migration in that men and women migrated at a similar rate, with a high representation of the young and unmarried amongst female migrants. Migrating as individuals rather than as part of a family group, large numbers of Irish women sought employment outside the home as a means of supporting themselves and, very often, their families in Ireland. In Liverpool, the prevalence of casualism within the male employment market meant competition was strong, with few men obtaining more than part-time employment. Even where steady employment could be found competition over wages brought migrants into conflict with native labourers. As a result, few families enjoyed the full employment of a male breadwinner bringing in a steady wage, but rather found themselves dependent upon the earnings of the women and children.

Yet, Liverpool's concentration on her maritime economy provided a narrow range of opportunities for female wage-earners. What work was available was largely low status, and the large number available for that work ensured that it was poorly paid. The city's rising middle class of merchants demanded a steady supply of domestic servants, creating a market for female migrant labour which they readily moved into, though attitudes surrounding race, religion and class demanded that they be strictly monitored and controlled. Alternative forms of employment were pursued by married women or those with other dependents, in particular the keeping of lodging houses and street trading becoming niche occupations amongst Irish migrant women, whilst prostitution was resorted to by those with few alternative choices. As highly visible vocations, they brought women into the public gaze, and into conflict with Victorian middle-class ideas surrounding the role of women and their place within the family and wider society. The moralistic attitude towards those who did not conform to this restrictive ideal was compounded by anti-Irish feeling and together made migrant women the focus of public criticism.

Whilst, at the turn of the twentieth century, many areas of the country witnessed the rapid decline of domestic service and the opening of new opportunities in factories, offices and shops, the situation in Liverpool was somewhat different. Although there was expansion in manufacturing - particularly in the electrical, food and toy industries - this remained auxiliary to the city's main interests which still lay in maritime commerce centred on its extensive system of docks and warehouses. This continued over-reliance upon the docks within the male employment market, its system of casual recruitment and the resultant

pattern of boom and bust in household economies, ensured that large numbers of families remained dependent upon female earnings.

With few alternatives available to them, domestic service remained the dominant form of female employment in Liverpool far longer than in other areas. This provided an outlet for considerable numbers of young Irish women, many of whom faced few alternative prospects but perpetually unwaged domestic service within their family home. Seeking escape, they unwittingly augmented the already plentiful female workforce, their sheer numbers ensuring wages were kept low, conditions unfavourable, and opportunities for advancement few.

The combination of low wages and squalid living conditions made Liverpool's life expectancy rate one of the worst in the country. In response to crippling poverty a plethora of charitable organisations arose, though their door was often closed to the outsider who failed to meet the qualifying criteria. Similarly, poor law provision was restricted through settlement rules so that Irish applicants faced the prospect of prison or removal back to Ireland. Those who sought to circumvent these restrictions faced the full wrath of the law and were reviled in the press.

Trapped in the downward spiral of poverty, Liverpool's Irish migrants were frequently portrayed as improvident and undeserving authors of their own fate, even by their supporters. A whole industry sprang up around the provision of charity for the poor and care for the vulnerable through secular and denominational societies and organisations,

and still the problem of poverty seemed undiminished. It was not until the years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century that their condition drew the attention of social reformers like Rathbone who highlighted the injustice of their plight and campaigned for changes in legislation. Even then, vast numbers - amongst them 90 *per cent* of all working women - found themselves excluded from the benefits widely represented as being extended to all.

Since Irishness and Catholicism were usually presumed to be synonymous, criticism of the one reflected on the other. In response the Catholic Church set about tackling the social and economic limitations imposed on its flock, rescuing, organising and educating through the founding of churches, schools, homes, philanthropic societies and social clubs until their number rivalled that of all others together. Nevertheless, the best efforts of the charities and self-help schemes could not meet every need, and those who fell through the cracks still faced the grim prospect of the workhouse or starvation.

In response, migrant women drew together, sharing resources with family and friends and forming neighbourhood networks of mutual aid in times of sickness, unemployment or bereavement. But the mutually-supportive sisterhood could just as easily provide means and opportunity for murder and insurance fraud. In either case the women revealed themselves to be enterprising agents in a largely hostile world.

These bonds of solidarity were not merely localised, for the influence of trans-national support networks is evident in the experience of the Monaghan sisters who left their

family farm to take up domestic service in Liverpool at the turn of the twentieth century. Typical of so many women's experience during this era, it illustrates Louise Ryan's assertions regarding the importance of migrants' links with home in influencing prospective migrants, financing chain migration and accessing employment. Furthermore, the sisters' long-distance housekeeping for an aging bachelor brother also illustrates Ryan's observation that these support networks frequently burdened women with the obligations and responsibilities of 'chains of care'.⁸⁷⁸

It might be said that the relating of this information from mother to daughter is an example of women constructing the story of their own migration experience. In choosing to recall, to recount, and to hand down this information to her daughter, Bella reveals a desire to identify herself as part of the Irish Diaspora and, simultaneously, establish herself as an individual within that mass of migrant people. The fact that this information was passed on further - to her granddaughter, her great-granddaughter and beyond - shows the grounding of the present in the past, and of the migrant community with its source. In the words of Bronwen Walter, 'it may be that through telling stories to their children, the second generation, that migrant women can remythologise their past as a counter to their own rootlessness.'⁸⁷⁹

Although substantial numbers of Irish migrants continued to come to Liverpool in the inter and post-war periods, anti-Irishness remained until Irish migrant communities began

⁸⁷⁸ Louise Ryan, 'Migrant Women, Social Networks and Motherhood: The Experience of Irish nurses in Britain' in *Sociology*, vol. 41 (2007), pp 295-312.

⁸⁷⁹ Bronwen Walter's review of Scott Brewster, Virginia Crossman, Fiona Becket and David Alderson (eds), *Ireland in Proximity: history, gender, space* in *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, vol. 8, no. 3 (September 2001), pp 321-323.

to disperse. Throughout the inter-war period traditional fields of migrant employment, such as unskilled manual labour and domestic service, remained available alongside new opportunities in Britain's growing manufacturing base. But, once again, Liverpool's divergence from national trends meant openings in manufacturing were few. As pressure increased on the Liverpool employment market, where the effects of the economic depression were strongly felt, expressions of anti-Irish feeling again came to the fore.

Whilst Britain had long represented a convenient destination for Irish migrants, the 1930s saw its importance increase. The tightening of United States immigration legislation from 1921 onwards saw applicants subjected to a test to determine if they were likely to become a public burden, and from 1929 they were required to prove they possessed sufficient financial capital, or employable skills, to support themselves. Introduced as a result of large-scale unemployment and deprivation in the wake of the Great Depression, such measures combined to make the United States a less attractive option. Conversely, until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, citizens of both Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State enjoyed unrestricted access to Britain, requiring no visa or identity papers. As a result, a far greater proportion of those leaving Ireland during the period 1930s-50s headed for Britain.⁸⁸⁰

Although the Second World War caused both the British and Irish governments to regulate and restrict movement between the two countries, it still provided increased opportunities for migrant women. Some joined the auxiliary forces or became nurses, some went to the munitions factories, and others filled the breach left in domestic service

⁸⁸⁰ *CEOPP, Reports* (Dublin, 1955), p.117.

by British women's conscription. When the next census was taken in 1951 it revealed that approximately 16.5 *per cent* of Irish-born women residents in Britain were 'professionals', the majority of them nurses and midwives. Their representation in this field was to remain disproportionately high until the end of the century.

But if the war provided 'liberating' opportunities for women, these were countered by a double workload since women were expected to continue in their traditional roles in addition to taking up war work. Although women stepped into what were considered male roles in the workplace, on the whole they did not receive equal pay. Therefore, whilst Irish women found in Britain a wider range of opportunities than they could hope for at home in Ireland, suggestions that they experienced increased 'freedom' are somewhat optimistically wide of the mark.

Interviews conducted with women who arrived in Liverpool during the late 1940s and 50s facilitated a consideration of their post-war experience in the light of the academic theories of Diner and Nolan which relate to nineteenth-century migration to America. Although none of the women appear to have consciously chosen to leave Ireland in order to improve their marriage prospects, all but one did marry. Similarly, whilst only two women cited better employment prospects as their original incentive, they had all felt that Liverpool offered more than was on offer in Ireland. In fact, the factors influencing their migration were diverse and complex; they involved the pressures of living with extended family, or the seemingly contradictory desire for adventure with the security of well-worn family pathways, or the need to lighten the financial burden of the family.

These first-hand personal accounts of post-war migration to Liverpool show the familiar pattern of the availability of male employment, but at low wages. Families still relied on women's earnings to 'make ends meet', and the work available to them remained largely low-status, poorly paid and within a narrow range of opportunities. Frequently engaged in the service sector, they cleaned and cared for their adopted city. These women assumed responsibility for earning at least part of the family income in addition to managing households and rearing children. Their importance within trans-national support networks was significant as they held families together, often across national boundaries, facilitating chain migration through the provision of financial assistance to prospective migrants along with practical support and advice to new arrivals. Their decision to leave Ireland changed their lives, and the lives of their families, and the contribution they made to the Irish economy through remittances was considerable.

Throughout this era Irish migrants in Britain faced open expressions of prejudice and discrimination. These attitudes diminished in the post-war period when, with the arrival of other more highly visible migrant groups, the Irish began to appear less alien. Perhaps it is no coincidence that this shift came at a time when long-standing Irish neighbourhoods were being dispersed and community networks fragmented, contributing to the fading of a distinct Irish migrant identity and its merging into a more general one of 'Liverpudlian'.

Such changes highlight the importance of personal migration narrative. As Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland, said:

Perhaps it is no harm either to remind ourselves that it is valuable to mentally place ourselves in the experience of those who, without the sustenance of property or land, expressed great love and solidarity for each other in the most difficult time, in the most difficult of circumstances, helped each other not only to survive but to make new lives in new settings, lives that carried the memory of what had been left, even the fantasies it suggested, but also lives that anticipated all the promise of future possibilities, possibilities they would create for themselves, for others and for future generations.⁸⁸¹

Irish women formed an important part of the migrant history of Liverpool, yet one which has been overlooked too frequently. In contemporary accounts their contribution was relegated to the 'private' realm, their experience passed over in favour of the more visible 'public' arena of male activity. Yet they did indeed leave all that was familiar, they helped each other to survive under the most difficult of circumstances, and they hoped to build better futures for their families. Their responses to the challenges of poverty and prejudice - in its many forms - impacted on the lives of their families and communities and resonated across the city and the Irish Sea.

⁸⁸¹ Higgins, *Reflecting on Irish Migration*.

APPENDIX I

LIVERPOOL CASE STUDY -
FEMALE IRISH MIGRANTS OF THE 1940s AND 1950s

METHODOLOGY AND BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

METHODOLOGY

When planning to conduct interviews as part of this study, approval was sought from the University of Liverpool's Ethic Committee. In accordance with their guidelines and recommendations, the privacy of interviewees has been preserved throughout this work by the use of pseudonyms and the removal of other identifying data. This study subsequently received ethical clearance from the University of Liverpool.

In order to identify women willing to participate in interviews, several avenues were explored with some yielding more fruit than others. Making use of existing networks, announcements were placed in the newsletters of the Broadgreen and Alder Hey Hospital Nurses' Association, and on the website of the Liverpool Royal Infirmary Nurses' League. These outlined the area of study and invited the participation of Irish women who had nursed, or undertaken nursing training, at these hospitals during the 1940s and 50s. The response was extremely disappointing, only one reply being received from a woman who believed her aunt had trained at the Royal. She later withdrew from the study when, on examining family papers more closely, she discovered her received version of events to be incorrect.

During the research process it became apparent that a hierarchical order existed amongst Liverpool's hospitals during the inter-war era, which was linked to class and racial discrimination in the admission of nurse probationers. To a certain extent the influence of this hierarchy, and the practices which supported it, continued to the post-war and

early NHS era. Consequently, very few Irish women were accepted for training at the Royal - and several other Liverpool hospitals of a similar standing - during the years under consideration in this study. The discovery of this went some considerable way to explain the lack of response to my advertisements.

Contacts made through a women's oral history workshop proved more productive. Invitations to participate were issued, and those who expressed an interest received a written explanation of what the study involved and how the collected material was to be used. Six of the respondents fitted the study's target group criteria, and arrangements were made for interviews to take place at a location convenient to them.

In considering the form of interviews, a formal question and answer session was considered too rigid for this study since it would restrict topics covered and inhibit full and detailed responses. On the other hand, a totally free-ranging narrative approach was rejected on the grounds that it might become too digressive and lack focus, especially given the breadth of subject matter and the lengthy time-frame. Therefore, a semi-structured approach was taken with a view to striking a balance between the interviewer as 'active agent' and 'neutral questioner' in the production of this oral history material.⁸⁸²

As older women from working-class backgrounds, several respondents were mildly bemused at the thought that their life experience might be of any interest to historians; though willing to share their memories, they were concerned that they 'had nothing special to tell'. Therefore, before interviews commenced, the women were encouraged to consider their migration experience in relation to broad subject areas such as home life in

⁸⁸² Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, p. 92.

Ireland, family attitudes towards migration, comparison of employment opportunities, the host society's attitude towards migrants, and migrants' responses to their new environment. However, since the aim was to record the woman's individual experience in her own words, care was taken not to press a particular topic on her or restrict her to those broad subjects suggested.

Once the interview commenced, opening questions were used to establish place of birth and family background, the participant then being allowed to tell her own story in her own way, with brief questions being used to encourage detail or to clarify a point. Towards the end of the interview session the participant was asked to consider the maintenance of Irish cultural identity amongst migrants and its transmission to the next generation, and to comment on her overall experience in Liverpool.

Each woman was issued with a transcript of her interview for inspection and editing, and written permission was obtained for use of the material. Individual 'feedback' sessions were arranged where participants were invited to discuss the interview process and any issues arising from participation in the project. Each received a letter of thanks for her participation.

Transcripts were then examined and compared with each other, and with available literature, for confirmation or contradiction.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON INTERVIEWEES

‘Maggie’

Growing up on a small farm in Co. Cavan, Maggie was ten years old when her mother died. Her eldest sister (who was fourteen) left school to keep house for their father and to care for her five siblings. A few years later this sister entered domestic service in Liverpool. In 1949, at the age of eighteen, Maggie left home to work as a domestic for relatives who ran a public house in London. She remained there for three years before being recommended by her sister’s employer for a job with his elderly neighbour. Maggie took up her new job in the southern suburbs of Liverpool where she kept house for an elderly lady, earning something in the region of £3 10s per week.

While attending the Shamrock Social Club in Liverpool Maggie met a young man, also from Co. Cavan. He worked on building sites in and around the Liverpool area. Their courtship lasted for three years and they married when she was aged twenty five. Initially, Maggie continued in her domestic employment, she and her husband ‘living-in’ with her employer. Some years later, after their employer died, they made an offer on her house and purchased it. They went on to have two children, and Maggie chose to be a full-time housewife and mother rather than take paid employment outside the home, showing evidence of considerable social progress.

Maintaining contact with family in Ireland was important to Maggie. She sent money to her father when she could, and made regular visits home. Her eldest brother migrated to London to work on the railways, and another brother inherited the family farm. He never married and, in later years, Maggie's visits became more frequent as he grew older and fell ill. In 2004 she and her husband bought a holiday home in Ireland, but have no plans to return permanently.

'Kathleen'

Kathleen was born on a farm near Castlebar, Co. Mayo. One of seven children, she was five years old when her father died. Although neighbours helped with gathering the crops, her mother struggled to run the farm and bring up her young family alone. As the children grew a little older Kathleen's mother took on employment as a cleaner at a nearby convent. In order to ease her mother's load, Kathleen left school aged fourteen and found employment as a domestic for an elderly lady who lived some miles from the family home. She earned approximately £1 per week and, with the aid of a bicycle her mother acquired for her, managed to get home for 24 hours at weekends.

When she was sixteen Kathleen visited relatives in Liverpool in order to meet up with her brother who was on leave from National Service in the British Army, his leave being insufficient to allow him to reach the family home in Co. Mayo. After two visits she was persuaded that Liverpool offered greater earning potential and would enable her to contribute more to the family income. She stayed in the city and, with the aid of family

contacts, found employment as an office junior at Dunlop's factory in Speke. Gradually working her way up to the post of wages clerk, she remained in work until her marriage twelve or thirteen years later.

Whilst still single, Kathleen and a work colleague did voluntary work as hostesses at Atlantic House, a social club for seafarers in Liverpool which was run by the Catholic Church.

In Liverpool Kathleen met and married a young man from Ireland who worked as an engineer in the Merchant Navy, serving with the Elder-Dempster Line. When their first child was born he left the sea and joined a firm of lift engineers. They settled on the northern outskirts of Liverpool where they raised two children. When the children reached school age Kathleen became the manageress of a dry cleaners shop just a few doors away from her home. With the help of a neighbour, who picked up the children from school, she was able to fit her work around family life. After three years she left the shop and found work on the evening shift at Jacob's biscuit factory. She remained there until 1981.

'Sheila'

Sheila was born on a farm in Co. Wexford. When in her teens, a school friend who had gone to Liverpool wrote asking Sheila to join her, so she did. One month later their money ran out and they looked for work. Sheila and her friend found employment with

the Meccano factory on Edge Lane where metal toys were made - Meccano engineering kits, Dinky cars and Hornby train sets. Sheila and her friend attended dances in Liverpool and the surrounding area, and on one of these dance excursions she met a young man originally from Co. Mayo. They began courting, and married a few years later. She continued work at the Meccano factory until her first child was born.

In the early days, Sheila and her husband took in several relatives newly arrived from Ireland - first her own brother, and later her husband's brother and sister-in-law. Sheila and her husband had five children in total. He was employed in the building trade and though work was plentiful the money was not. When the children reached school age Sheila took employment with Social Services, sorting clothes for children going into foster care. In the 1960s she trained as an auxiliary nurse at the Royal Liverpool Hospital, moving on to Mill Road Maternity Hospital and then to the Liverpool Women's Hospital. She worked nights, two twelve-hour shifts per week, earning £5 2s 6d (including allowance for unsociable hours). She retired aged fifty five. She is now widowed.

'Pat'

One of five children, Pat was born in 1934 on a mixed farm in Co. Waterford. She remembered her school being visited by representatives of religious houses and by hospital matrons who hoped to recruit girls who were about to leave. Initially she was undecided whether to become a teacher like her mother, or a nurse like her sister.

Eventually she chose to become a nurse and in 1953 - at the age of nineteen - followed her sister to Liverpool's Stanley Hospital to commence training. Upon completion of three years general training she gained a year's experience as a Staff Nurse, then took specialist training in midwifery.

Initially, nurses were required to 'live in' and conditions in the nurses' home were very strict. Roman Catholics had to obtain special permission to leave the premises before breakfast to attend early morning mass at a local church. Later, arrangements were made for a priest to come and say mass in an improvised chapel on site. Pat remained in hospital accommodation until 1980 when she bought a house of her own. Though her sister married and had children, Pat never did, stating simply, 'I was married to my profession, I think'. She gave over thirty years' service at Mill Road maternity hospital before retiring in 1991.

'Maureen'

Maureen was born in 1936 and grew up on a farm in Co. Mayo. In 1954 she joined her three sisters who had migrated to Croydon, Surrey, but in 1957 their mother fell ill and it was decided that Maureen should return home to care for her. In 1958 Maureen married a young man from Co. Mayo who worked as a joiner, and moved into his parent's house. These domestic arrangements were not ideal and, while pregnant with her first child, Maureen and her husband decided to migrate to Liverpool. Upon arrival in Liverpool the young couple lodged with his brother and sister-in-law, remaining there for six months

until the birth of their baby. They then found separate accommodation in a flat - a single room with adjoining kitchenette - where they remained for several years. Here they had two more children before they bought a three bedroom house in 1964.

Maureen's husband found employment in the building trade and although work was plentiful the pay was not sufficient to bring up a growing family - by 1967 they had five children under the age of eight years. When the youngest child was eight months old, Maureen went to work as an Auxiliary Nurse at the Royal Liverpool Hospital. Working at night enabled her to accommodate family life, and she worked three twelve-hour night shifts per week. Rebuilding and reorganization of the city's hospitals meant she was redeployed several times - first to Mill Road Maternity Hospital, then to the Women's Hospital on Oxford Road, and later to the new Women's Hospital - before her retirement in 1996. In addition to her work as an auxiliary nurse, in 1971 Maureen took on bar work at a parish social club, working three evenings per week until its closure in 1991.

'Jean'

Jean was born on a farm in Co. Monaghan, but when her father suffered a serious accident the family moved to the town of Dundalk where they opened a grocers shop. In 1952 - when Jean was thirteen - her father died. Five years later Jean and her fiancé came to Liverpool on holiday to visit her brother, and she fell in love with the city. On returning home she left her job at a department store and moved to Liverpool, where she lodged with her brother and his wife. She found work at the T. J. Hughes department

store, and later at the John Moore's mail order company, but planned one day to become a nurse. For Jean, coming to Liverpool felt like coming home as she had strong family ties with the place. During the early 1930s her grandfather had worked as a blacksmith on the building of the Mersey Tunnel, his daughter (Jean's mother) attending school in Birkenhead. The family had returned to Ireland when their daughter was about seventeen, but she maintained contact with school friends on Merseyside and, in later life, retired to her childhood home.

When Jean's fiancé qualified as an engineer he completed a period of work experience in Ireland before joining her in Liverpool. They were married and rented a flat in the Aigburth area of south Liverpool. After a brief spell at the Camel Laird ship yard Jean's husband found employment with Cadbury's on the Wirral. At this point Jean commenced nursing training at Saint Catherine's Hospital in Birkenhead. She worked at various hospitals in the area until her retirement at the age of sixty seven. She and her husband had one child, and fostered several children over a number of years.

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