



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	i
DEDICATION.....	ii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	iii
LIST OF PLATES.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
GLOSSARY.....	viii
TIMELINE.....	x
ABSTRACT.....	xiii
CHAPTER 1	
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2	
PRIMARY SOURCES AND METHODS USED IN THIS THESIS.....	11
CHAPTER 3	
THE IRISH IN LEEDS: THE SOCIAL, HISTORICAL & GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF THE STUDY.....	32
CHAPTER 4	
EXPLAINING EMIGRATION.....	82
CHAPTER 5	
ACROSS THE IRISH SEA: KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH HOME.....	123
CHAPTER 6	
THE MYTH OF RETURN.....	150

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION.....177

APPENDICES

A. Maps.....187
B. Photographs & Images.....193
C. Tables.....224
D. Documents.....230

PERSONAL TESTIMONY.....236

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....248

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Dedicated to my grandparents
Conal & Bridget McGowan from Donegal
&
Martin & Ellen Ferguson from Mayo
who emigrated to Leeds

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Fig. 3.1: Location of Leeds.....	32
Fig. 3.2: Areas and Districts of Modern Leeds.....	33
Fig. 3.3: Motorways constructed in the 1970s around Leeds.....	63

LIST OF PLATES

	Page
Frontispiece: Isaac Charles Ginner [1878-1952], <i>Leeds Canal</i> , 1914. (Leeds City Art Gallery)	
Pl. 3.1: Charles Cope's view of Leeds, c. 1826. (S. Burt & K. Grady, <i>The Illustrated History of Leeds</i> , 2002, p. 128).....	36
Pl. 3.2: Old St. Patrick Catholic Church, off Burtmanhofts St., 1922. (Local Studies Department, LCL).....	37
Pl. 3.3: Old St. Patrick Catholic Church, off Burtmanhofts St., 1999. (Local Studies Department, LCL).....	38
Pl. 3.4: View looking along Tab St. upwards to Richmond Hill. (S. Burt & K. Grady, <i>The Illustrated History of Leeds</i> , 2002, p. 183).....	38
Pl. 3.5: An engraving of the procession of the Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII) on his way to open Leeds Exhibition. (<i>London Illustrated News</i> , 30/05/1868).....	44
Pl. 3.6: Leeds Union Workhouse, Beckett St., Leeds. (Local Studies Department, LCL).....	46
Pl. 3.7: The Cathedral Church of St. Anne's (1838-1899), Cookridge St. (Unknown Source).....	50
Pl. 3.8: The replacement St. Anne's Cathedral completed in 1904, Cookridge St. (Photograph by Author).....	50

Pl. 3.9:	St. Augustine's Catholic Church, Harehills Rd. (Photograph by Author).....	50
Pl. 3.10:	Opening of the new Leeds Irish Centre on York Rd., 8 th June 1970. (Local Studies Department, LCL).....	64
Pl. 3.11:	Slab laid by the Leeds Irish Community in 1995 to commemorate 'The Great Hunger'. (Photograph by Author).....	74
Pl. 5.2:	Telegram sent from Mayo to Leeds, on occasion of wedding, 1974. (Author's Collection).....	130
Pl. 5.3:	Irish Cross Channel Passenger Services Timetables, 1955. (www.movinghere.org catalogue reference (PRO) RAIL 910/1).....	137
Pl. 6.1:	Killingbeck Cemetery on York Rd. (Local Studies Department, LCL).....	151

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 3.1: Census of 1881: Inmates of Leeds Union Workhouse, Beckett St. (<i>Census of Population of England and Wales: 1881</i>).....	46
Table 3.2: Irish-born population of Leeds (Borough): 1841-1921 (<i>Census of Population of England & Wales: 1841-1921</i>).....	47
Table 3.3: Irish-born Population of Leeds (Borough): 1931-1981 (<i>Census of Population of England & Wales: 1921-1981</i>).....	58
Table 3.4: Leeds wards with highest concentration of Irish-born in 1981 (<i>Census of Population of England & Wales: 1981</i>).....	65
Table 4.1: Number of Overseas Emigrants from Ireland (32 Counties): 1825-1860 (<i>Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54</i>).....	84
Table 4.2: Irish-born residents in Britain: 1931-81 (<i>Census of Population of England & Wales: 1931-1981</i>).....	85
Table 4.3: Decennial breakdown of respondents first year of departure (Interviews with respondents).....	87
Table 4.4: Annual net emigration from Ireland: 1926-1981 (P. J. Drudy, 'Migration between Ireland and Britain since Independence', in P. J. Drudy (ed.), <i>Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain Since 1922</i> , 1986, p. 109).....	88

Table 4.5:	Irish-born Population of Leeds (Borough): 1931-1981 (<i>Census of Population of England & Wales: 1921-1981</i>).....	97
Table 4.6:	Irish-born population in England: selected cities: 1951-81 (<i>Census of Population of England & Wales: 1951-81</i>).....	102
Table 6.1:	Net in-migration of older people (65+) for intercensal periods 1946-81 (Nessa Winston, <i>The Return of Older Irish Emigrants: An assessment of needs and issues</i> , 2002, p. 31).....	152
Table 6.2:	Older (65+) Irish-born persons who resided abroad for 1 year or more by year of taking up residence in Ireland and country of previous residence (Nessa Winston, <i>The Return of Older Irish Emigrants: An assessment of needs and issues</i> , 2002, p. 31).....	153

GLOSSARY

<i>Term</i>	<i>Literal Translation</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
<i>Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann</i>	Commonwealth of musicians/singers of Ireland	An Irish traditional music organisation
<i>Caint na ndaoine</i>	Language of the People	The common spoken language; in this case Hiberno-English
Culchie	Shortened version of 'agricultural' or a person from Kiltimagh (<i>Coillte Mach</i>), Co. Mayo	A derogatory name for a person from rural Ireland
<i>Dáil</i>	Assembly	House of Representatives of the Irish Parliament
<i>Éire</i>	Ireland	Ireland
<i>Fianna Fáil</i>	Soldiers of destiny	Ireland's largest political party founded in 1926 by Eamonn de Valera
<i>Fine Gael</i>	Family of the Gael	Ireland's second largest political party founded in 1933 by the amalgamation of a number of parties
<i>Fleadh Cheoil (na Breataine)</i>	Festival of music (of Britain)	Traditional Irish Music festival

<i>Term</i>	<i>Literal Translation</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
<i>Gaeltacht</i>	Irish-Speaking District	Irish-Speaking District
<i>Gardaí</i>	Guards	Irish Police Force
<i>Scoraíocht(aí)</i>	Social evening(s)	Evening(s) of Irish traditional entertainment
Shant, also Shanty	Old house	A seasonal migrant workers temporary accommodation; from the Gaelic <i>seantigh</i> , meaning old house.
Spalpeen, also <i>spailpín</i>	Seasonal agricultural labourer, also a rascal/scamp	An agricultural labourer who travelled about the country or abroad at certain seasons seeking work. Now pejorative.
Tattie Hoker, also Tatie-howker	Potato Digger	A (migrant) potato digger. Tatie (corruption of <i>potato</i>) & hoker (variant of <i>holker</i> , <i>holk</i> , a verb meaning to hollow out by digging, to dig up or dig out)
<i>Tánaiste</i>	Heir, successor	Deputy Prime Minister
<i>Taoiseach</i>	Chief, ruler	Prime Minister

TIMELINE: SOME IMPORTANT DATES IN THE HISTORY OF THE IRISH IN LEEDS

- 1800:** Act of Union. Irish Parliament dissolved. Britain & Ireland merged politically.
- 1801:** The population of Leeds Borough was 57,276 and Leeds was the seventh largest town in England.
- 1816:** Famine & typhus ravaged Ireland.
- 1821:** Population of Ireland stood at 6.8 million. The population of Leeds borough had risen to 83,943.
- 1829:** Catholic Emancipation.
- 1831:** The population of Leeds borough estimated at 123,548.
- 1832:** Leeds cholera epidemic, which recurred in 1842.
- 1834:** The first passenger and freight railway was built from Leeds to Selby.
- 1836:** The Leeds police Force was established. Report on the Irish Poor in Great Britain.
- 1838:** By this year it is estimated that there were over 100 woollen mills employing more than 10,000 in Leeds.
- 1841:** Population of Ireland stood at over 8.1 million.
- 1842:** More than 2,000 died in a cholera epidemic.
- 1845:** Potato harvest failed.
- 1847:** Known as 'Black 47' the worst year of the Great Hunger.
- 1848:** United Irish Rebellion.
- 1850:** Restoration of Catholic Hierarchy in England & Wales.
- 1851:** Population of Ireland falls to 6.5 million as a result of famine & emigration. The population of Leeds borough was estimated to be 172,258.
- 1855:** There were 37 flax mills employing 9,500 workers, many of which were Irish famine refugees.
- 1858:** Fenian Movement gains prominence.
- 1867:** Manchester Martyrs. Hanging of three Fenians: Allen, Larkin & O'Brien. Procession planned for Leeds in their honour.
- 1870:** Home Rule Movement initiated by Isaac Butt.
- 1885:** Gladstone's majority in the General Election helped by Irish vote.
- 1893:** Leeds becomes a city.

- 1901:** The population of Leeds stood at 428,968.
- 1904:** St. Anne's Church, the Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Leeds Diocese, was consecrated.
- 1916:** Easter Rising in Dublin.
- 1922:** Anglo-Irish Treaty. Partition of Ireland.
- 1920:** Start of restrictions imposed by United States on immigration from Ireland.
- 1931:** Leeds Irish-born population had fallen to 3,165, its lowest figure for a century.
- 1932:** Peter O'Toole was born in Connemara and shortly afterwards his family migrated to Leeds, settling in Hunslett.
- 1939:** On September 1st & 2nd 18,000 children, 2,800, teachers and 8,000 mothers evacuated from Leeds, mostly to Lincolnshire and the Yorkshire Dales.
- 1940:** The first air raid by the German Luftwaffe on Leeds.
- 1941:** On the night of March 14th the German Luftwaffe damage 4,600 houses, the museum and the Town Hall; 65 people were killed and a further 260 injured, 56 seriously.
- 1945:** Victory parties are held on the streets of Leeds on May 8th. The city's final war damage statistics: 77 civilian dead, 327 injured & 197 buildings destroyed in nine air-raids.
- 1948:** Ireland declared a Republic. The Yorkshire County Board, the governing body of Gaelic Football was established.
- 1951:** Population of Ireland at 2.96m. The census revealed that there were 4,788 Irish-born residing in Leeds, an increase of 1,632 persons in the previous two decades, and the population of Leeds borough for the first time broke the half-million mark.
- 1961:** Population of Ireland falls to 2.82m – the lowest recorded in the twentieth century.
- 1969:** In July the Council of Britain granted permission for a branch of *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* (CCE) to be formed in Leeds.
- 1970:** New Leeds Irish Centre (LIC) opens on York Road.
- 1971:** Leeds' Irish-born population stands at 7,580.
- 1981:** Leeds' Irish-born population stands at 7,563.
- 1993:** Davitt House – a retirement home for elderly Irish – opens in Headingley.
- 1996:** Leeds Irish Health & Homes (LIHH) was established.

- 2000:** Bríd Duggan, a native of County Galway became the first Irishwoman in Leeds to be invited to be Lady Mayoress of the Occasion. Leeds Metropolitan University developed the first Irish Studies curriculum in the North of England.
- 2001:** The Irish-born population of Leeds stands at 5,685 - its lowest recorded figure for half a century.

ABSTRACT

The Irish in Leeds, 1931-81: Aspects of Emigration

Brendan McGowan

Irish emigrants have been settling in Britain in significant numbers since the early nineteenth century. As a result of continued waves of emigration, the Irish constituted the largest ethnic minority in mid-twentieth century Britain. The history of the Irish in Leeds is a microcosm of this migration pattern. Leeds has had a significant Irish population from the 1820s, which dramatically increased throughout the 1840s but petered out as the nineteenth drew to a close. However, the 'second wave' of Irish emigration to Leeds, which took place between the 1930s and the 1970s, is the primary focus of this thesis.

Research on the history of the Irish in Britain has tended to focus on the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Irish in twentieth century Britain have received comparatively little academic attention; instead the focus has been on Afro-Caribbean and Asian immigration at the expense of those of longer standing and greater numbers, but perhaps of less visibility. Although by 1971 the Irish-born constituted the largest immigrant group in Leeds [as in Britain], relatively little is known about the actual experiences of these emigrants. As a small step towards correcting this deficiency this thesis addresses various aspects of the emigrant experience, primarily using oral evidence from the life-narrative of thirty-three Irish emigrants who arrived in Leeds between 1931 and 1981. The main themes of the thesis are based on the common elements of the emigrant experience which were expressed in the life narratives: the actual emigration process, initial settlement, contact with home and the issue of permanent return to Ireland. As far as was possible their experiences are kept in the emigrant's own words.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Emigration is a theme in Irish history that touches almost every family in Ireland. In particular, it has been a central thread of the relationship between Ireland and Britain.¹

Brian Cowen, Minister for Foreign Affairs

By 1971 the Irish born population was the largest migrant grouping in Britain, yet relatively little is known about the actual experience of these migrants. Further studies using oral testimony and documentary sources should begin the process of unraveling this complex and nuanced facet of the Irish migrant experience.²

Enda Delaney

This study of the Irish in Leeds between 1931 and 1981 is a valuable record of those who left this country for Britain in what is known as the second great wave of Irish emigration. In contrast to Irish emigrants in nineteenth century Britain, those in the twentieth century have received little academic attention; instead the focus has been on Afro-Caribbean and Asian immigration at the expense of those of longer standing and greater numbers but perhaps of less visibility.³ As Enda Delaney highlighted in the opening quote, little is known about the Irish emigrant experience in the twentieth century. It is as a small step towards correcting this deficiency that this thesis, using oral evidence from the life-narratives of thirty-three Irish emigrants who arrived in the city of Leeds between 1931 and 1981, addresses various aspects of emigration.

The aspects referred to are based on the common elements of the emigrant experience which were expressed in the interviews, so that to some extent the respondents themselves contributed to the format and content of the thesis. These common elements relate to the actual emigration process, the initial settlement period, post-emigration contact with home and the issue of permanent return to Ireland. As far as is possible the respondent experiences are kept in their own words and thus the main body of the text is heavily littered with quotes.

Scope of the Study

With regards to the scope of the thesis, the study covers the period from 1931 to 1981 and is confined to those who left Southern Ireland i.e. the Free State (1922) or the

Republic of Ireland (1949). These dates were chosen because the 1930s witnessed the beginning of an easily identifiable and intense period of emigration from Ireland to Britain which lasted well into the 1970s. It was decided to focus solely on emigrants from the 26-counties because, for social, political and economic reasons, their situation differs from those who emigrated from Northern Ireland.

Throughout this thesis, pseudonym first names, the year and county of birth (e.g. [Delia, b. 1934, Co. Mayo]) have been used to indicate that the personal testimony provided by that respondent is being referred to. The reason for this is twofold, firstly to guarantee the anonymity of the individual respondents; additionally, the names of family members and friends have been changed. Secondly, this format has been adopted in order to avoid clogging up the text and endnotes with references to minidisc recordings of interviews, letters and other documents which are in the author's possession.

There is a trend in recent studies to use the term 'migration' to describe the movement of Irish people to Britain and elsewhere. Patrick O'Sullivan, the editor of the award-winning series entitled *The Irish Worldwide*, contested that contributors to the anthology should avoid the use of 'those emotionally freighted words "emigrant" and "immigrant"'; instead he advised the use of 'the more neutral word "migrant"'.⁴ However, for a variety of reasons, throughout this thesis 'emigrant' and 'emigration' are the words of choice used to describe those who left Ireland and their movement to Britain. Writing from an Irish third-level institute about people who left Ireland, it seems appropriate by definition to use the word 'emigrant'. During the period under study Ireland was a free and autonomous country and those who left for England were crossing international borders, regardless of freedom of movement between the two countries; again, therefore the word 'emigrant' is an accurate description. Furthermore, since this is essentially an oral history study based on the personal experiences, memories and opinions of Irish people in Britain emotion is an inextricable part of the source material (regardless of the subsequent meanings/accretions to the word meaning). Finally, during the period covered by this study, 'emigrant' and 'emigration' were the common historical and contemporary terms used; these words were also favoured by the respondents themselves.

Aims & Objectives

The four principal aims of this thesis are as follows:

- To provide a brief overview of the history of the Irish in Leeds from the early 1800s to the present.
- To increase the present understanding of the emigrant experience in Britain through the recording of oral testimonies of Irish emigrants who resided in Leeds between 1931 and 1981.
- To use interviews with past and present members of the Leeds Irish community to identify and examine common elements of the emigrant experience.
- To sketch a picture of the Leeds Irish community throughout the period under consideration.

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To provide a brief qualitative and quantitative synopsis of the history of the Irish in Leeds pre-1931 and evaluate the available source material.
- To provide a qualitative and quantitative account of the Irish community in Leeds for the period 1931-1981.
- To chart the development and geographical distribution of the Irish community throughout this period.
- To look at the cultural and social institutions that evolved as a result of the Leeds' Irish population and to talk to those involved in the running of these institutions.
- To understand why Irish emigrants left Ireland and also why some chose Leeds as their destination.
- To identify some of the initial difficulties in settling in the city.
- To look at the extent of the Leeds Irish community's links with its motherland. To examine the extent that the emigrant kept in contact with home whilst in England. To look at the phenomenon of remittance sending.
- To understand why so many of these 'economic migrants' never returned permanently to live in Ireland.

The following section of this introductory chapter contains a brief literature review of secondary sources dealing with the Irish in Britain and more specifically in Leeds. Literature regarding oral history theory as well as oral histories and autobiographies are dealt with in chapter two, which details the methodologies employed in this study. The purpose of this review is twofold. Firstly, it will highlight that there is a general dearth of knowledge about the twentieth century Irish emigrant experience in Britain. Secondly, the review will show that there is a distinct lack of scholarly research on the Irish community in Leeds. Additionally, the review will highlight the most useful works of literature consulted in researching this topic.

Secondary Sources: Literature Review

The following section will deal only with the most prominent works of literature consulted during the research process; a full list of the books and articles used is available in the bibliography. The secondary sources have been classified under the following headings:

1. Histories of Ireland in the 19th & 20th century
2. Histories & Studies of Irish Migration to Britain
3. Histories & Studies of the Irish in Britain
4. Histories & Studies of Leeds & the Irish in Leeds

Ireland in the 19th & 20th century

As regards background reading a number of useful books were consulted to provide a social, cultural and historical context for the study. In particular, four single-author publications stand out as the most comprehensive and authoritative histories of Ireland over the course of the last two centuries, each by highly regarded academics. F. S. L. Lyons' *Ireland Since the Famine* and R. F. Foster's *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* both provided detailed information regarding nineteenth and twentieth century Ireland. The other two of note were Terence Brown's *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-1985* and J. J. Lee's *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society*. Both, as can be seen from the titles, are concerned with Ireland in the twentieth century.

Irish Migration to Britain

There were a number of works consulted on the subject of Irish migration. The most recently published and commendable of these was Enda Delaney's *Demography, State & Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-71*. Delaney's well-researched, readable and comprehensive text effectively deals with the period covered by this thesis.

Other works relating to Irish migration throughout the period under consideration were consulted. In particular there were two useful articles in a compendium of essays edited by Andy Bielenberg under the title *The Irish Diaspora*; these were Tracey Connolly's 'Emigration from Ireland to Britain During the Second World War' and Enda Delaney's 'Placing Postwar Irish Migration to Britain in a Comparative European Perspective, 1945-1981'.⁵ Additionally, Liam Ryan's article 'Irish Emigration in Britain Since World War II' provided a useful overview of post-war Irish emigration and neatly followed on from Connolly's aforementioned article.⁶ P. J. Drudy's, 'Migration between Ireland and Britain since Independence' complemented the abovementioned works.⁷ Social commentary on emigration was also provided by two well-known and outspoken Irish journalists: John Healy and Fintan O'Toole.⁸

The Irish in Britain

The Irish, although the longest established and until recently the most numerous ethnic minority in Britain, have received relatively little attention within British social history or indeed the sociology of migration, race and ethnicity.

There are two substantial twentieth century single-author histories which deal with the subject of the Irish in Britain: historian J. A. Jackson's pioneering classic *The Irish in Britain* published in 1963 and journalist Kevin O'Connor's *The Irish in Britain* published in 1972. Jackson's seminal work has become the standard text on the subject; it deals extensively with the nineteenth and twentieth century, and was the first to deal with the Irish in the post-war period; it has yet to be surpassed. O'Connor focuses primarily on the experience of Irish migrants in twentieth century Britain. Although, both are now somewhat dated they provided sufficient background reading for the period under consideration in this thesis.

Over the two decades or so there has been a marked increase of interest in the Irish in Britain, which has been reflected in a growing body of local, regional and national studies by historians and social geographers, much of it in the form of essay compilations. The most notable of these are *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939*, *The Irish in the Victorian City* and *The Irish in Victorian Britain: the local dimension* co-edited by Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley and the aforementioned *Irish Worldwide* series published in six volumes and edited by Patrick O'Sullivan. Whilst the first three works look at the Irish solely in a British context, the latter contains an array of interdisciplinary essays on the Irish Diaspora worldwide. Graham Davis' *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1914* is another noteworthy publication which adds to the aforementioned publications. Another collection of essays bound together under the title of *The Great Famine and Beyond: Irish Migrants in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* and edited by Donald MacRaild are extremely valuable additions to the historiography of the Irish in Britain. These works, however, primarily focus on the Irish emigrant experience during the nineteenth century when it may be argued the Irish were most discernible in British society; there are comparatively fewer studies on the Irish in twentieth century Britain. This is crudely highlighted by the fact that in a bibliography of the history of the Irish in Britain published in 1986, 65% of the works focus on the nineteenth century compared with 35% on the twentieth century.⁹ This disproportionate interest may be explained by the fact that the Irish in nineteenth century Britain were regarded as a serious social problem and were subject to much contemporary official scrutiny and criticism. In a Leeds context, Dillon noted that:

Their arrival in such numbers and in such destitution is unique amongst immigrants to Britain and their presence created problems of which those resulting from twentieth-century immigrations are but a pale reflection. Animosity and misunderstanding resulted, and the Irish became, as for a long time they remained, an isolated minority.¹⁰

As a consequence, there is an abundance of nineteenth century accounts of the Irish in urban Victorian Britain for the modern historian to draw upon. This is reflected in modern writings concerning the city of Leeds and its Irish inhabitants which rely heavily on mid-nineteenth century reports (of which more in the following section).

The Irish in Leeds are notably absent in the aforementioned compendiums either in localised studies or in thematic essays. This is despite the fact that in 1861, for

example, Leeds was the sixth largest town in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (having a population of more than 207,000 of which over 7% were Irish). Certainly, Leeds has not received the same attention as smaller towns with fewer Irish residents (in both absolute and relative terms). Therefore, a brief quantitative and qualitative analysis of the historical, social and geographical context of the Irish in Leeds pre-1931 precedes the main body of the thesis.

Leeds and the Irish in Leeds

Three main texts were consulted on the history of Leeds: Steven Burt and Kevin Grady's *The Illustrated History of Leeds*, Derek Fraser's *A History of Modern Leeds* and Dr. David Thornton's *Leeds: The Story of a City*.

For the purpose of this study Burt and Grady's *Illustrated History of Leeds*, which it is claimed is the first full history of the city published since the nineteenth century, was found to be the most authoritative account of the history of Leeds and an invaluable source of reference. The book also deals with the Irish in Leeds throughout the Victorian period, but particularly between the years 1832 and 1867. The former year marks a cholera outbreak in Leeds (the first victim was a two-year-old child of Irish immigrants) and the latter marks the subduing of a potentially violent Irish protest procession; these are indicative of the direction in which this highly regarded work takes with regards the Irish community in Leeds. The Irish are dealt with primarily in two sections entitled 'The Immigrants: the Irish and the Jews' and 'Troubles with the Irish' and elsewhere under sections relating to crime, prostitution, disease, the Poor Law and religion.¹¹ In similar fashion Fraser's *History of Modern Leeds* deals with the Irish in a Victorian context again focusing on religious and political differences.¹² Although Dr. Thornton's *Leeds: The Story of a City* is highly regarded, the work is somewhat flawed in that it is bereft of footnotes or endnotes. As in the other works, Dr. Thornton tends to focus on the negative aspects of the Leeds Irish community. Notably, there is no mention of the Irish in Leeds in the twentieth century in any of the abovementioned works; the obvious conclusion to be drawn from this is that there is a need for further research into the subject.

To date there is no one definitive work on the history of the Irish in Leeds and very few works on any aspect of their past. Of the few that exist, the following articles

which deal with different periods and aspects of the history of the Irish in Leeds were most useful. T. Dillon's article entitled *The Irish in Leeds, 1851-61* is without exception *the* most authoritative account of the Irish in Victorian Leeds and the most substantial piece of writing on the Irish in Leeds in any period. Dillon using census data, contemporary reports and local newspapers, identifies the core area of Irish settlement during this period and discusses a number of demographic, environmental and social aspects of their presence in Leeds.

Danny & Helen Kennally's essay entitled 'From Roscrea to Leeds: an emigrant community' which was published in the *Tipperary Historical Journal* is another excellently researched piece of writing focusing roughly on the same period as Dillon. The article deals with the pre-famine influx of Irish weavers into Leeds and establishment of an Irish community in the city.

Dr. Bell's article entitled 'Leeds: The Evolution of a Multi-Cultural Society' primarily deals with the spread of the Irish community in relation to the spread of Catholic parishes throughout Leeds in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its limitations are that it is a purely geographical study which focuses solely on the Irish Catholic population of the city.

Pauline E. Freeman's essay entitled 'Erin's Exiles – The Irish in Leeds' examines the growth of the Irish community in Leeds and the impact it had upon Roman Catholicism and on the social, professional and political life of the city. It featured in *Catholicism in Leeds: A Community of Faith, 1794-1994* an informative and interesting collection of articles covering topics relating to the revival and expansion of Roman Catholicism in the city from the late eighteenth century. Again, the obvious limitation is that it deals solely with Irish Catholics in Leeds and not those of other religious denominations.

To a lesser extent Mary Patterson's *The Ham Shank* provides a glimpse of life in an Irish enclave known as 'the Bank' at the turn of the twentieth century. The only other work found which deals with the Irish in twentieth century Leeds is an unpublished MA thesis entitled *A Group Apart or an Assimilated Community? A Study of the Irish in Post War Leeds*, which primarily focuses on religion and identity.

The conclusions are that there is clearly more research needed on the Irish in Britain in the twentieth century and also on the Irish in Leeds in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Structure of Thesis

The following chapter two contains a review of the primary sources and methods used for this thesis. The first half of chapter three which focuses on the development and growth an Irish community in Leeds pre-1931 is heavily dependent on previously published work, contemporary official reports and newspaper accounts in providing a historical overview of the Irish in nineteenth and early twentieth century Leeds. The second half of this same chapter introduces for the first time oral history information to the study to give an overview of the Irish in Leeds post-1931. The reasons why Irish people left for Britain are investigated in chapter four entitled 'Emigration & Arrival'. Furthermore, the reasons why these people chose particular destinations are explored. Chapter five, entitled 'Across the Water: keeping in touch with home', primarily focuses on the various ways in which the emigrant kept in touch with home and also the subject of remittances. In chapter six the issue of return migration is discussed. The concluding chapter of this thesis will draw together the main findings and arguments of this thesis. Additionally, areas in which it is felt require or necessitate further research will be highlighted.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Remarks by Mr. Brian Cowen T.D., Minister for Foreign Affairs, at a Reception to announce the Dion grants for 2004. <<http://www.foreignaffairs.gov.ie/information/display.asp?ID=1550>> Accessed 29/07/04.

² Enda Delaney, *Demography, State & Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-71*, 2000, p. 297.

³ For a discussion on the 'invisibility' of the Irish in post-war Britain see: Bronwen Walter, 'Irishness, gender and place', *Environment and planning, part D: society and space*, vol. 13, 1995, p. 36.

⁴ Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish Worldwide. Volume 4: Irish Women and Irish Migration*, 1995, p. 2.

⁵ Tracey Connolly, 'Emigration from Ireland to Britain During the Second World War', 2000, pp. 51-64 and Enda Delaney, 'Placing Postwar Irish Migration to Britain in a Comparative European Perspective, 1945-1981', 2000, pp. 331-356.

⁶ Liam Ryan, 'Irish Emigration to Britain Since World War II', in Richard Kearney (ed.), *Ireland: The Emigrant Nursery and the World Economy*, 1990, pp. 45-67.

⁷ P. J. Drudy, 'Migration between Ireland and Britain since Independence', in P.J. Drudy (ed.), *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain Since 1922*, Cambridge, 1986, pp. 107-23.

⁸ John Healy, *Nineteen Acres and No-one Shouted Stop!* (Formerly *Death of an Irish Town*); Fintan O'Toole, *The Ex-Isle of Erin: Images of Global Ireland* and *A Mass for Jesse James: A Journey Through 1980s Ireland*.

⁹ Maureen Hartigan & Mary J. Hickman (eds.), *The History of the Irish in Britain: A Bibliography*, 1986.

¹⁰ T. Dillon, 'The Irish in Leeds, 1851-61', *The Thoresby Miscellany*, vol. 16, 1979, p. 1.

¹¹ Steven Burt & Kevin Grady, *The Illustrated History of Leeds*, 2002. See 'The Immigrants: the Irish and the Jews' (2002, pp. 155-7) and 'Troubles with the Irish' (2002, pp. 170-1). The Irish are elsewhere mentioned under sections entitled 'Crime, Prostitution and Dripping' (2002, p. 169), 'The Poor Law' (2002, p. 173), 'Combating Disease' (2002, p. 174) and 'The Rise of Anglo-Catholicism and the Roman Catholics' (2002, pp. 183-4); essentially in areas where the Irish were viewed as a serious social problem outside the control of British political or religious leaders.

¹² Derek Fraser (ed.), *A History of Leeds*, 1980. In this publication the Irish and Jews dealt with together as the primary immigrant groups in nineteenth-century Leeds (1980, pp. 61-2), Roman Catholicism in Leeds (1980, p. 256), Fenian Activity (1980, p. 342) and Political Differences (1980, pp. 342-3 & 348-9).

CHAPTER TWO:

PRIMARY SOURCES AND METHODS USED IN THIS THESIS

All too often migration is viewed solely as a movement of population which is subject to rigorous quantitative analysis. But the process of migration involves real people with real stories.¹

Enda Delaney

Introduction

This thesis is based upon a variety of sources; however, it is '*real people with real stories*' that provide the primary material for this study. More than thirty life stories gathered from Irish emigrants have been combined with and augmented by documentary sources to create this study of the Irish in Leeds between 1931 and 1981.

Population and emigration statistics feature periodically throughout the text but only to provide a quantitative background to the mainly qualitative composition of the thesis. Where population statistics have been used they are for the most part obtained from the censuses of the population of Ireland, England and Wales. More localised detail of Irish populations in English towns and cities were found in the census county reports. Moreover, emigration data was drawn from the Irish Government publication of the *Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54: Reports*; this 1955 publication also provided much qualitative material with regards to official views of the period on emigration and the social condition of Ireland. Contemporary newspaper reports and articles relating to Irish emigration and the condition of Irish emigrants in England, which appeared in both the Irish and British Press, were also consulted during the research process.

However, as mentioned previously life-biographies provide the main source of information for this study; thirty-three Irish emigrants who had spent time living in the city of Leeds were interviewed. On a couple of occasions family members sat in on the interview and their input and experiences proved helpful. A number of Irish autobiographies and published oral histories were also consulted in order to compare and contrast with the life-stories of the respondents, their memories of Ireland and their emigration experiences. A number of informal meetings and chance encounters provided a valuable insight into many aspects of Irish emigration. In this chapter the uses, strengths and weaknesses of the various sources employed in this thesis are evaluated with particular emphasis on the use of oral history as a source of

information on the past.

Census of Population of Ireland, England and Wales

Prior to the nineteenth-century Ireland's national population estimates were based on the hearth-tax returns, of amongst others Sir William Petty (17th century) and Arthur Dobbs (18th century). An official headcount was planned for Ireland in 1813 but never came to fruition due to squabbling amongst the grand juries. Thus, the 1821 and 1831 censuses of Ireland, which were carried out by locally appointed enumerators, proved the first completed official attempts to measure the population of Ireland but they are generally thought flawed. The 1841 census, which was overseen by the Royal Irish Constabulary and for which returns were filled out for the first time by the householders themselves rather than the government enumerators, is considered to be the first accurate record of the population of Ireland. Further Irish censuses of population were carried out on a decennial basis between 1851 and 1911. Following the establishment of the Irish Free State a census of population was taken in 1926, 1936 and at every five years from 1946, with the exception of 1976 which was cancelled as an economising measure.

In 1801 the first official enumeration of the inhabitants of England, Scotland and Wales took place. The censuses of England, Scotland and Wales coincide with those of Ireland from 1831 until 1911. In England and Wales, censuses were carried out in 1921 and 1931; however, in 1921 the War of Independence in Ireland disrupted proceedings and the subsequent partition was to ensure that the British Government's last census of Ireland had taken place. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 disrupted the decennial flow and it was not until 1951 that the next census was completed; however, national registration in Britain ensured a population figure for 1939. In Britain censuses of population are carried out on a decennial basis. As a result reliable comparative examination of the Irish and British censuses is most possible for the period 1841 to 1911 and every decade from 1951.

The hundred-year rule applies to the censuses of England and Wales whereby the personal details entered by the householders are not available to the general public for a century from the date they were completed. As a result, for the period covered in this thesis, no grassroots information is available such as was used in studies of Irish communities in mid-nineteenth century Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester.² In Ireland

the censuses of 1831-51 were largely destroyed by a fire, which ravaged the Public Record Office, Dublin in 1922. Those censuses of 1861-1891 were completely destroyed by order of the government. This in turn means that the 1901 and 1911 censuses are the earliest complete censuses available. As a result the normal hundred-year rule has been waived and both have been available to the public for many years.

Until the 1921 British census everyone born on the island of Ireland was included in the Irish-born category, but from 1931 the birthplace of Irish respondents was sub-categorised into 'Northern Ireland', 'Irish Free State' and subsequently 'Irish Republic' and 'Ireland (part not stated)'. It is this last category, that of 'Ireland (part-not stated)', which has proved problematic in that it could not be ascertained if the respondent had been born north or south of the border. In 1961 a post-enumeration survey was carried out for the first time in order to examine census information gathered during the census. On the subject of Irish birthplace the survey concluded that:

A number of persons gave the reply 'Ireland' or 'Éire' with no indication whether this referred to Northern Ireland or the Irish Republic. The people appear in certain tables in the group 'Ireland (part not stated)'. The post enumeration survey indicated that practically all these persons were actually born in the Irish Republic.³

In consideration of this 1961 finding, the figures shown in this thesis for 'Ireland (part not stated)' have been added to those of the 'Irish Republic' when giving the overall number of Irish-born in Leeds/England.

One of the problems of using the British census, from an Irish perspective at least, is that since 1841 the censuses have defined Irishness by the birthplace of the individual. This system of basing nationality on place of birth is crude and problematic in that it classifies only those born on Irish soil as Irish, and not those second and third generation children of Irish emigrants who may consider themselves Irish (The same it must be said is true for those born in Ireland of foreign-born parents). The problematic nature of this system of classification may be highlighted as follows. It has been noted that between the censuses of 1961 and 1971 Ireland experienced a rise of approximately 32,000 children under the age of 15 years who had been born in Britain. This unexpected increase has been explained by the fact that many Irish emigrants of the post-war years returned to Ireland with their families in the 1960s.⁴ These children would be by English Census classification British citizens, yet it is unlikely that many of them would consider themselves so.

Mary Hickman has estimated that '*the number of Irish-born people in the*

Census should be multiplied by 3 to give the size of the Irish community'.⁵ When this significant increase is taken into account it would, for example, increase the 1981 Irish-born population of Leeds from 7,563 to a Leeds Irish community population of 22,689 or 3.3% of the total population of Leeds. After much campaigning by groups representing the Irish in Britain, the 2001 census for the first time included 'Irish' as an ethnic minority category. Under the question '*What is your ethnic group?*' the respondent was asked to choose ONE section from A to E and to tick the appropriate box to indicate the choice of cultural background. Section A (White) gave the further option of ticking British, Irish or Any Other White.

Another problem, again from an Irish point of view, is that it is impossible to obtain accurate figures from the British censuses for the number of Irish-born who were in Britain temporarily, such as seasonal migratory workers.

For the most-part the information gleaned from the censuses of England and Wales is used in this thesis to provide the Irish population of England and of the city of Leeds. Moreover, this data has been used to calculate the percentage of Irish-born residents against the overall population of Leeds. In addition this information has also been used to compare the Irish-born population of Leeds with those of other significant midland cities such as Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, etc. With regard to Irish population statistics Vaughan and Fitzpatrick's *Irish Historical Statistics: Population 1821-1971* proved more than sufficient for the purposes of this thesis.⁶

Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54

In 1947 a concerned Pope Pious XII raised the issue of mass emigration from Ireland. This overt concern would have caused much embarrassment to the devout de Valera and his government.⁷ However, de Valera did not get the immediate chance to remedy the situation; the *Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems* was established in 1948, not by *Fianna Fáil* but, by the recently formed inter-party government of *Fine Gael*, Labour and minority parties headed by John A. Costello. It proved to be the Irish Government's most energetic and assertive attempt to explore the root causes of emigration. The inclusion of '*other population problems*' in the title of the report implies that the government viewed emigration as a negative trend. The economist, Dr. James Beddy, chaired the Commission of twenty-four members that included statisticians, economists, medical doctors, union officials, a number of

government officials, writers, social critics, clergymen and a sociologist. Notably, despite the fact that for the period 1926-51 female emigrants outnumbered their male counterparts, the panel contained just two women. Furthermore, it was pointed out in the *Irish Press* that of those who made up the panel the majority had '*little direct knowledge of the problem to be solved*'.⁸

The Commission convened on over a hundred occasions. Impending emigrants were interviewed and the social conditions throughout various parts of the country were surveyed. The Commission did not bring about an end to Irish emigration, in fact in terms of numbers the worst was yet to come, but '*it did contribute to a more realistic understanding of its causes*'.⁹

The *Reports* of the Commission contain a valuable array of detailed material for the statistician, from the straightforward 'Population since 1841' to the more complex 'Fertility as Measured by Average Annual Number of Legitimate Births per 1,000 Married Women in the Age-Group 15-44 at Census Date'. However, this thesis is not primarily a statistical undertaking. What the landmark *Reports* do provide, which is of value to this particular study, is an insight into the social conditions of Ireland in the 1940s and 1950s, the perceived official causes of Irish emigration and the subsequent recommended solutions to the population problem.

Autobiographies and Published Oral Histories

A number of Irish autobiographies and published oral histories were consulted during the research process for comparative sources of life experience. At the same time it was realised that there is an inherent problem in anything published for financial reward; it is fair to say that the products or publications will be somewhat consumer orientated since they are written with a particular readership in mind their content will be tailored to suit. In writing *Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt has made a comfortable living selling the story of his desperate Irish Catholic childhood in an impoverished Limerick of the 1940s. R. F. Foster has heavily criticised McCourt's best-selling work questioning his ability to '*retain absolutely concrete memories from the time of his conception, and retail word-for-word conversations exchanged, and letters written, from the age of three*'.¹⁰ At the same time, both historically and literally, Alice Taylor's series of childhood reminiscences (*To School Through the Fields, Quench the Lamp, The Village, Country Days*, etc.) tells of an idealistic time in an idyllic

country setting, not a million miles from Limerick. Both authors have made their mark selling an Ireland greatly contrasted with that of the present day. That is not to completely disregard their content, but to treat them and their like with caution.

There are a number of valuable autobiographies, which were written about emigrant life in Britain in the twentieth century. Four emigrants whose experiences coincide with the period covered by this thesis are those of John O'Donoghue, Donall Mac Amhlaigh, John B. Keane and Sean Ó'Ciaraín.¹¹ John O'Donoghue's account of emigrant life begins in England in 1943; he had previously been a member of *An Garda Síochána* and had also studied in a monastic order. Donall Mac Amhlaigh, having served in Renmore, Galway as part of an Irish-speaking division of the Army, was more than competent in both of Ireland's official languages. His memoirs are a rich source of detail on the life of the Irish navy in 1950s England. John B. Keane's *Self-portrait* dedicates some of its pages to recounting the author's own experiences of life in the south of England, also in the 1950s. It has been observed and remarked upon that the aforementioned three authors received a better education than was average amongst fellow emigrants and that '*this educational advantage made them interpreters and often critics of the migrant community, about whom in the main they write*'.¹² This educational advantage makes their experiences less representative or ordinary; another point of note is that those who have put pen to paper, or fingers to keys, to record their life experiences are not average and ordinary, in that they are self-selected story tellers, have a degree of literary ability and the possess the gift of expression. Sean Ó'Ciaraín's account tells of his childhood in west Mayo, emigration to Scotland in the 1950s as an alternative to signing on the dole, and his failed attempt at retuning permanently to settle in his county of birth and his subsequent return to Glasgow. This latter theme of the emigrant's attempted resettlement in Ireland is one that recurred throughout the oral history study. Brendan Behan's *Borstal Boy* tells of another Irishman's experience across the water, as an IRA activist, but this could hardly be considered an average or ordinary emigrant's account of life in Britain.

All of the above autobiographical accounts were written by male emigrants; there are comparatively fewer emigrant accounts left by Irish females despite their constituting the greater portion of Irish emigrants in the twentieth century. The comment has also been made that female emigrants feature so rarely in the writings of their male counterparts. The explanation is to be found in '*the strong traditional*

division between male and female labour on small farms and the way that division continued in Britain where Irish men worked predominantly in male labour groups while Irish women went into hospitals and offices where employment was predominantly female'.¹³ This makes the recording of life testimonies of female emigrants to Britain all the more important. Of the 33 emigrant life stories recorded for this thesis, 18 (45.5%) were female.

There are, however, a number of published interviews and oral histories with Irish women in England. Rita Wall's *Leading Lives* is based on a series of interviews with nine Irish women who are for a variety of reasons famed. From Annie McGuire, who was wrongly convicted and subsequently imprisoned on IRA bomb making charges, to the famous and equally infamous vocalist Sinead O'Connor, the collection, the author insists confronts and contradicts the stereotype of the Irish mother: '*struggling with eleven children, she is uneducated, Catholic, poor, married to an alcoholic labourer. It is a cruel image*'.¹⁴ A cruel image it may be, but some of the oral history respondents would certainly identify more with the stereotype than with Rita Walls' leading ladies. Her aim is nonetheless admirable. Mary Lennon's *Across the Water: Irish Women's Lives in Britain* is perhaps a more balanced account of the emigrant experiences of Irish women in that the stories captured are more representative.

Another recently published collection of emigrant accounts worthy of note is entitled *An Unconsidered People: The Irish in London* and is an example of the diverse experiences of eleven male and female ex-pats who spent part of their lives in the English capital. The themes covered by the author, such as memories of Ireland, reasons for emigrating, the emigration process, settling in an English city, the Irish social scene, work, housing, etc. are similar to those dealt with throughout the course of this thesis. Thus the experiences recorded may be compared and contrasted with those of their fellow emigrants further north in Leeds.

So of what value are autobiographical accounts and published oral histories to this present study? As long as it is understood that most of the biographers of these accounts cannot be taken as a representative sample of the majority of emigrants, then they can, since the accounts often focus on their fellow emigrants, provide valuable insights into the lives of emigrants, their living, working and social conditions, and may be used for comparative purposes. These accounts offer a rich complementary

source to printed sources and the oral testimonies recorded for this study and are to be treated with a critical eye in the same manner as any historical source.

Contemporary Newspapers and Publications

Contemporary newspapers are also a valuable source of information on the past, so long as they are viewed critically. An extreme modern example would be the views on the current Northern Irish political stalemate as reported in the pages of *An Phoblacht* as compared with those of *The Irish Independent* or *The Times*. Each would have a different point of view on the current political crisis and each are to be viewed in the context of their publishing background.

The Vanishing Irish is a wonderfully paranoid and apocalyptic series of essays, which predict the end of the Irish race in or about the year 2050 as a result of natural extinction.¹⁵ Another series of articles published in the Catholic periodical *The Furrow* in the April of 1958 are devoted to the social investigation of the Irish in England. Oliver Reilly's article is particularly interesting as he poses as an emigrant for the purposes of reporting on the experiences of the Irish in Birmingham; and Desmond Fisher's *The Irishman in England* is a lesson in boosting the Irish ego by declaring Irish intellectual superiority:

The Englishman is basically bourgeois (and I use the term to include the derogatory overtones associated with it). That means that his outlook is smug, small-minded, intellectually limited, lacking in imagination, in the capacity to admit new ideas, in range of thought and perception. By comparison, the average Irishman of equal educational training is more interested in new ideas and arguments, more natively intelligent and more "alive" in every way.¹⁶

It also somewhat reverses the roles of the traditional Irish and English stereotypes.

Oral History

Oral history is based on the interviewing of those who have been witness to past events whose memories and reminiscences can be used for the purposes of historical reconstruction. Oral history is or was as Paul Thompson wrote '*the first kind of history*'¹⁷ but as an academic discipline it is a relatively new and an oft-disputed concept. By the early decades of the 1900s oral interviews were being widely used as sources of information by anthropologists and sociologists but it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that oral testimony began to be accepted as an historical source, initially in the United States and subsequently in Britain. In the early

years the focus of oral history projects was upon white male elites, but from the 1950s oral history pioneers in Britain began to focus on the ordinary workingman and from the 1970s community history projects began to appear in the cities of England.

This researcher was drawn to oral history because of the attraction of the possibility of revealing hidden histories not documented by traditional historical sources. All four of this researcher's grandparents emigrated from the west of Ireland to Britain between the 1930s and the 1960s and eventually settled in the city of Leeds. Growing up, vivid tales of the Irish in Leeds were transmitted down through two generations of emigrant relatives but there is little in the way of documentary sources that record the experiences of this once thriving Leeds Irish population. These emigrants are counted in the censuses of Leeds but this skeletal data cannot speak of what it was like for the individuals to arrive from the rural west of Ireland to war-time or post-war Leeds, or why they departed their Irish homes, or why they chose Leeds as their destination, or what networks they accessed to secure lodgings and employment, or what opportunities and limitations they encountered across the water, or what contact they kept with home, or why some did and others did not return to live, etc. These answers can only be provided by the emigrants themselves; in consequence, oral history is the only viable source for such information. The experience of the individual therefore contributes to the collective history of the Irish in Leeds 1931-81 and unlike the many histories of the nineteenth century Irish in Britain, which were written using establishment sources which viewed the Irish as a social problem, this oral history study enables a history to be written from the emigrant's own perspective.

Oral history, it has been noted, is of less use when trying to uncover specific information about events in history of national importance such as, for example, Government Elections or Immigration Acts to which the average person is remote:

Poverty in the Thirties to a woman with six children would not be in terms of coalition governments and social legislation and trade union demands, but soup kitchens, shoes for the family, the memory of a day's outing to the seaside – the common body of daily life.¹⁸

Thus, for the study of an immigrant population, oral history is the most appropriate source of information on the migration and settlement process, work and social networks, identity and other cultural issues through the study of daily life.

In Defence of Oral History

The benefits of using oral testimony are manifold:

It offers the possibility of gaining information on aspects of life and work which would not otherwise be available. Second, it offers the opportunity of exploring people's ideas and beliefs about if not of the past...Finally, it provides a valuable way of gaining insights into, and ideas about specific phenomena in the past.¹⁹

It was because of this that life story interviews were chosen as the type of oral history over other kinds such as single-issue testimony, which might focus on one particular aspect or period of a person's life. Life story testimony '*allows a person to narrate the story of his or her own life in all its dimensions: personal, spiritual, social and economic*'.²⁰

What distinguishes oral history and autobiographies from other historical sources is that they are written in retrospect; this fact has been the primary popular criticism by some historians of its use as a source of historical information. It has been argued that retrospective data may not be representative, that it cannot be verified, and furthermore that there are numerous problems posed by the psychological process of selective memory and the accuracy of remembering past events, beliefs and feelings. In defence of these charges Paul Thompson, in his seminal work *The Voice of the Past*, has drawn attention to the deficiencies and biases of documentary record. He asserts that the traditional sources for social historians such as the censuses, registers of birth, marriage and death and Royal Commissions, or in this particular study's case the Irish government's Commission on Emigration, are based on contemporary interviews and that these are generally taken as *bone fide* sources. In this same work Thompson further argues that few historians would take contemporary newspaper accounts as the gospel truth without bias, but most are much less critical of newspapers accounts when reconstructing the past.²¹ The axiom that '*no paper ever refused ink*' should be borne in mind by those critical of oral testimony as an historical source.

In defence of oral history an example, which highlights its strength as a corrective to documented history can be recalled from this author's personal experience whilst undertaking a genealogical project at undergraduate level. The family history project required that the individual student gain experience handling a variety of genealogical sources whilst piecing together their family's history. One particular enumerator's return from the 1901 census provided the information that the family who resided in this particular Mayo home on the night of the 31st March 1901

consisted of seven individuals; the head of family, his wife, four sons and a daughter. Over a century after this census had taken place the granddaughter of the head of family was able to correct that document. One of the individuals recorded on the census as 'son' was in fact the nephew of the 'wife'; he had been taken in following the death of his mother shortly after his birth. But for the oral testimony of the only living person who could know this fact, this discrepancy would for stand for all time unknown and undetectable by anyone. Although hardly a history altering insight it does highlight the fact that documentary sources are not infallible and that oral testimony can be a powerful corrective and complementary source of information.

The Design of the Oral History Study

Oral history by its very nature requires that it be written about times past within living memory because as it has been so realistically put '*we cannot, alas, interview tombstones*'.²² It was initially proposed that a date earlier than 1931 be chosen as the start year for this study, perhaps 1921 to coincide with the foundation of the Irish Free State or even earlier. However, on receiving responses from potential interviewees it became clear that the earliest date of their emigrating was in the early 1930s. In consequence, the year 1931 was chosen as the start date for the study. As has been previously mentioned, in this same year the English and Irish Censuses coincided thus allowing a quantitative comparison to be made. Furthermore, the 30s are an appropriate start date for any study of the Irish in twentieth-century Britain since this decade heralded the beginning of a 'second-wave' of emigration to Britain. Irish migration of the last two centuries has been neatly sub-divided into three primary temporal waves, each with its own specific features.²³ The first wave roughly begins in the 1820s and was heavily fuelled by those fleeing the Great Hunger. The primary destination was the United States, but significant numbers fled to Britain. The second wave started in the 1930s with the primary destination now England; as a result of the Depression years of the 1920s and the subsequent series of restrictions imposed by the United States on immigration our nearest island neighbour gradually became the main destination for our emigrants. The 1931 Census recorded 381,089 Irish-born persons residing in England and Wales; in 1951 this figure had risen to 627,021. The 1970s witnessed the end of this second wave as Ireland unexpectedly achieved a net back flow of migrants. The third wave took place throughout the 1980s. Therefore the

period covered by this study neatly coincides with the second wave of emigration from 1931 to 1981.

The Informants

It was decided from the onset that those from the Republic of Ireland and not those from the whole island of Ireland would be the source of respondents. It would be fair to say that the experiences of emigrants from either side of the border and from each side of the Northern divide would be diverse and each deserving of the particular attention that this study could not provide. However, during the course of the study a number of emigrants from Northern Ireland were met and some general experiences were noted.

It would appear that there is no specific number of informants that would constitute a normal or average number for an oral history study. Both Cairíona Clear and Sharon Lambert for their PhD theses, which featured oral history as their prime sources, interviewed 40 people during the course of their research.²⁴ In other works, *The Irish in London* was based on the sole voice and life story of Paddy Fahy, as recorded by Bernadette Halpin. Another more recent publication of the same name was founded on the emigrant experiences of eleven Irish men and women. Being based in Galway meant that temporal, economic and travelling restraints allowed the recording of 33 detailed life testimonies. Furthermore, a number of formal and informal, arranged and per chance, meetings took place (about a dozen in total) with members of the Irish populace in Leeds.

It should be noted here that since oral history is a qualitative source of information the primary concern of the oral historian is not the number of interviewees but the diversity of their experiences and the quality of what they have to say. Furthermore, the author should not be overly concerned with attracting a statistically representative sample of respondents since this would be a gargantuan if not impossible task. Firstly, many of Leeds Irish population of the last seventy years have passed away. Secondly, because of the transient nature of the Irish emigrant, many of whom had resided in Leeds for a part of the study period have since settled in other parts of Britain and others still have returned to live in Ireland. There is also the insurmountable problem that not everyone is interested in parting with their life story to a complete or even a relative stranger and it was not desirable to force personal

questions on reluctant interviewees. In consequence the initial primary concern was to locate and contact respondents.

An open letter was sent to the editors of Irish local and national newspapers as well as to *The Irish Post* and the *Ireland's Own*, which in particular has a more aged readership. The Leeds Irish Centre, which is a popular focal point for many Irish in Leeds, sells a number of national and provincial Irish newspapers whereas many living others across the water, who may not attend the centre regularly or at all, have their local paper sent weekly from Ireland. In addition, the same letter was sent to the *Yorkshire Post* and *Evening Post* but was refused because of the vast amount of similar requests from the public. However, the *Leeds Weekly*, which reaches a huge readership, did publish the appeal for respondents. The letter appealed to those born in Ireland who had emigrated, either directly or indirectly to Leeds, between 1921 and 1981 and who would be interested in talking about their life experiences for the purpose of research into Irish emigration to contact the address or telephone number provided thereafter. All letters were replied to and followed up by telephone. It was realised that this method of contact would only attract a response from a self-selected group of the Irish population, people with particularly strong opinions or ideas about emigration and that this in itself posed problems in that they may not be a representative group. To counteract this, personal contacts were used and at times abused to recruit other informants who may not have otherwise volunteered. A nursing home in Leeds, which is run by an Irish couple and caters specifically for elderly Irish persons, was contacted and thus five more respondents were recruited. But perhaps the most valuable link that was made, which facilitated the contact of many respondents who would for various reasons, such as the inability to read or write, would not have easily been contactable, was with the Leeds Irish Health and Homes (LIHH).²⁵ The director and staff of the LIHH were met with on a number of occasions and it was decided that the organisation would, through their support workers, make the initial approach to potential respondents. The response was, thankfully, fruitful. In addition, the LIHH placed an appeal in their monthly magazine [see Appendix D: 2]. As a result of public notices, personal contacts, chance encounters and third party approaches it is felt that a reasonably balanced group of respondents was achieved.

The group of 33 respondents who provided their life testimonies consisted of 18 males and 15 females, of which 19 hailed from the Connaught/Donegal region, 4 from other western seaboard counties, 5 from Dublin and 4 from elsewhere in Ireland [see Appendix C: Table 6]. They initially emigrated from Ireland between 1933 and 1978 (1930s: 7; 1940s: 5; 1950s: 7; 1960s: 11; 1970s: 3); most still reside in Leeds whilst others have since returned to live in Ireland. As is ideally the case, the group was made up of persons from a diversity of social classes and occupations. All but one respondent was Catholic; this was less than ideal, however, since the study was aimed at those from the Republic of Ireland perhaps this result was to be expected given their predominance in the country's society.

The Interviews

In preparation for the interviews two primary works were consulted. Firstly, Thompson's influential publication *The Voice of the Past* and secondly an international anthology of informative introductory essays under the title *The Oral History Reader*. In addition, advice was sought and gratefully received from noted NUI Galway oral historian Caitríona Clear with regards conducting interviews.

The life testimonies were always recorded, using a Sony minidisk player (SONY NET MD WALKMAN MZ-N707 TYPE-R). The advantages of using a minidisk player over a standard tape recorder are manifold. The minidisks to which the interviews were recorded are small, compact and relatively cheap, can be written over without losing sound quality and have less chance of being damaged than tape cassettes. Furthermore, the minidisk player provides editing functions, for example it allows for the addition of track marks to be placed throughout the interview. As a result it is possible to allocate each different question asked or topic discussed an individual track number thus allowing specific information to be quickly and easily consulted. Furthermore, a high quality compact stereo microphone was used (SONY STEREO MICROPHONE ECM-717) for recording the life testimonies. The microphone itself is smaller and weighs less than a small matchbox and could be clipped to an interviewees garment or left freestanding. In consequence of its size, the microphone did not prove much of a distraction and was less intimidating than a large standard microphone might have been.

The interviews always took place in the respondent's own home, or in that of a relative, in order to create a relaxed atmosphere through comfortable and familiar surroundings. Although it was preferred to interview the respondents on a one-to-one basis so that they would not feel inhibited in revealing any detail from their life-story, on a couple of occasions a family member sat through the procedure. This 'intrusion' did have its advantages, in both cases the respondents were in their 80s and the family member acted as a stimulant, often able to prompt them when they became lost in their memories or if they felt they had forgotten something important in their lives.

Part of the next section is written in the unconventional first person form since it relates directly to my background and my relationship with the respondents. I was acutely aware of the problems and advantages of being 'an insider' when arranging and conducting interviews with Irish respondents and the implications this could have on the interviews. I was born in Leeds of Irish parents; my father was born in Donegal and aged 12 emigrated to Leeds with his family, my mother was born and raised in Leeds of Mayo parents. We returned to live in Ireland in 1979 and have been here since. My Mayo grandparents were landlords of a popular and successful Irish pub in Leeds from 1968 to 1978; almost everyone I interviewed had been to it, had heard of it and knew or knew of my grandparents. Many of my relations in Leeds are or were heavily involved in the Leeds Irish scene and as a result are well known. Furthermore, Leeds having a relatively small Irish-born community made up largely of Mayo and Donegal natives there occurs the situation where, through work or socialising, everyone more or less knows everyone else. I unrepentantly used my background to my advantage; I was able to talk about my native Mayo, my parents and Leeds relations, my grandparent's pub, etc. in order to break the ice when first meeting a new respondent and thus establishing an initial rapport. Thompson recognises this advantage of being of the one community or background in winning an initial rapport but warns that the interviewee '*later on may find difficulty in asking questions because of a common social network*'.²⁶ However, I believe that inasmuch as I was 'an insider' I was also in many ways 'an outsider'; I was relatively young; I have no memory and had little knowledge of Leeds; I live in an Ireland that is vastly different to the one they left behind and I am a post-graduate student whereas most of those interviewed had finished their education by the age of fourteen, etc. I found the respondents to be most frank and forthcoming especially with regards the poor

treatment of the Irish in England by their fellow countrymen: *'your own was the worst'*.²⁷ I am sure that if I were to conduct a similar project on the Pakistani, Indian or Caribbean population of Leeds that I would have had less success in attracting respondents and would have encountered many cross-cultural difficulties.

One of the things that shocked me most of the interviewing process was the trust which the respondents placed in me; in most cases I was invited without scrutiny into the homes of many elderly Irish who were living alone in some less desirable areas of the city. Although it is often advised that after the interview has taken place one should get written consent from the respondent to use the material I felt that this action would arouse the suspicion that I was somehow less trustworthy or that my motives were devious. I also believed, perhaps idealistically, that the respondents were from an Ireland where a man's word, and not a formal contract, was the unit of trust. Each respondent was assured in advance of the interview that they would remain anonymous in the finalised document. This has been achieved by a number of means: respondents are identified solely by first name pseudonyms, the respondent's places of birth are only given at large town or county level; their year of birth and not the specific date are provided and the names of family members or friends have been changed.

The interviews averaged around an hour and a half but ranged in length from about a half hour to almost three hours. In preparation of the first trip to Leeds, two pilot interviews were conducted with respondents who had returned to live in Ireland and who were already familiar to the interviewer; this allowed for a comfortable and critical post-interview analysis with the respondent on the way in which the interview was approached and structured. In the first of the pilot studies a long series of questions, drawn from Thompson's 'A life-Story Interview Guide', were put to the respondent.²⁸ This approach proved long and tiresome and the respondent tended to answer the questions briefly without elaboration, in preparation for the next question. For the second of the pilot studies there were less focussed questions and the interview was allowed flow by using open-ended roughly chronological questions: Tell me about your childhood/schooldays; what did you want to do after leaving school; when/why did you first decide to leave Ireland; what were your first impressions of England, etc.

As a general guide an approach developed and advocated by Gabriele Rosenthal proved most useful. It is a three-phased approach:

The interview is opened by a wide, non-contentious question, and in the first phase the interviewer simply offers non-verbal encouragement; in the second phase details may be drawn out by asking the interviewee to say more about the themes already mentioned; only in the third can new topics and missing themes be raised.²⁹

During the pre-interview interaction the respondents were asked to begin by talking about their family and then to recount their lives chronologically as best they could; the opening question simply asked them to tell when and where they were born. Notes were taken during the interview, with regards to themes that could later be expanded upon, in order not to interrupt the flow of the interview. However, the more interviews that were carried out the clearer it became that no one structure suits all interviewees. Some respondents from the question 'Could you begin by telling me when and where you were born?' did so, and continued to recount their life story over a two hour period without so much as a breath, others specifically requested to be asked question after question to prompt them in the right direction. Again others preferred to have a conversation whereby they could occasionally ask questions of the interviewer questions and exchange information, particularly regarding the recent changes in Ireland and to compare the present Ireland with *their* Ireland. Each interview proved a vastly different experience, each with another lesson to learn. In retrospect the interviewer had to become a class of chameleon adapting and reacting to each individual's personality, background and situation.

After each interview was concluded the minidisk was track-marked according to the different themes discussed and a typed sheet was prepared for each disk, recording and numbering each of the themes, the names of the respondents, their addresses, their birthplaces, dates of birth and dates of emigration. A number of interviews were transcribed in full but this process proved time consuming and not wholly necessary. It was deemed more time effective to take notes from the recordings and transcribe themed parts of the interviews, which were relevant across the board.

As a result of much deliberation, quotes throughout are transcribed phonetically rather than written in Standard English. It was at first thought that this might prove offensive, as it is redolent of nineteenth and twentieth century British newspaper reports, which highlighted and often ridiculed Irish *caint na ndaoine*. Moreover, profanity, as it occurs, has not been censored. However, it is hoped that

this will be seen in the light of Irvine Welch novels in which the author uses phonetics to capture the idiosyncratic speech and expressions of everyday Scots. The degree to which some respondents fluidly moved between, for example, a strong Galway to a strong Yorkshire accent without noticing gave another interesting dimension to the interviews. It is hoped that the quotes contained throughout convey the ways in which the respondents use the English language, the influences of the Irish language in their speech and allow the written word to come alive as the spoken word in the minds ear of the reader.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a sociological research technique whereby the sociologist moves freely within a community and observes almost covertly without the collective being aware. In using this technique, information is gathered on the basis of direct observation and not solely on informants' testimony. This technique is most effective in large 'open' communities and also where the participant observer is of the same background or community since '*communication is in the same language and within the same symbolic system*'.³⁰ It is also a skill dependent on the researcher's level of social interaction and personality. However, there is the ethical dilemma as to whether one should observe people as part of a study unbeknownst to them. (Again I revert to unconventional first person to explain how this technique was used in this study.) Being Irish and having spent many weeks during the course of the research process in Leeds, I had the opportunity to meet and mix with many Irish emigrants, their families and friends. I do not believe that there was anything underhanded in participant observation because it did not occur to me at the time that I was using this technique. It was subconscious observation and it only occurred to me at a later date that what I experienced outside of the actual oral interviews, in social and recreational activities, could be drawn into the study. Where it is applicable in this thesis it will be highlighted how participant observation proved useful.

Conclusion

This chapter has been devoted to the description and critical investigation of the various primary historical sources which have been used in this thesis. The strengths and limitations of each of the sources have been highlighted and assessed with the

conclusion that as long as each is used critically they are equally of value to this study.

The value of the statistical material provided by the census from both sides of the water is primarily contextual. Autobiographies are shown to have their implicit faults but also have been shown to be of use for corroborative and comparative purposes particularly with regards the use of oral history as a primary source. Published oral histories have also been highlighted for their comparative and complementary values. Oral history has been advocated as presently the most viable source for investigating the experiences of the Irish in Leeds between 1931 and 1981; there has been little published material on the Irish in Leeds during this period and detailed census material will not be made available in its totality to the public for another eight decades. The methodologies of this particular oral history study have been explained with the conclusion that although it is advisable to have a rough structure for the interview, such as that put forward by Gabriele Rosenthal, it is vital to be able to adapt to the interviewee and their interview preferences. The oral testimonies collected will provide detailed insights into many aspects of the Irish experience in Leeds such as settlement, social and network patterns, contact with home, cultural identity and return migration. The relationship between the interviewer and interviewee with regards to being from similar backgrounds has also been discussed in this chapter with the conclusion that it was more advantageous than problematic. This cultural link is viewed as being important in terms of establishing initial contact and subsequent trust which is a necessary component of any interview process.

In conclusion, this thesis contends that oral evidence and personal testimony are the best possible sources to elicit social and cultural information about the Irish emigrants in Leeds for the period from 1931 to 1981. And furthermore, as regards the importance of such a study, it has been noted and quoted that '*the sense of the past, at any given time, is quite as much a matter of history as what happened in it*'.³¹

In the next chapter, the social, historical and geographical context of the Irish in Leeds from the early nineteenth century will be discussed as a prelude to the main body of research.

ENDNOTES:

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- ¹ Enda Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-71*, 2000, p. 160.
- ² T. Dillon, 'The Irish in Leeds, 1851-61', *The Thoresby Miscellany*, vol. 16, 1979, pp. 1-28; Lynda Letford and Colin G. Pooley, 'Geographies of migration and religion: Irish women in mid-nineteenth-century Liverpool', in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish World Wide, Irish Women and Irish Migration*, vol. 4, 1992, pp. 89-112; Meryvn A. Busteed, Robert I. Hodgson and Thomas F. Kennedy, 'The myth and reality of Irish migrants in mid-nineteenth century Manchester: A preliminary study', in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish World Wide, The Irish in the New Communities*, vol. 2, 1992, pp. 26-51. In these particular studies the enumerator's returns were analysed to create distribution maps to indicate where there were greater Irish concentrations. From these returns it is also possible, for example, to identify the types of dwelling houses they inhabited and how many lived under their roofs.
- ³ *Census 1961, England and Wales, Birthplace and Nationality Tables*, p. xi.
- ⁴ Donal Garvey, 'The history of migration flows in the Republic of Ireland', *Population Trends*, no. 39, 1985, p. 25.
- ⁵ Hickman and Walter Report, *Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain*, 1997, p. 20.
- ⁶ W. E. Vaughan and A. J. Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Irish Historical Statistics: Population, 1821-1971*, 1978. This is a collection of Irish statistics from the first census of 1821 to the then most recent census of 1971. The overall totals are subdivided under counties, provinces and towns. Subjects included are ages and conjugal status; births, marriages and deaths; and emigration.
- ⁷ Enda Delaney, *State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-71*, 2000, p. 189.
- ⁸ *Irish Press*, 22/04/1948.
- ⁹ Paucic Travers, 'Irish female emigration, 1922-71', in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish World Wide, Irish Women and Irish Migration*, vol. 4, 1992, p.158-9.
- ¹⁰ R. F. Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling tales and making it up in Ireland*, 2001, pp. 166.
- ¹¹ John O'Donoghue, *In a Strange Land*, 1958; Donall Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navy: The diary of an exile*, 2003; John B. Keane, *Self-portrait*, 1964 & Sean Ó'Ciaraín, *Farewell to Mayo: An emigrant's memoirs of Ireland and Scotland*, 1991.
- ¹² Bernard Canavan, 'Story-tellers and writers: Irish identity in emigrant labourers' autobiographies, 1870-1970', in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish World Wide, The Creative Migrant*, vol. 3, 1992, pp. 162-3.
- ¹³ Bernard Canavan, 'Story-tellers and writers: Irish identity in emigrant labourers' autobiographies, 1870-1970', in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish World Wide, The Creative Migrant*, vol. 3, 1992, note 40, p. 169.
- ¹⁴ Rita Wall, *Leading Lives: Irish Women in Britain*, 1991, p. 10.
- ¹⁵ John A. O'Brien (ed.), *The Vanishing Irish: The enigma of the modern world*, 1953.
- ¹⁶ *The Furrow*, vol. 9, no. 4, April 1958, p. 230.
- ¹⁷ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, p. 25.
- ¹⁸ Melvyn Bragg, *Speak for England*, 1976, p. 7, quoted in Paul Thompson's *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, p. 158.
- ¹⁹ D. Gittens, 'Oral history, reliability and recollection', in L. Moss and H. Goldstein (eds.), *The Recall*

Method in Social Surveys, pp. 82-97.

²⁰ Hugo Slim, Paul Thompson et al, 'Ways of Listening', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, 1998, p. 116.

²¹ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, pp. 119-22.

²² Paul Thompson, 'History and the Community', in Willa K. Baum and David K. Dunaway (eds.), *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 1984, note 78, p. 40.

²³ See Alan Strachan, 'Post-war Irish migration and settlement in England and Wales', in R. King (ed.), *Geographical Society of Ireland Special Publications* 6, 1991, pp. 21-2 & Russell King, Ian Shuttleworth & Alan Strachan, 'The Irish in Coventry: the Social Geography of a Relict Community', *Irish Geography*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1989, p. 65.

²⁴ Both PhD theses were subsequently published: Caitriona Clear, *Women of the House: Women's Household Work in Ireland 1922-1961*, 2000 and Sharon Lambert, *Irish Women in Lancashire, 1922-1960: Their Story*, 2001.

²⁵ This voluntary organisation was established in 1996 and offers Irish in need culturally sensitive housing and support services.

²⁶ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, p. 242.

²⁷ Joseph, b. 1950, Dublin.

²⁸ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, pp. 309-23.

²⁹ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, p. 228.

³⁰ Muhammad Anwar, *Pakistanis in Britain*, London: Heinemann, 1979, Appendix I, pp. 228-29.

³¹ Ralph Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Vol. 1 of Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, 1994, p. 15, quoted in Caitriona Clear, *Women of the House: Women's Household Work in Ireland 1922-1961*, 2000, p. 218.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE IRISH IN LEEDS: THE SOCIAL, HISTORICAL & GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Leeds is nestled in the Aire Valley of West Yorkshire, east of the Pennines, in north central England. The modern city spans the River Aire, which meanders south-eastwards across the English midlands eventually finding its way into the North Sea. Leeds lies between one of England's most important manufacturing regions to the west and agricultural regions to the north and east and is the regional capital of the Yorkshire and Humber region. Leeds is also located approximately mid-way between the capital cities of London and Edinburgh and between the Irish and North Seas, Merseyside and Humberside [Fig. 3.1]. Its population – 715,402 in 2001 – makes it the second largest Metropolitan District in the United Kingdom.



Fig. 3.1: Location of Leeds

It is at this point useful to define Leeds in spatial and human terms. Leeds officially became a city in 1893. Up until 1911 the borough of Leeds and the parish of

Leeds were coterminous; they consisted of the in-township of Leeds and the eleven out-townships of Armley, Beeston, Bramley, Chapel Allerton, Farnley, Headingley, Holbeck, Hunslet, Osmondthorpe, Potternewton and Wortley. In 1911 Leeds borough had a population of 445,550; the out-townships containing nearly two-thirds of this population were gradually merged with the in-township of Leeds. During the period 1912 to 1957 the city's administrative boundaries were stretched to increase the area of the County Borough by 80%; Roundhay, Shadwell, Crossgates, Seacroft, Temple Newsam and Austhorpe were added to the east, Adel and Alwoodley to the north and Middleton to the south. The new City of Leeds Metropolitan District was created in 1974 as a result of local government reorganisation in England. Boundaries were extended further in all directions forming an administrative area of 216 sq. miles and 743,300 inhabitants [Fig. 3.2]. It was to be the second largest Metropolitan District in England (after Doncaster) and the second largest in population (after Birmingham).¹



Fig. 3.2: Areas and Districts of Modern Leeds

Far back in history Roman, Viking and Norman influxes left their mark on Leeds. In more recent times, in roughly successive order, the Irish, Russian and Polish Jews, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African, Caribbean and Chinese peoples have accrued and settled in this ever-sprawling pluralist city. The story of the Irish in Leeds is broadly a historical one and is inextricably entwined with the roller-coaster fortunes of the industrial economy of the city. This chapter, by focusing on two centuries of Irish influx and influence in the city of Leeds, will create a contextual background for the entire study.

A brief history of the Irish in Leeds pre-1931

Initial Arrival & Settlement

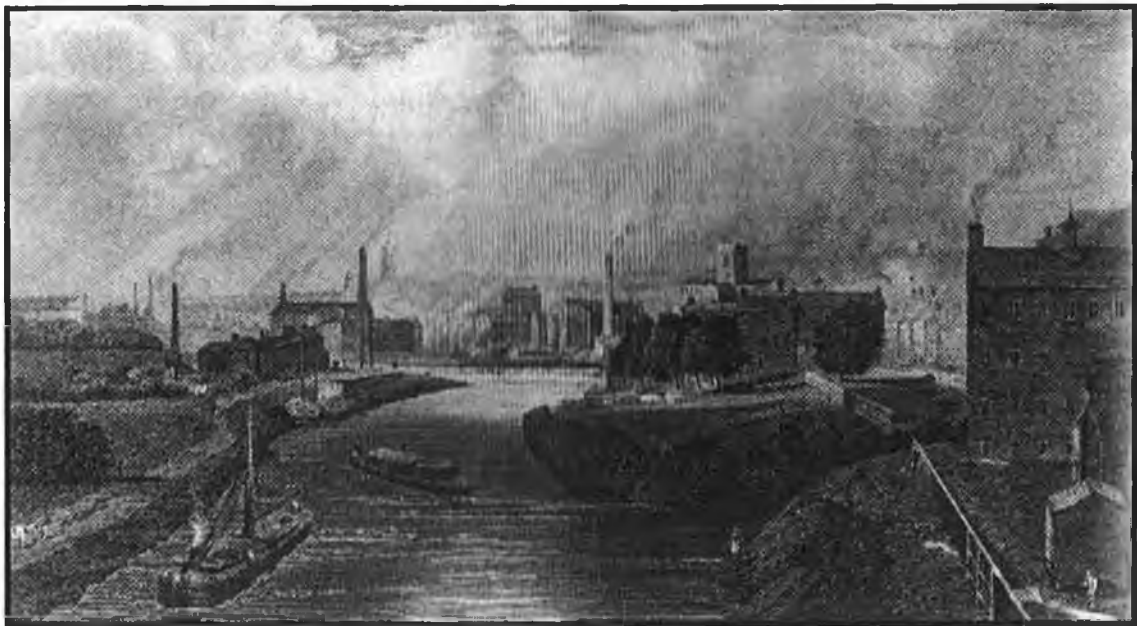
From the early seventeenth century the woollen trade became Leeds' main industry; the eighteenth century bore witness to the strengthening of Leeds both industrially and economically as a result of this thriving textile industry. The many coalmines in the vicinity of Leeds fuelled its numerous textile factories, which attracted labour from the surrounding countryside thus transforming this rural township into an immense industrial city. In Yorkshire in the early eighteenth century large villages with a domestic woollen trade grew at such a pace that by the mid-nineteenth century they had become sizeable towns and cities, the centre of a number of wards, which were previously villages on the periphery of the old town. Leeds is a prime example, the population of Leeds borough stood at 30,309 in 1775, 53,276 in 1801, increasing rapidly to 152,054 in 1841.² This increase in population was primarily as a result of rural migration from the Yorkshire Dales; however the 1841 Census recorded just over 5,000 Irish-born persons living in Leeds, constituting 6% of the total population. No doubt many of these Irish immigrants had arrived as navvies on the construction of the Leeds-Liverpool Canal (1770-1816) and the railways (1834-1849), which linked the heartland of industrial Yorkshire with the Irish Sea.³ Others perhaps began as seasonal migrants to the farms around Yorkshire and gradually gravitated towards Leeds attracted by its employment opportunities – in the woollen and textile industries, in engineering and coal mining. Again others would have been enticed to follow family, friends and neighbours who had gone before them in a process known as chain migration.

In the early 1800s open cast coal was produced at Temple Newsam, about five kilometres from Leeds. Many Irish were employed at the pit and on the railway, which took workers from Cross Green to Temple Newsam and coal to Cross Green on the return journey for distribution. The line became known locally as the '*Paddy Line*'.⁴ Many Irish who arrived during the 1820s and 1830s were handloom weavers who, following the domestic decline of rural textiles from the late eighteenth century had begun to descend upon Yorkshire and Lancashire; by the 1830s two-thirds of the 900 weavers in the township of Leeds were Irish.⁵ By 1838 there were said to be more than a hundred woollen mills in Leeds employing nearly 10,000 people. A number of these weavers were from Tipperary, many other of the emigrants were from the western seaboard counties and their wives and children took up work in the nearby mills.

The working classes resided in clearly defined areas in nineteenth-century Leeds. In 1839, the Statistical Committee of the Town Council estimated that of the total population of 82,120 in the township, of which 61,212 were of the working class.⁶ The North, North East and Kirkgate wards, along with the rapidly expanding out-townships of Holbeck and Hunslet formed the most densely populated working-class area; the middle-classes tended to occupy the healthier and better situated in the Mill Hill, West and North West wards.⁷ Thus, the division between the classes was reinforced by geographical isolation.

It is estimated that in 1851 and 1861 more than 80% of the Irish resided in three wards, that of the East, the North and the North East.⁸ These emigrants predominantly settled in two districts (The Bank and Kirkgate) on the east bank of the River Aire forming an 'Irish Quarter' or 'Little Ireland'. These areas consisted of an area roughly enclosed by York Road to the north, the River Aire to the south, Ellerby Lane and Devon Street to the east and Vicar Lane to the west [see Appendix A: Figs. 7-8]. The houses were back-to-backs, separated from their opposing buildings by narrow ash covered streets, which were rarely cleaned by day or lit by night. These houses had neither gardens nor yards and opened directly onto the street so that: '*The intersection of the street with clothes-lines is an anomaly in street regulations. In the township of Leeds, out of the total number of 586 streets, 276, or nearly one-half are weekly so full of lines and linen as to be impassable for horses and carriages, and almost for foot-passengers*'.⁹ The

area was also characterised by the poor drainage and sanitation; a report by the Town Council in 1839 highlighted the fact that for a hundred dwellings inhabited by more than 450 persons there were but two privies.¹⁰ Moreover, the numerous red-brick chimneys of the mills and factories omitted thick plumes of smoke, which caused an almost permanent fog to engulf the city [Pl. 3.1]. This fog blackened the city's buildings and caused untold harm to the inhabitants living in the vicinity of these manufactories, which included most of the township's Irish population.

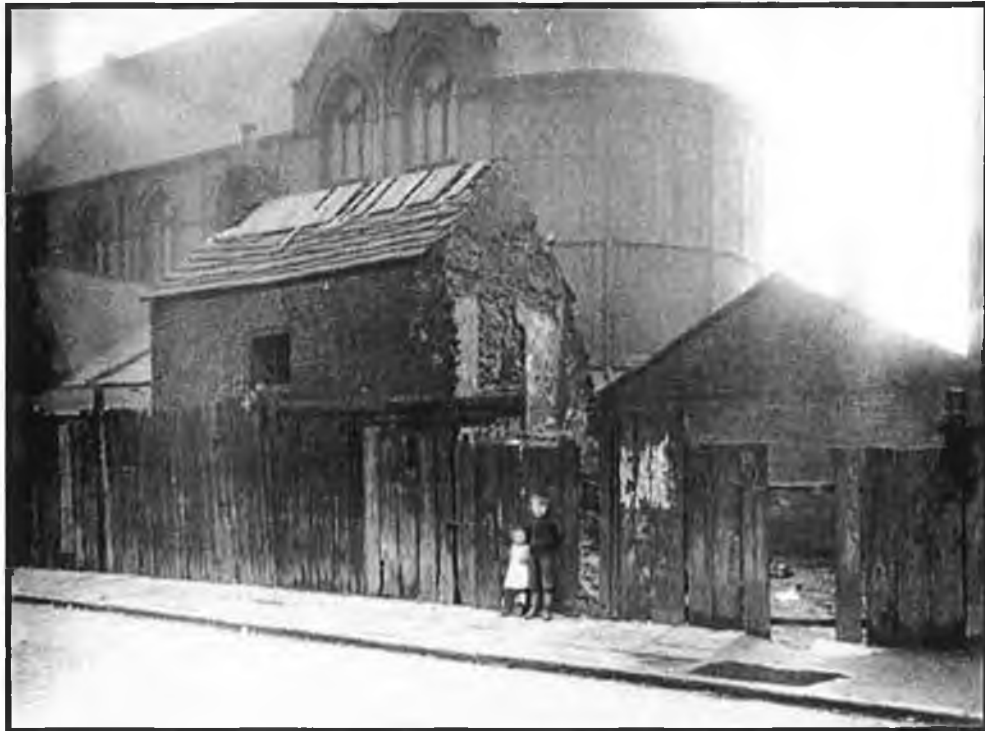


Pl. 3.1: Charles Cope's view of Leeds, c. 1826. Even in the early nineteenth century Leeds was an industrial townscape. Note the chimney stacks and smoke filled skies.

The Old Saint Patrick's Church [Pl. 3.2 & Pl. 3.3], situated on a plot of land part enclosed by York Road, Rider Street and Burmantofts Street, was built in 1831 to serve the Irish population of East Leeds. However, the rapid influx of famine refugees from Ireland in the late 1840s greatly swelled the Catholic population of the area, in particular that of the Bank district and around Richmond Hill. To meet the religious requirements of the Irish community a second larger church was built in the heart of the Bank. The building of Mount Saint Mary's Catholic Church [Pl. 3.4] was a task of gargantuan proportions, especially for an impoverished and much despised community, and the construction was not without its tragedies and setbacks. Mount Saint Mary's was

completed in 1857 and served the city's Irish population for more than a century.¹¹

By 1855 there were 37 flax mills in Leeds employing a total of 9,500 workers, many of whom were Irish famine refugees and a decade later it was noted by Alderman Carter that Irish female labour dominated the lowest strata of the labour force: '*English girls have almost entirely got into better occupations, and those flax mills, where there is such a large amount of dust and heat and steam, are filled almost entirely with the children of the lowest class of people – they are nearly all Irish now*'.¹²



Pl. 3.2: St. Patrick's Catholic Church, off Burtmanofts St., built in the 1830s to serve the Irish population of East Leeds. This photograph was taken in 1922.



Pl. 3.3: St. Patrick's Catholic Church, off Burtmanofts St. Its last mass was celebrated on the 28th April 2001. This photograph was taken in 1999.



Pl. 3.4: View looking along Tab St. upwards to Richmond Hill, crowned by Mount Saint Mary's Catholic Church which was built by the local Irish Famine refugees.

'Crown of Thorns' Period: 1840s-1890s

The mass famine exodus from Ireland doubled Leeds borough's Irish-born population from 5,027 in 1841 to 10,333 in 1861. Of course the Leeds Irish community was much larger. Dillon has, in his study *The Irish in Leeds: 1851-61*, taken the term Irish to mean '*Irish-born, the children of parents one of whom at least was Irish-born, and second generation Irish, who by their names and presence within an Irish household can be recognised as the off-spring of some earlier immigrant*' thus arriving at a figure of 14,905 'Irish' in the in-township of Leeds in 1861.¹³ In terms of size the in-township of Leeds extended '*some three miles long from East to West and one and a half miles long from North to South*'.¹⁴ Hugh Heinrick reporting for *The Nation* in 1872 estimated a Leeds Irish population of between 22,000 and 25,000, contesting that the Irish-born population of Britain should be doubled to obtain this truer figure for its ethnic Irish population.¹⁵

The bulk of this post-famine colony also resided in the Kirkgate and Bank districts of Leeds. The Bank, in particular, became synonymous with poverty, disease, crime, rioting, underemployment and unemployment in contemporary writings thus reflecting the typical '*British upper and middle-class alarm concerning the mass-urbanisation of Victorian Britain and the heavy concentration of destitute Irish people in northern towns, particularly during and after the famine*'.¹⁶ There are many grim contemporary reports and first-hand accounts that highlight the harsh realities that faced Irish emigrants in their new urban homes. Even before the Irish famine refugees had arrived in great numbers, the miserable conditions of the Irish poor in Leeds were being noted; in 1842 Robert Baker a Leeds surgeon and factory inspector reported that:

In the houses of the Irish poor...there is a general state of desolation and misery. Whether it is the improvidence of the Irish character, or that their natural habits are filthy, or both, or whether there exists the real destitution which is apparent in their dwellings, I know not; but in them there is more penury, and starvation, and dirt, than in any class of people I have ever seen.¹⁷

Without exaggeration working-class conditions in Leeds in the 1840s can be described as sub-human, a statement which can be supported by Edwin Chadwick, the Secretary to the Poor Law Commissioners and an ardent sanitary reformer, who reported that for every 1,000 children born in the town, 570 died before the age of five.¹⁸

Almost without exception, in towns of rapid economic growth in north central England – Bradford, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester – the Irish were rooted firmly to

the lowest rung of the economic ladder and at the mercy of low wages and underemployment.¹⁹ Thus they relied for subsistence on their fellow working class neighbours, on charity, on the Poor Law and occasionally on petty crime. For the March quarter of 1846, it is recorded that the number of Irish-born persons relieved by Leeds Union was 756. In the corresponding quarter for 1847, this figure increased dramatically to 3,120. There were also quite dramatic increases in other West Yorkshire Unions for the same period: Bradford from 567 to 1,428 Irish-born persons; Dewsbury 58 to 592; Halifax 194 to 2,066; Huddersfield 136 to 544; Keighley 1 to 247; Sheffield 178 to 859 and Skipton 0 to 899.²⁰ In the first half of 1847 many newly arrived Irish died in the towns and cities of England as a result of malnutrition and its associated illnesses, although exact figures are lacking. The appearance of hoards of destitute Irish on the streets of urban England and the many newspaper reports of the desperate situation in Ireland greatly impacted on the middle classes and in turn resulted in the raising of private charity for the relief of the poor in Ireland. In a seven-month period in 1847, the then substantial sum of £354 17s. 6d., along with 48 bales of clothing, was received by the Society of Friends from Leeds for distribution to the poor in Ireland.²¹ For the same period only London provided a more generous donation. The British Relief Association was even more accomplished in amassing subscriptions for the suffering in Ireland. In 1847, the British Relief Association established relief committees throughout England, which held fundraising meetings; Leeds' donations amounted to £2,500.²²

Reverend Edward Jackson's recollections of 1847 Leeds provide a vivid and horrific first-hand account of the famine-fleeing Irish:

Tall men, with long coats and hats without crowns, and women, wild and haggard, with numbers of unearthly looking children – strange beings that ran alongside of the men and women, and looked at you out of the corner of their eyes, with a sort of half frightened, half-savage expression. The usual low lodging-houses for this class of people were soon more than full, and they extemporized for themselves dwellings such as none but they would have occupied. Why the Poor Law Authorities did not bestir themselves in time, and open proper places for the reception of these wretched exiles, seems now a strange blunder. Being Irish, I suppose they were not legally chargeable to the township. But it was a great mistake and a woeful economy; for the emigrants brought with them not only hunger but death. In a short time the frightful Irish fever [typhus] was epidemic in all the lower parts of the town.²³

The Irish community in Leeds had been associated with the spread of disease long before this outbreak of typhus. A cholera epidemic, which swept across England in the early 1830s, appeared in Leeds in 1832; the first report of infection was of a two-year-old child

of Irish emigrants living in the Bank. In the following six-month period the disease claimed 600 lives in 2,000 cases primarily in the East End of Leeds where the majority of Irish were concentrated.²⁴ Typhus, or 'Irish Fever' as it was more commonly and officially known, appeared in Leeds in 1847. As in Liverpool, the epidemic broke out initially in the town's Irish quarters and quickly spread to other quarters. Typhus spread quickly and easily in overcrowded, impoverished conditions such as was the norm in the Bank; the often deadly organism was transmitted from the affected by body lice. The Reverend Jackson, in his letters and memoirs recalled the situation in the Bank district:

Here, in this district, which was one of especially Irish character, it was simply horrible. Every place above ground, and underground, was crammed with miserable, famished wretches, scarcely looking like human beings. In one cellar we counted thirty-one men, women and children, all lying on the damp, filthy floor, with only a few handfuls of straw under them; while the frightened neighbours, who would not venture inside the pestilential depth, were lowering water in buckets to allay the intolerable thirst of the miserable people.²⁵

Following the gradual cessation of the typhus epidemic, cholera again returned with a vengeance in 1848 to claim 2,000 more lives in Leeds borough. Once more the East End of Leeds bore the brunt of the casualties. These major epidemics provoked hostility from the host community as the Irish were seen as the disseminators of these killer diseases.

In 1849, the *Morning Chronicle* journalist Angus Reach toured England reporting on the state of its major cities. He further describes the living and working conditions of some of Leeds' Irish inhabitants:

I proceeded to the neighbouring row of cottages recently erected. These had each a common room, a bedroom, and a cellar loom shop. In the first when I entered, two Irishmen were weaving a coarse sacking, and the wife of one of them was winding in the bare, scarcely furnished room on the ground floor. The tenant of the room told me that the row was all alike, and belonged to the gentleman for whom he was working. The two looms were fixtures; of course, therefore, he could not rent them without renting the house. The rent was stopped every week out of his wages. Whatever they were, much or little, the rent must always come out of them before he got his money. He believed that the work was given to him just to enable him to pay the rent (which was 3s. weekly), and thus to make a good return for the money invested in the house; otherwise it would be cheaper for the master to get the stuff woven by power. His wages, with his wife to wind, were very small, not averaging above 9s. or 10s. the highest.²⁶

There is an abundance of these dire contemporary accounts.²⁷ And although there were as many working-class English living in the midst of this poverty, it is the Irish who were blamed for dragging the level of the neighbourhoods down. They, according to the city's officials and the media, were responsible for introducing and spreading disease, overcrowding, poor housing and poorer sanitary and drainage conditions. Edward Baines

the editor of the *Leeds Mercury*, however, pointed out that these sanitation and housing problems were not merely confined to urban areas; they were equally problematic in rural Yorkshire.²⁸

According to their English fellow working-class neighbours the Irish were also responsible for lowering wage levels, whereas in fact it was unscrupulous factory employers who were taking advantage of the desperate conditions of the Irish emigrant. In retrospect, it is evident that the Irish were being used as a scapegoat for the poor conditions brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the increased population influx of into Leeds from the countryside, conditions that were, for the most part, out of the control of the Irish emigrant. With this in mind it is not surprising that the Irish were not a popular grouping in mid-nineteenth century Leeds but with little or nothing to return home to they persevered.

The East End of Leeds, in which the Irish resided in greatest numbers, was notorious not only for its poor living conditions but also for crime, prostitution, violence, and drunkenness and as a place where the police only entered in the security of numbers. Between 1851 and 1861 at least 14% of all cases which came before the Leeds Quarter Sessions involved Irish persons; in 1852 the Irish accounted for 33% of all assaults and breaches of the peace.²⁹ This situation, however, is not peculiar to Leeds; the Irish in many English urban centres such as London, Liverpool and York are over represented in certain categories of criminal offences particularly '*the often interrelated categories drunkenness, disorderly behaviour and assault (including assaults on the police) and, to a lesser extent, petty theft and vagrancy*'.³⁰ In the more serious crimes committed, the Irish figured largely in line with the native population. Studies on criminality amongst the Irish in Britain, by Dillon for Leeds, Richardson for Bradford and Finnegan for York have highlighted a direct relationship between crime and environmental decay.³¹ In *The Irish in Leeds, 1851-61*, Dillon remarks of the Irish living in the East End of Leeds that:

In such conditions there is little wonder that the feelings of the Irish were blunted, that their health was affected and that they sought relief in their surroundings given to drinking and brawling. They remained long time victims of their circumstances, subject to the influences of their surroundings...the instances of disorder and disturbance which occurred in the Irish quarter were the inevitable outcome of their situation.³²

Acculturation

Conditions for the Irish were gradually improved from the late 1850s as a result of the increasing prosperity of the town and as the Irish adjusted to urban life. However, there is little evidence to suggest that the Irish as an ethnic group after a half-century and more of settlement in Leeds had been absorbed into the English way of life. As early as 1844, the slogan '*No Swaddy Irishmen or Soldiers Wanted Here*' was inscribed on a table of The Green Man public house on York Street, close to both the Irish quarter and a large barracks. In 1866, there were rumours circulating around Leeds, which proved untrue, that the Irish were making pikes and drilling in secret in preparation for an uprising in the town that was to take place, predictably, on St. Patrick's Day. These unfounded rumours proved premonitory, in February 1867 a large body of Irishmen left Leeds, Bradford, Halifax and Huddersfield evidently with the intention of joining with fellow Fenians in Chester to raid the castle's store of arms and ammunition. Police and troops were deployed in prospect of a disturbance. Meanwhile, in Leeds a young man carrying a parcel and acting suspiciously was approached and challenged by a constable. The parcel contained 24 packages containing 140 ball cartridges all greased and prepared for use. Later that same month packages of rifle cartridges were discovered in Morley railway tunnel.³³ In the December of 1867, following the execution of the Manchester Martyrs, large placards appeared all over Leeds:

GOD SAVE IRELAND – A funeral procession of the Irish patriots executed at Manchester on November 23rd 1867 will take place in Leeds on Sunday next, the 15th December. The procession will assemble Vicar's croft, and start at two o'clock p.m., and will parade the principal streets to St. Patrick's Cemetery, York Road. All lovers of Ireland, men and women, are requested to attend and show their respects to the memory of their fellow-countrymen.³⁴

The Mayor of Leeds banned the procession, but Irish preparations for it continued. The authorities fearful of mass civil disobedience organised a major military security operation and consequently the procession never took place.



Pl. 3.5: An engraving of the procession of the Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII) on his way to open Leeds Exhibition, which appeared in the *London Illustrated News*, May 30th 1868.

The media commented on the Irish presence in the crowds celebrating the visit of the Prince of Wales to Leeds in 1868:

Even the supposed Fenian sympathisers in Kirkgate...forgot to hiss. They cheered and cheered again – old hats that no-one but an Irishman would wear, brilliantly-coloured handkerchiefs that only an Irish woman would delight in, were waved over and over again in the breeze, and the prince graciously and smiling acknowledged the greeting.³⁵

The above wording would suggest that the Irishmen and Irishwomen were still considered alien, in dress at least, to the city's natives and that they could be distinctly picked out in a crowd. The Irish were also considered different in the minds of the working class; the English working class, Marx noted in 1870, '*feels himself a member of the ruling nation...He cherishes religious, social and national prejudices against the Irish worker*'.³⁶

In 1870, H.M.I. Fitch gave an account of the lowest level of Irish emigrant residing

in Leeds living a:

Life of indigence, squalor and hopelessness, which it is difficult for comfortable people to conceive. It is known that there are hundreds of families, whose average income from all sources does not exceed 1s per head per week....There are rag-pickers, chip-sellers, and other persons of nondescript occupations; and there are hundreds of children in Leeds, the main preoccupations of whose life is to follow coal wagons about, with an old pail or basket...³⁷

Their Irish situation in Leeds was little improved throughout the following decade. The 1881 Census of England & Wales highlighted the fact that there was a disproportionate number of Irish relying on town's workhouse for survival. Of the 449 inmates of the Leeds Union Workhouse on Beckett Street, 109 (58 male & 51 female) or 24% were Irish-born [see Table 3.1]. This same census recorded that the Irish constituted merely 3.1% of the total population of Leeds borough. On closer inspection of the names and ages of the inmates it becomes clear that many more of those born in Leeds are of Irish blood. Many of the elderly men in the workhouse are recorded as bricklayer's/carpenter's/contractor's labourers, many of the elderly women as domestic servants, charwomen. Both men and women are also recorded as being involved in a variety of flax/cloth dressers or linen/stuff weavers. The men folk obviously were no longer in a capacity to fulfil the workload of such physically demanding positions and as the century progressed those involved in handloom weaving increasingly came under pressure since they could not compete with the power looms. It would appear that these Irish, more than 50% of them then in the 60-80 age bracket, would have arrived during the famine decades and remained in the same occupations they initially secured without scaling the social or income ladders.

It would, however, appear that there were discernible differences in the working class Irish in Leeds in the later Victorian period; Dillon remarks that:

There are sufficient examples...to indicate that the Irish were not simply refugees from the famine. Taken alongside the evidence of continued immigration in the mid-50s, much of it still from Ireland, they add a further dimension to the story of Irish settlement. Leeds attracted the famine Irish, but it also attracted others, who were more capable of contributing to the well-being of the town upon arrival. Indeed, in 1860, the assistant overseer of the poor in Leeds reported that although the Irish were still arriving they were far more capable of looking after themselves than their predecessors of the late 1840s and early 1850.³⁸

Additionally, following the suppression of the procession in honour of the Manchester Martyr's the local press reported that '*in York Road very few people were assembled, but here some of the better class of Irish were walking about*'.³⁹

Table 3.1: Census of 1881: Inmates of Leeds Union Workhouse, Beckett St.

Birthplace of inmates	Number of inmates	As % of total inmates
<i>England</i>	328	73
<i>Ireland</i>	109	24
<i>Scotland</i>	8	1.6
<i>Poland</i>	1	0.2
<i>Elsewhere</i>	3	0.6
TOTAL:	449	100

Source: Census of Population of England and Wales: 1881, Enumerator's Returns.



Pl. 3.6: Leeds Union Workhouse, Beckett St, Leeds (built 1858-61) in which many impoverished Irish ended their days.

In 1895, *The Leeds Mercury* reported in a somewhat paranoid manner on an Irish Marian festival taking place in the city's suburb: '*as the procession wended its way along the principal streets, the Rosary was recited...hymns...sung, and we felt for the time being as if a sudden transformation into a Roman Catholic country had taken place*'.⁴⁰ This astonishment at a celebration of faith by a community that had been residing in their midst for at least 70 years highlights the fact that there had been little interaction between the natives and the emigrants. On occasion this astonishment expressed in the local press appeared in the more serious form of religious bigotry and open hostility towards the

Irish Catholics of Leeds:

In those days, the bigotry of the working class English made them [the Irish] cling together. The scoff and sneers had to be ignored as they set out for Sunday Mass. Bands of young Irish men had to walk together up the main road, the women kept together in the centre, to protect them from stones and blows that were hailed on them from bands of ignorant colliers, who resented the Irish Papists and stood in gangs to torment them as they went to church on Sundays.⁴¹

This sectarianism, as we shall later see, on occasion was echoed in the mid-twentieth century.

By 1880 Irish immigration into Leeds had slowed and at the close of the century had virtually ceased, thus ending the first wave of Irish immigration into the town [see Table 3.2].

Table 3.2: Irish-born population of Leeds (Borough): 1841-1921

Census year	Irish-born population	Total population of Leeds	Irish-born as % of total
1841	5,027	152,054	3.3
1851	8,446	172,270	4.9
1861	10,333	207,165	5.0
1871	10,128	256,212	4.0
1881	9,541	309,119	3.1
1891	7,166	367,505	2.0
1901	6,443	428,968	1.5
1911	4,739	454,155	1.0
1921	4,027	458,232	0.9

Source: *Census of Population of England & Wales: 1841-1921, County Reports.*

In terms of numbers the only immigrant community to rival that of the Irish in Leeds in the nineteenth century was that of the Jews; in 1851 the Leeds Jewish community numbered 144 persons, increasing to 988 persons in 1871 and to 7,856 in 1891. The Jews, like the Irish, settled in heart of Leeds, in or near a dilapidated area of the town known as 'The Leylands' [see Appendix A: Fig. 7 & Appendix B: Plates 14-15]. They, like the Irish, were predominantly working-class and were met with much hostility; this hostility reached a climax in 1917 with a mob attack on the Leylands. In the late 1920s, the Leeds Jewish population peaked at around 22,000-25,000. If the Irish in Leeds

were traditionally associated with labouring and millwork, then the Jews became synonymous with the cloth trade. By the late 1920s Burton's bespoke tailoring factory, founded by a Lithuanian Jewish immigrant, on Hudson Road was employing 16,000 and was the largest and most popular clothing store in Europe; by 1935 the majority of the 200 tailoring firms in Leeds were Jewish owned.⁴²

One marked difference between the Irish and Jewish communities is the relative speed with which, generally speaking, the Jewish community vacated their initial decrepit core area, scaled the economic ladder and moved to the plusher areas of Leeds. By the 1920s, the Jewish population were dispersing from the Leylands area, many moving to Chapeltown and Moortown. Today, 90% of Leeds Jews live in the prestigious Leeds 17 postal district (incorporating Alwoodley & Moor Allerton),⁴³ whereas the Irish are scattered across the city with minor concentrations in some inner-city wards namely Harehills, Burmantofts, City & Holbeck and Richmond Hill [see Table 3.4].

In the following section the development and expansion of the Irish community will be discussed using the town's infrastructure as a barometer of its spread.

Leeds Irish Community Development & Expansion

Indeed, the development and gradual spread of the initial Irish community and their descendants in Leeds may be tracked by analysing the successive establishment of Catholic Parishes and Churches in the city. According to Dr. Bell, in his paper entitled 'Leeds: The evolution of a multi-cultural society', this process can be tracked in six phases of development,⁴⁴ three of which take place in the nineteenth-century:

1. Initial Settlement Area: 1820-30s
2. Great Famine Influx: 1840-60s
3. Expansion: 1860s-1900
4. Pre World War One: 1901-1914
5. Inter-war Spread to New Housing Estates: 1918-39
6. Post World War Two Expansion: 1945-60s

The first phase saw the establishment of St. Patrick's parish and church in the early 1830s and also included the construction of St. Anne's Catholic Church later that same decade [Pl. 3.7]. The second phase witnessed the establishment of Mount Saint Mary's on Richmond Hill in The Bank district of the town 1857. This was followed by an extension south of the River Aire into the Hunslet district in which St Francis' became the parish church in 1860. In 1878 this initial grouping of parishes was combined to form the Catholic Diocese of Leeds.

During phase three, which took place between 1861 and 1901, Catholic Churches and Parishes were set up in Wortley (1872), Hyde Park (1891), Woodhouse (1891) and Beeston Hill (1896). This spread of the Irish population corresponded with the labour demands of the time, particularly that of the textile and engineering industries. A fourth phase of development, from 1901 to 1914, witnessed the establishment of Catholic Churches and Parishes in Beeston and Harehills, in and around developing working class housing areas. The fifth phase, in the inter-war years but particularly in the 1930s, occurred hand-in-hand with the clearance of the slum dwellings of the in-township of Leeds and the energetic construction of thousands of new houses by the council for rent and sale. In the years following the First World War many Irish came to work on these building projects as the City Council, on the back of promises made by Lloyd-George, strove to build suburban housing estates '*fit for heroes*'. These estates include those at Crossgates, Osmondthorpe, Middleton and York Road and the private and council housing areas of Chapeltown, Bramley and Gipton. Today, the Beeston, Chapeltown, Gipton, Harehills, Hunslet, and Woodhouse areas of Leeds are still home to significant Irish communities.



Pl. 3.7 & Pl. 3.8: The Cathedral Church of St. Anne's (1838-1899), which stood on the intersection of Guilford St. and Cookridge St. was compulsorily purchased and demolished by Leeds Corporation and the replacement St. Anne's Cathedral on the junction of Cookridge St. and Great George St. was completed in 1904.



Pl. 3.9: St. Augustine's Catholic Church on Harehills Rd. opened in 1905 to serve the Irish population of Harehills.

The sixth and final phase of Catholic parish expansion took place in the years following the end of World War Two. The bulk of this spread was to the newly built housing areas of – Seacroft and Swanscliffe to the east, the Belle Isle estate to the South, Chapel Allerton and the Moortown estate to the north, Headingley, Spen Lane, the Ireland Wood estate and Cookridge to the north-west and in more recent times to the Cowclose estate and Stanningley to the west.

In the next section, the question of whether this infrastructure and the population it served constituted a real community will be addressed.

The Irish in Leeds as a Community

On occasion up to this point, the term ‘community’ has been used without definition to refer to the Irish in Leeds. However, the ‘community’ term is one of the most problematic in sociology in that it is vague, wide-ranging and largely without specific meaning. There are many ways in which to view a community, some of which are crude and exclusive, others of which are less tangible and more complex. A number of elements by which a community may be identified have been noted by King, Shuttleworth and Strachan;⁴⁵ these include:

1. Shared birthplace or shared ancestral origin
2. Geographical space
3. Creation & participation in various cultural/political/religious institutions
4. A common sense of identity and shared values
5. A social network of interacting individuals
6. The less tangible feeling of Irishness

Thus far ‘Irish-born’ has been used to refer to all those born on the island of Ireland, since in the nineteenth century and pre-1921 there was no border between north and south and therefore no distinction between those born in the six or twenty-six counties. Where the term ‘Irish’ has been used it has been to include Irish-born, children and grandchildren of Irish-born persons. Identifying a community on the basis of shared birthplace or shared ancestral origin is crude and problematic because in many cases the individual may well not want to be or feel to be Irish or part of an Irish community. One

important point of note is that whether or not the Irish viewed themselves or acted as a united community in 19th century Leeds, the native English of the town certainly saw the Irish as a distinct and separate group.

The term community at the very least refers to collection of people in a shared geographical area. The Irish formed a definite geographical community in mid-nineteenth century Leeds, being concentrated in the in-township with a particularly strong concentration in the Bank district. The formation of an Irish community on the Bank on the basis of geographical location was the result of a number of factors. The development of steam-powered technology in the late eighteenth century encouraged the construction of textile factories in the East End of Leeds. To accommodate factory workers, farming land was purchased to the north-east and south of the town and rows of back-to-back terraced houses were built. Conditions in and around the factories were crowded, sanitation and water supplies virtually non-existent and thus rent was cheap. The Irish came to settle in the Bank district in the 1820s and 1830s because rent was cheapest, factory employment was on the doorstep for man, woman and child and St. Patrick's Catholic Church was nearby. The Bank was to retain a green tinge for almost a century until the slum clearances of inner city Leeds of the 1930s relocated the majority of its population to newer flats and houses. However, the Bank and its crowning edifice, Mount Saint Mary's Church, remains a symbol of the Irish community in Leeds. The Irish were not totally segregated from the native population; there were many native English working-class living in the same streets on the Bank. It is fair to assume that the Irish and their English neighbours intermingled but to what degree this took place is undeterminable, although it is known that some English families on the Bank converted to Catholicism.⁴⁶

Another reason for the dense population in this area was the limited room for expansion; the area was bound to the south by the River Aire, to the north by the railway and York Road, to the east by the commercial town centre and to the west by open farmland. It would be fair to suggest that successive generations of Irish were attracted to the Bank because 1.) it was an established 'Irish quarter' 2.) of the availability of cheap accommodation upon arrival 3.) of the nearby employment opportunities and 4.) of the newcomer's inability to afford expensive public transport. It is also fair to assume that

many were drawn to these areas of traditional settlement to family, friends and neighbours where the inherent problems of settlement and dislocation from Irish society would have been eased in an area of Irish character where accents were familiar and cultural practice was similar.

With regards to Irish institutions in Leeds, Mount Saint Mary's was built with the blood and sweat of the surrounding Irish community; some funds for the construction of the church were collected locally, but wealthy Catholics residing outside the area donated the bulk of money. The older St. Patrick's Church further served the Irish community. However, it is estimated that in mid-nineteenth century England 50% of Irish emigrants permanently abandoned practicing Catholicism and the Irish of Leeds would have been no exception.⁴⁷

Politically Irishmen such as Feargus O'Connor, Charles Connor and George White were all heavily involved in the Chartist movement in Leeds in the 1830s and 1840s and were involved in the physical force wing of the movement. In the late 1840s attempts were made to broaden the Chartist base in Leeds by attracting the town's Irish population but to what extent they were successful remains speculative. Before Daniel O'Connell had launched his 'monster-meeting' campaign for the restoration of political autonomy to Ireland in 1843, most large Yorkshire towns – Bradford, Dewsbury, Huddersfield, Leeds and Sheffield – had established Repeal Organisations. The Leeds Association had by 1843 opened five Repeal Reading Rooms and in the nine months previous raised £80 towards the Repeal Rent.⁴⁸ In Leeds as elsewhere, the Catholic clergy were influential in persuading Irish emigrants and their families to enrol with O'Connell's Repeal movement.⁴⁹ There was also a Leeds Fenian Society; some Irish in nineteenth century Leeds were involved in Fenian activity but it is likely that this was a small minority of the community. Nonetheless, with a sizeable Irish population in Leeds, the town's natives and authorities were nervous of a Fenian threat and tensions were high between the Irish and English communities. Additionally, in the town there existed a Leeds Home Rule Association, which had its premises in Kirkgate. In 1883, the Irish National League for Great Britain was founded at a convention in Leeds; Charles Stuart Parnell headed the convention. In 1885 Parnell, the Irish Home Rule leader, urged Britain's Irish population to vote against Gladstone's Liberals. The Irish in the East Leeds

constituency obliged and the Conservative candidate, R. Dawson, was subsequently elected. In the general election the following year Parnell transferred his support to the Liberals, after Gladstone had converted to Home Rule, and the only changed seat in Leeds was that of East Leeds.⁵⁰ Thus it would appear that there was a degree of political cohesion amongst the Irish population of Leeds, however, following the fall of Parnell the Irish community was split in its allegiance; the anti-Parnell faction went as far as to establish a separate Irish club.⁵¹ The Irish National Club, which had been founded on the Bank, moved to premises situated off Lower Briggate at the close of the nineteenth century. In summary, if one is to look at the Irish in Leeds as a community through various cultural, political and religious institutions there is evidence that there was a degree of cohesion. However, there is no way of accurately estimating the numbers that ever joined these institutions or attended their gatherings; all that can be said with confidence is that each incorporated a fraction of the Leeds Irish community.

Mary Hickman advocates a sociological approach that *'focuses on social relationships as the basis of 'community' rather than geographical space'*, which she argues *'is a more useful conception of community because ways of life do not necessarily coincide with settlement types'*.⁵² In an ideal world, the analysis of social networks within a community would be preferential over a basic geographical study of a community; however, a difficulty arises in that there is no clear, widely accepted definition of just what characteristic features of social interaction constitute the relations typical of so-called communities.⁵³ In this regard oral history has been recognised as being *'most useful in explaining the social structure and pattern of everyday life'*.⁵⁴ However, for the Irish in nineteenth century Leeds, this discipline evolved decades too late.

To what extent the Irish in Leeds in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries interacted as a community during the course of their everyday lives is a little hazy. There is little documentary material which could shed light on the social relationships of the Irish in Leeds during this period. However, in *The Ham Shank* Mary Patterson, in documenting the life of her Aunt Maggie (the daughter of a Mayo emigrant), sketches a picture of life on the Bank from the latter decades of the nineteenth century to its clearance in the 1930s. The sketch is particularly religiously focussed but is also one of a humble existence with Irish emigrants *'living in the English way, but clinging fervently to*

their Irish customs, and above all to the Faith of their Fathers'.⁵⁵ She recalls that her aunt attended '*concerts given by the school children to celebrate the feast of St. Patrick when the girls in their white dresses and emerald sashes and ribbons sang the Irish songs, and their parents proud and happy came along to applaud them*'. Patterson also alludes to the constant stream of young Irish emigrants to the Bank and religious tensions amongst the Irish and English.

One interesting point of note is that when Eamonn de Valera escaped from Lincoln Jail in 1919, two of his fellow escapees Sean McGarry and Sean Milroy hid on The Bank within the Irish community for several days before retuning to Ireland.⁵⁶ This would at the very least hint at a degree of social and political cohesion amongst the Irish in the district, in that fugitives could safely be accommodated amongst and within the community.

So did the Irish constitute a united community in nineteenth century Leeds? The evidence suggests that in spatial terms they formed a distinct 'Irish Quarter' with offshoots. They were to be found in all eight wards of the township of Leeds but were for the most part residing in three wards, those of the East, the North and the North East. However, they were not segregated and dwelt amongst the English working class. Religiously, and politically they were almost exclusively Catholic, but not all were practicing Catholics, and some were involved in Fenian and Home Rule Movements. Culturally little evidence remains but there were Irish dances and St. Patrick's Day celebrations in the town in the late 1800s. The Irish were also somewhat united in the fact that they were seen as outsiders by the native population and in many cases as a social problem and they were, almost without exception, working class. On the basis that the Irish were of a shared birthplace or ancestry, that they were residing in numbers in a definable area, that for the majority they were working class and of the one religion, that they could be called upon to unite in times of difficulty (Procession for the Manchester Martyrs and by Parnell to unite the Irish Vote) one would have to view the Irish in Leeds as a community united to varying degrees. The Irish in Ireland were not a homogeneous group and neither were its emigrant sons and daughters living abroad.

Summary

The story of the Irish in nineteenth century Leeds is, in many respects, similar to that of the Irish in many of England's urban centres during this period. By the 1820s Leeds had a small Irish population, which had arrived most likely via the port of Liverpool and who were attracted by employment opportunities in the textile industry and in the construction of housing, railways and canals. They initially took root in the East End of Leeds, the most impoverished working class area of the town around the mills and factories, where housing was cheapest. Increased native population movement into Leeds from the countryside coincided with the continued arrival of Irish emigrants in the 1830s. This rapid influx and sustained urban growth added further strain to the already inadequate conditions of the working class. Thus the town of Leeds was ill prepared for the sheer numbers of destitute Irish who arrived in the latter years of the 1840s. Conditions worsened in the East End of Leeds, cholera and typhus spread rapidly into adjoining quarters and the town struggled to come to terms with the increased strain on its resources. The Famine Irish bore the blunt of the blame for the desperate social conditions; however, these conditions existed not only in Leeds but also in almost all contemporary major industrial centres throughout England and were mostly the result of rapid industrial expansion. A number of reports on the social conditions of the working class in England, which were carried out in the years before the famine influx (early 1840s) indicates that there were universal housing and sanitation problems as a result of the Industrial Revolution.⁵⁷ The desperate situation was not caused but *was* compounded by influx of the Famine Irish in Leeds. As the century wore on the Irish in Leeds were still for the most-part located within the initial core settlement area and were over-represented in the poverty and crime statistics of Leeds. They suffered from bad press and on occasion open hostility from their fellow working class neighbours as religious differences and competition for employment strained community relations. Thus the Irish formed a distinct geographical, spiritual and social community. The Leeds Fenian Society had been involved in an abortive attack on Chester Castle in 1867 and a funeral procession organised in the town '*in honour of the Irish patriots executed at Manchester*' met with strong military and police resistance. Gradually the Irish in Leeds began to adopt more constitutional methods to achieve their political aims and the working class

area of East Leeds became a constituency decided by the Irish vote.⁵⁸ The Irish had begun to organise themselves as an ethnic group at the end of the nineteenth century; the Irish National Club had been established on the Bank and by the 1890s had moved to Trinity Street, off Lower Briggate Street. Evidence suggests that at the close of the century the Irish were still visibly different from the native population in politics, dress, religion and culture. It is difficult to estimate how in terms of social interaction, recreational activity, cultural tradition (other than religiously) and community aspirations the Irish differed as an ethnic grouping from the native population in nineteenth century Leeds. The only accounts which survive were written from outside the community and focus upon the negative aspects of the Irish population of Leeds – their squalid living conditions, their poor state of health, the criminal activity of a minority of its members etc. With regards to their hopes and desires, their daily lives and recreational activities, no record survives. Oral history would have been an ideal instrument by which such information could have been elicited and recorded for posterity; however, it remains forever lost.

The Irish in Leeds post-1931:

The Irish-born population of Britain declined in the early decades of the twentieth century, in both absolute and relative terms.⁵⁹ The establishment of the Irish Free State in 1921 failed to initiate a mass return of Irish emigrants in Britain. From the 1930s Britain took the place of the United States as the choice of destination favoured by Irish emigrants; this occurred as a result of depression in the US, the imposition of immigration quotas by Congress and the difficulties in transatlantic travel during the war. This second wave of large-scale emigration from Ireland to Britain took place between the mid-1930s and the early years of the 1970s; it began as a trickle in the 1920s, gradually increased during the 1930s gathering momentum during the war years and in the post-war reconstruction of Britain. By 1931 the Irish-born population of England & Wales had fallen to 381,089 (0.9% of the total population). As a result of the surge of emigration in response to the intense demand for labour in war and post-war Britain the Irish-born population of England & Wales rose to 870,445 in 1961, peaking at 878,530 (1.9% of the total population) in 1966.

Table 3.3: Irish-born Population of Leeds (Borough): 1931-1981

Census year	Irish-born population	Total population of Leeds	Irish-born as % of total
1931	3,165	482,809	0.66
1941	<i>No Census</i>	<i>No Census</i>	<i>No Census</i>
1951	4,788	505,219	0.95
1961	6,632	510,676	1.30
1971	7,580	496,009	1.53
1981*	7,563	696,714	1.09

Source: Census of Population of England & Wales: 1921-1981, County Reports.

*Note: * These figures are for Leeds Metropolitan District and not Leeds Borough.*

1930s & 1940s

By 1931 the Leeds Irish-born population had fallen to 3,165, its lowest figure for a century [see Tables 3.2 & 3.3]. By the 1920s, Leeds' textile industry was in decline and tailoring and manufacturing became the dominant industries. Unemployment in Leeds was high in the 1920s and 1930s.⁶⁰ However, in the 1930s many Irishmen in the city secured work in industries with a long tradition of employing Irish labour, notably the building trade; the largest public housing scheme in Europe, the Quarry Hill flats comprising 938 flats for over 3,000 people on a 26-acre site was begun in 1934. This complex was home to many Irish families in the 1950s and 1960s.

It was all navy work; it was all buildings then; there was building going on at the time. Now it [unemployment] was very bad up to the end of 1938 when the war clouds...then things began to brisk up because they knew there was war coming. Now prior to that when I went there first you'd see notices up in factories 'No Irish Need Apply' and then all of a sudden that changed to 'Irishmen Wanted'. They wanted ya, not just in there at the factory, they wanted ya, what meant by that was they wanted ya in the army. You went for a job then they'd say "Well, we only take certain aged men in here, what age are ya? Alright, well you're eligible for the army".

[Austin, *b.* 1916, Co. Roscommon]

Many more Irishmen were employed in the agricultural sector around Yorkshire. Of their female counterparts many found work as domestics, in the services or in the thriving clothing trade. Leeds of the 1930s was still a heavily industrialised and consequently a filthy city in the eyes of its new Irish arrivals:

I hated it, I detested it, them days there was no such thing as a blue sky, it was black with soot and muck, even the footpaths were black with muck, the walls were black with muck, it was a terrible, it was, what do you call, an industrial city, and I couldn't understand why it was so black.

[Eileen, b. 1918, Co. Mayo]

Leeds had a relatively sizeable Mayo contingency in the post-famine decades and by 1930s it was fast becoming established as a 'Mayo' town. One Galway woman recalls of the Irish in Leeds in the late 1930s that '*every single one was from Mayo and they all went to St. Francis*': St. Francis was an Irish social club organised by the Catholic Clergy and well known throughout Yorkshire and in Ireland. There weren't many Irish owned or Irish managed pubs in 1930s Leeds, but Austin remembers that two pubs The Simpson Arms, on York road, and The (Old) Roscoe, in Sheepscar, were frequented by the Irish. One Mayo veteran described his memories of being Irish in 1930s Leeds:

We were all very sensitive and unsure then. We'd cling together a lot with lads from our own county. After Mass we'd go to a pub in Leeds frequented by Mayo men. The talk would be mostly about Mayo and who was doing what back there – or about Mayo men here, or what they were doing in the "diggin's". After that we might have a meal, but never in a place that looked "proper", with tablecloths and so on. We'd be scared to go into a place like that, even on Sunday with our best suits on, in case they'd throw us out for not knowing how to behave properly at table. We all shared rooms in digs, and sometimes we shared beds – but no immorality mind you – and sent money home most weeks and said we were getting on fine at the buildin' – even though in the thirties we'd have work only about three weeks out of four. When you met someone you knew, the remark was always "Are ye workin'?" It was up to yourself to get work when it was scarce, by letting on to a foreman what a great worker you could be if you were given a job. Some fellows used to develop a particular way of walking – they called it "The Gimp" – it amounted to a sort of swagger which gave an impression of confidence. When a fellow with "The Gimp" came onto a site, he'd kick any ould timber out of his way – fuck it outa his way, as much as to say: "You want a tunnel dug...I'll dig it myself in a day...

And then coming to England with the lads and sticking together, being afraid to talk to English girls, and all the time this brooding thing of history...well it didn't help you in so-called integrating.⁶¹

The description is one of Irish youths lacking in self-confidence, living in cramped conditions, without constant employment, but sending money home under the pretence that all was good and the finding comfort and solace amongst their own.

The reception of the Irish emigrants in England was not always amicable. On January 16th 1939 there were three IRA explosions in Manchester; one person was killed. Mass arrests followed the attacks but the campaign continued with further bomb outrages in Birmingham, Cardiff, Coventry, Derby, Leicester and Liverpool; train stations, banks, post offices, bridges and pylons were the prime targets of over 200 explosions. The IRA

campaign peaked with the killing of five people in an explosion in Coventry on August 25th, eight days before the outbreak of World War II. For the most-part Yorkshire escaped the IRA's campaign of terror, however, in the July of 1939 Belfast-born James McGowan was, with four others, arrested after the 20lb of gelignite was discovered at a house in Potternewton, Leeds. In November, at the Leeds Assizes McGowan was given a 12 year sentence, the others were not proceeded against.⁶² In the July of 1939 the British Government responded to such attacks by introducing Prevention of Violence Bill, which required all Irishmen in Britain to register with the police. Thus, perhaps understandably, Irish emigrants were often treated with suspicion, mistrust and on occasion open hostility, a situation which lasted well into the fifties. The immediate result was the reluctance to employ the Irish and the difficulty in securing 'digs'.

On September 1st & 2nd 1939, 18,000 children, 2,800, teachers and 8,000 mothers evacuated from Leeds, mostly to Lincolnshire and the Yorkshire Dales. However, some Irish parents decided to send their children to the relative safety of the west of Ireland and took part in the war effort:

When he [Honora's husband] went into the army and the two kids went evacuated home to Ireland to me mothers, I went into munitions...I worked two-and-a-half years doin' a man's work...in the munitions and it was like being in the army, you had to do it, you couldn't say no, it was the women that made all them munitions to keep the men in the field.

[Honora, *b.* 1914, Co. Galway]

When, in September 1939, the war broke out many Irish in Leeds decided to return to Ireland because of conscription into the British forces and the fear of the inevitable bombings:

When the war broke out we came home to Mayo; I didn't want to but my sister was afraid we'd be bombed in our beds.

[Bridget, *b.* 1918, Co. Mayo]

Oh I decided that I wasn't goin' to fight for England anyway, I'll be straight about that, and I often told them that too. But I decided then that the best thing to do was to keep an eye out to see how near it was coming and to get out of there before it would come, the trouble you know so...me wife came home first ...she came back to her parents place and I stayed there a while to put a few quid together...I was asked to join the air-force, you know, it was recommended to ya to join the air force...if you went into we'll say a labour exchange now, that's the first thing that they'd want ya to sign on for the... in the forces, you know. Everywhere you went that was it "Join the British Army, Join the British Air Force".

[Austin, *b.* 1916, Co. Roscommon]

However, many others decided to stay, some to protect their new lives and homes:

I couldn't go home, I was living in Leeds and I had to stand me ground in Leeds because our home was there; we had got a house. But I went home for our Jarleth to be born but I came

back again. And father [her husband] of course was in tailoring and then he was taken into the army and then I couldn't [return to Ireland] because we had the children to think of to come back. That was our home; we had given up everything at home.

[Honora, b. 1914, Co. Galway]

It is estimated that around 100,000 men and 10,000 women from Leeds registered for service, of which the city's Irish community contributed a share. Since there was no census taken in 1941 it is impossible to estimate with any certainty the Irish-born population of Leeds during the war years and besides many more moved eastwards across the Irish Sea as the demand for wartime labour intensified.

The fear of bombing proved founded and 1940 witnessed the first air raid by the German Luftwaffe on Leeds. In the following year, on the night of March 14th the German Luftwaffe damaged 4,600 houses, the museum and the Town Hall; 65 people were killed and a further 260 injured, 56 seriously [see Appendix B: Plates 24-25]. The raid is vividly recalled by one Irish emigrant:

One night these German planes come over and the search lights was on, well they come this way and you could see the swastikas on them and they let one of the fire bombs fall down on the yard ...and we had sandbags at the time and I picked up one of them and I said to my husband "put it out quick or we'll be all..." so the next street there was two back-to-back houses blown up.

[Honora, b. 1914, Co. Galway]

On May 8th 1945 Victory parties were held on the streets of Leeds. The city's final war damage statistics: 77 civilian dead, 327 injured & 197 buildings destroyed with a further 7,623 damaged in nine air raid attacks. However, material damage to Leeds was minimal in comparison with other cities such as Birmingham, Coventry, Hull, Liverpool, London, and Sheffield.⁶³

As elsewhere in Britain, the post-war prosperity experienced by Leeds resulted in a shortfall of labour in the lower-paid jobs such as in the hospitals or on the buses. Furthermore, mass cheap manual labour was required in the post-war reconstruction of Britain. For example, in 1948 it is estimated that there were 90,000 substandard houses unfit for human habitation in Leeds, of which 56,000 were back-to-backs, out of a total of 154,000.⁶⁴ Thus new estates were sited near the city centre and around the Outer Ring Road. By the late 1940s, Britain increasingly turned to her colonies in the Caribbean to satiate this demand for labour. However, the Irish, Britain's traditional supplier of cheap labour, remained the largest immigrant group in Leeds and in Britain in general with an

average annual net migration of 24,384 persons from Ireland for the post-war period of 1946-51.⁶⁵ In 1948, the Yorkshire County Board, the governing body of Gaelic Football was established; Canon Stritch was the board's first chairman.

1950s & 1960s

The 1951 Census revealed that there were 4,788 Irish-born residing in Leeds, an increase of 1,632 persons in the previous two decades, and the population of Leeds borough for the first time broke the half-million mark. The ethnic mix of Leeds was further added to during the 1950s and 1960s as large numbers of from the West Indies and the Indian Sub-continent arrived in the city. They for the most part settled in the inner city wards where rent is cheapest and conditions are worst. Much of this Irish population came to reside in the streets in and around the Chapeltown, Sheepscar and Harehills districts, to the north-east of the city centre. Economically Leeds was notably prosperous in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. As a result of this economic boom, the Leeds Irish population surged by almost 2,000 persons during the 1950s and by a further 1,000 in the 1960s, peaking at 7,580 in 1971 [see Table 3.3]. This surge resulted in greater needs for the Leeds Irish community, better sports and social facilities were required and also a social services department to provide advice to new arrivals on housing and employment. In 1967, the *Yorkshire Evening Post* revealed plans for a new Irish Centre to be built on a three-acre site off York Road at an estimated cost of £120,000; the leasehold on the Irish National Club on Lower Briggate was to expire in September 1969. In the report Mr. Patrick Kissane, the then secretary of the club, estimated the city's Irish community at about 45,000, of which 16,000 were Irish-born and the remainder of Irish parentage.⁶⁶ This overestimation was highlighted in the 1971 census, which gave an Irish-born figure of less than 7,000 for Leeds (and a Northern Irish-born figure of less than 3,000). The proposed Irish Centre was to consist of a licensed club premises, a dancehall, sports fields and other social facilities. Funds for the centre were to be sought from industrial and commercial organisations in Ireland and also from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Leeds. In July 1969, at a meeting in Birmingham of the Council of Britain permission was granted for a *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* (CCE) branch to be formed in Leeds.

1970s

In terms of population, the Census of 1971 recorded 33,310 people residing in the city of Leeds born outside of the United Kingdom of which 6,565 were born in the Republic of Ireland. Moreover, 2,715 were born in Northern Ireland and a further 1,015 born in Ireland did not indicate a specific location. As has been discussed in the previous chapter this latter figure may be added to the figure for those born in the Republic of Ireland with a degree of confidence that the majority were born there. In addition to this these figures, there are many more second and even third generation Irish, although precise figures are lacking, who are conscious of and reflect their Irish cultural background.

The 1970s construction of the M1 and M62 motorways, at a time when the use of canals and railway had faded, further provided Irish labourers with seemingly never-ending work and reinforced Leeds importance as a commercial centre, the crossroads of the north-south and east-west highways [see Fig. 3.3].



Fig. 3.3: Motorways around Leeds constructed in the 1970s.

The Leeds Irish Centre was officially opened on the 8th June 1970 replacing the older Irish National Club off Lower Briggate. Also in 1970, Leeds CEE was invited by BBC Radio Leeds to broadcast a fortnightly programme of traditional Irish music and song. In May 1972, the Leeds CCE hosted *Fleadh Cheoil na Breataine* at Primrose Hill Secondary School; the same location served as the location for the Annual Leeds *Fleadh Cheoil*. In 1973, the Leeds CCE launched a branch magazine entitled *A Chara*, in which members penned articles, anecdotes and poems celebrating Irish culture and tradition. In January 1980, Radio Leeds became the first radio station in Britain to broadcast a show exclusively devoted to traditional Irish music; the programme entitled 'If you're Irish' survived for eight years.



Pl. 3.10: Dignitaries of the Catholic Church arriving for the opening of the new Leeds Irish Centre on York Rd., 8th June 1970.

What is of further interest to this study is that the 1982 *Catholic Leeds Diocesan Directory* gave a population of the Leeds Catholic Parishes of 52,380 persons. It has been noted that 'as a general estimate it has been said that 80% of Catholics are of Irish descent in three generations. This would give a population of Irish origin in Leeds of more than 40,000'.⁶⁷ This, of course, does not take into account those of the Irish Protestant community who may have immigrated to Leeds, or indeed those who entered into mixed marriages.

Table 3.4: Leeds wards with highest concentration of Irish-born in 1981

Leeds ward	Irish-born as % of total Irish population of Leeds	Leeds ward	Irish-born as % of total Irish population of Leeds
<i>Harehills</i>	10.67	Richmond Hill	04.54
<i>Chapel Allerton</i>	06.22	Headingley	04.43
<i>Burmantofts</i>	05.79	Armley	03.99
<i>Kirkstall</i>	05.39	Seacroft	03.29
<i>City & Holbeck</i>	04.84	Wortley	03.01

Source: Census of Population of England & Wales: 1981.

In 1981 the Irish-born population of Leeds was distributed across the 33 wards of Leeds. Of the 7,563 Irish-born persons residing in Leeds in 1981 57% were to be found in the 11 wards listed above [see Table 3.4] which are located, in part or entirely, in Urban Priority Areas; the remaining 43% were scattered amongst the remaining 22 wards. At present according to the Index of Local Deprivation two of the above wards, those of Harehills and City & Holbeck of which together contained 15.5% of Leeds Irish-born population, are amongst the top 100 most deprived wards in England (there are 3,619 wards in England).

Leeds Irish Community, 1931-81

As aforementioned the development of Leeds Irish Community can be tracked by analysing the establishment of successive new Catholic parishes and churches in the city. Additionally, respondents' reminiscences can provide an insight into the city's Irish community. Interestingly, one respondent believed the Irish community in Leeds was more readily apparent through a network of church, pub and work than in terms of a particular geographical area:

There was a feeling in the 50s anyway that I seem to recall of the Irish sticking very much together particularly in matters of work, you know a lot of them worked in the construction industry and they more or less dominated that, it was kinda like an Irish mafia you know in the building trade. There was that kind of thing and you know they did of course concentrate in the pubs you know so there was that kind of a thing you know, the community, if you like, was in the church and the pubs and in work more than anything else, you know, that's my memory of it anyhow.

[Thomas, b. 1941, Dublin]

The majority of the respondents identified the Irish community with particular areas of the city. It has been noted that The Bank was the Irish stronghold for almost a century until the slum clearances in the 1930s scattered its Irish population. Information gleaned from the oral history interviews confirms that from the late 1940s to the 1970s the Irish population was most heavily concentrated on and off York Road and in the Burmantofts, Chapeltown, Harehills and Sheepscar districts and particularly around Chapeltown Road, Roundhay Road and Harehills Lane. These were Jewish areas in the opening decades of the twentieth century but as that community prospered it gradually moved northwards from the Leylands to Sheepscar, and since World War II via Chapeltown, Moortown and Roundhay to Alwoodly.⁶⁸

I remember the Jews coming and settling in Leeds in the old days, Claypit Lane [The Leylands] they were all, and Spencer Place [Chapeltown]...well that was the top grade, all Jewish Doctors and specialists they all lived in Spencer Place...and the Jews had their own hospital there, they had their own Jewish hospital, nearly all the big doctors and them in Leeds they were all Jewish. Well the Jews ran Leeds, let's put it this way.

[Honora, b. 1914, Co. Galway]

Other significant Irish clusters were to be found to the north-west of the city in Headingley and south of the River Aire in Beeston and Hunslet, particularly around Dewsbury Road. However, by general consensus Harehills and the neighbouring Chapeltown emerged as being *the* focal point of the Irish community from the late 1940s to the 1970s [see Appendix A: Fig. 9 & Appendix B: Plates 34-40]. One contributor to the Leeds *Comhaltas* commemorative magazine in 1989, on the occasion of their 20th anniversary, recalled of the Irish community Leeds in the early 1950s that:

Anybody who lived in Chapeltown in those days could say they lived in Ireland. If you walked into Potternewton Park on a Sunday you would have thought you were in St. Stephen's Green in Dublin. Irish boys and girls in their hundreds, hurlers and footballers, and somewhere under a tree the occasional sound of the accordion, fiddle and flute. Then there was Reginald Terrace a hundred yards from the park. Surely this should be called Patrick Street or Irish Town. Three houses stand out in my mind, numbers 19, 21 and 23, to be joined in 1951 by numbers 25 and 31...Well with five houses and about a hundred boys and girls it means a lot of birthday parties in a year. As a matter of fact I'm sure it was non-stop partying. The Irish music and dancing was all the go. I think that every musician that ever came to Leeds played in 23 Reginald Terrace...Then there was week-end dancing at places such as St. Francis' on Saturday night and the Holy Rosary on Sunday afternoon (and Sunday night in later years), also Claypit Lane and the Green Rooms.⁶⁹

Gráinne recalls the continued Irish predominance of this area in the 1960s:

There was a lot of Irish [in Leeds] and they all down Harehills Road, near St. Augustine's Church, that was all the Irish community, if ever you came to Leeds and you wanted to find somebody Irish you came there. And there used to be a park called Potternewton Park and we

all met there on a Sunday. Now a white pershon daren't walk through there [laughs] so it changed so much. But all the Irish were brilliant, everybody sort of knew everybody an' stuck up for each other and helped and what have ya. And then that place started going down and they started moving out to the outskirts of Leeds and scattered all over, so you lost contact with a lot of; the only time you meet people now is when it's at funeral, that's mostly when you meet them all. It is, it's awful, it really is.

[Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo]

Michael, the son of Mayo emigrants, was born and raised in Harehills and recalls that it was easy to believe that this area was the only Irish enclave in the city during the 1950 and 1960s.

You see I only knew about Harehills at that time and I thought that all the Irish were in Leeds [were] in Harehills but I found out afterwards that there was a lot out in Dewsbury Road [South Leeds] as well, a lot of Irish living out there.

[Michael, *b.* 1947, Leeds]

Of the South Leeds area Liam recalls that when he first lived in Beeston that:

There were very few [Irish in Beeston], but then about the 50s you started getting a lot of them in you know and nearly every one of 'em were from Mayo, nearly every one. Because they used to run a dance down at St. Francis which is not there now and you'd go in there on a Saturday night and it were all the culchies and they were all very clique you know.

[Liam, *b.* 1934, Co. Wexford]

Liam also provides a reason why those living in the Harehills area might not be very aware of the Irish in south Leeds:

We lived in Beeston, and Beeston was full of Irish but very rare you used to get them coming over to the club [LIC] you know they all used to have there own one pub in Beeston that nearly all the Irish went ta. At one time there was three pubs up there with Irish Landlords in 'em and we all used to use them you know. The only time you used to go up the Irish Centre was [for example when] one of my biggest mates...Mick lost his wife and she was young you know was Kathy, she died young and left five kids an' we used the Irish Centre for a charity, well they used to do charity dances then, whatever come in used to go to Mick for the family.

[Liam, *b.* 1934, Co. Wexford]

Michael's sister Bernadette added that the Irish community of Dewsbury Road consisted of many emigrants from the Killala/Lacken area of Mayo whereas the Harehills area had a greater concentration from the Attymass, Ballina, Charlestown, Swinford and Foxford region. This suggests that not only were emigrants attracted to the city by family/friends but also to certain areas within the city in which people from within their towns and parishes had settled.

In Harehills and Chapeltown Irish families bought or rented whole houses in these areas and occasionally they in turn sub-let rooms to single emigrants. Single Irishmen, either unmarried or with a wife in Ireland, also often rented houses together. There were also many 'digs' style accommodations run by native and Irish landladies, many of which

were situated around Spencer Place and off Roundhay Road. These were formerly the grand and spacious houses of the Jewish community, which because of their large rooms suited sub-division to cope with the housing needs of Irish emigrants into the area. Although Harehills and Chapeltown are remembered as the core of the Irish community in Leeds during this period that is not to suggest that the Irish outnumbered the native population in these areas. In fact, there may have only been a handful of houses in which Irish emigrants were residing on any one of the hundreds of streets that made up these areas. Generally speaking the standard of housing in Harehills was superior to that of Chapeltown throughout this period; in the 1950s Chapeltown contained mainly back-to-backs and houses divided into flats whereas Harehills was mainly comprised of terraced houses. The Holy Rosary Church served the Catholic congregation of Chapeltown and St. Augustine's Church served that of Harehills. Thomas, who moved from Dublin to Leeds as a young teenager, arrived in Chapeltown in 1955:

He [Thomas' father] found us a flat in a pretty rough area of Leeds – Chapeltown, which was an area of once former splendour, big Victorian houses but in the 50s they'd gone down, they were just the worst flats for people, you know, whereas they were originally built as single family houses. And we lived there for a couple of years and we got moved to a council estate, an area called Meanwood and we lived there for, well up until the day I got married in 1978 we lived there. And my parents that where they basically lived and died...

BMcG: And were there many Irish living in the area when you moved to Chapeltown?

In Chapeltown there was at that time in the 50s, not so much now, over the course of the years more and more Black and Asian emigrants came into the area and the Irish gradually moved out. It was also a Jewish area Chapeltown, most of the small shops and that were owned by Jews but it's all changed, it's predominantly an Afro-Caribbean neighbourhood now you know. The real Irish area, the old Leeds Irish area was an area called the Bank, yeah? But I've no experience of that, we didn't live there. But there was, long after the Irish kinda basically moved out of Chapeltown, I don't mean everyone of them moved out there was of course still some of them there, but it was no longer what you'd call an Irish area but some of the pubs remained Irish, like The Roscoe and The Pointers, The Victoria, The Regent, they are all more or less in that area you know and they still remained Irish and still do to this day.

BMcG: And when you came here first, where were the main Irish concentrations in the city?

Well there was quite a few around Chapeltown. The Bank, that got pulled down in the 50s but I'm not sure when in the 50s, there was a lot of Irish people lived up the York Road area and down around Sheepscar which is very close to Chapeltown anyway. A lot of the old Irish from the Bank got moved up to new, new-ish housing estates like Halton and Seacroft and places like that, you know, so they're more scattered now. There's no real Irish one area, there isn't one area you could say is definitely Irish now. They're spread and integrated all over the city, you know. So I was never conscious of living in a definite Irish area as such, it was very much a mixed area was Chapeltown anyway, you know there was an Irish community, but there was also a Polish community, a Jewish community and so on.

[Thomas, *b.* 1941, Dublin]

Evidence suggests that rather than being an Irish area, Sheepscar/Chapelton in the 1950s and 1960s was an area where many of the city's immigrant population resided: Polish, Jews, Black and Irish (alongside the native population). It would appear that Harehills was a more exclusive area than Chapelton at this time.

By all accounts there was a vibrant Irish social scene in Leeds in the 1950s and 1960s. The respondents gave the impression that this era was the heyday of the Leeds Irish community. This was perhaps due to the fact that the city's Irish population had increased, work was plentiful and consequently the emigrant found him or herself with more disposable income than they were used to. Leeds it seems was a Mecca for Irish emigrants, with St. Francis' Social Club and The Shamrock Dancehall to which Irish revellers came from all over Yorkshire:

In them days [early 1960s] there used to be a coach that would come in from, shtart in Halifax, call to Huddersfield, then in to Bradford, and to Brighouse and then into Leeds because all those places they had no dancehalls of their own once you see, so they all used to come into Leeds for the you know, there used to be two or three coaches come like in to Leeds on a Saturday and Sunday night you see.

[Martin, *b.* 1940, Co. Mayo]

Martha and Martin recall of The Shamrock Dancehall:

Oh it was terrific, we used to go three nights a week to it, and walk home, we used to walk there was tram lines on North Street when we firsh kem and we'd walk home at night, there was a bus for Briggate but by the time we all come out and talk, all the gang, you'd jusht walk home, and you'd walk in your bare feet because you'd be wearing those stupid stiletto heels and your feet would be crippled dancing all night so you'd jusht come out take them off an' walk in your bare feet home and we thought nothing of it, nothing. It wouldn't take us long. And then we'd all shtand talking because there's be people going in different directions because everybody went up to Harehills then, that's where everybody lived, or Beeston or Harehills... and there used to be a coffee bar there at Spencer Place, the Rendezvous, an we'd go in there for coffees. Well he [husband] didn't drink, he was a pioneer for years so he never took a drink so we sorta went to pictures and different things, he wasn't inta drink, we'd go up to Roundhay Park and out on the boats when they'd go to the pubs.

[Martha, *b.* 1946, Co. Longford]

I met my wife Marian in 1962 in early '62...in the dancehall the Shamrock it was and... I asked her for a dance you know like and she said "oh yes" like you know so we were out on the floor and dancing around so then like after the three bars you know when you're chatting somebody you say the usual craic was them days you know will you come for a mineral you know there was no beer bar like there was all a mineral bar or a tea bar you know like. Do you want to go for a mineral you know like you thought that was the half-way house you know like [laughs] you knew if you could get them for a mineral like you could get shtart working on them more like ya know.

[Martin, *b.* 1940, Co. Mayo]

The fact that the two primary Irish dancehalls did not serve alcohol does not mean that the nights were alcohol free as the evening usually began in one of the city's many Irish

pubs. In response to the demand created by the numbers of young Irishmen pouring into Leeds, Irish landlords began to take over a number of public houses throughout the city. There was a particular concentration of Irish drinking establishments in the Sheepscar, Chapeltown and Harehills areas of the city; The Pointer, The Roscoe (Old & New), The Queen's Hotel, The Vic(toria), The Golden Lion, The Prince Arthur, The (Golden) Eagle, The Harp, Delaney's and The Regent were all at one time or another managed by Irish landlords [see Appendix B: Plates 30-33].

They all wore suits, they all wore ties, they all wore wide trousers like that, most of them at that time wore hats, in the late 50s and they all had a certain gait about them, this kinda but it was very pronounced, I mean ya won't see it see it with Irish fellas round here now, you won't see it in England as much but I mean with their hands in their pocket and them coming down the road it was a really pronounced, not exaggerated, down the road and everybody would be walking the same way. I used to think when I was getting a bit older into me late teens that it was the type of work people did with over the years at home or abroad, I don't know what it was really, so you picked somebody out an' they had kinda dark hair, black hair mostly and they had had ruddy complexions so you could see Irish people....I used to notice them particularly because they'd be in twos an' threes an' fours on a Sunday comin' or goin' to Mass or goin' down to the pubs, down Roundhay Road, there'd be streams of people walking like that down Roundhay Road in that type of dress...well when you went down Roundhay Road from Harehills where you met The Pointers, The Vic, The Prince of Wales, The Roscoe, The Regent, all the pubs were in a kind o' a' round long bend there altogether and because they were all heading off to the pub on a Sunday.

[Michael, *b.* 1947, Leeds]

These pubs and clubs were much more than just places to frequent at the weekend; they represented familiarity in the urban unknown. Together they constituted a vital network of friendly faces and accents, where information about work and lodgings could be shared. Poet Pearse Hutchinson who spent an evening in the Regent in the 1970s, which was then managed by a couple from County Mayo, penned the following lines:

In the Regent in Leeds there was just one lonely
Englishman; bar us. Lemonade was the strongest
Cathal would take but he had Planxty
Johnson for ever, Liam Óg was there
and Sligomen in town, and others making
music besides them and others drinking
and all of us gulping down the music, I said
to Francie in the jax
'Here we are,' and he took the words right out of my
mouth
'in the heart of England' –
'in the heart of Ireland' said I correcting him.⁷⁰

His words explain why the Irish pub became a central institution for the Irish in Britain: the emigrant could forget or at least ignore for a time that he was away from home.

Michael, however, recalls that the role of the Irish pubs in Leeds changed somewhat from 1970 following the opening of the new Irish Centre on York Road:

Thing[s] changed in 1970 when the Irish Centre came in because prior to that there was these kinda Irish pubs where you could meet, you could get a job, you could get accommodation, you met a social scene, you had friends immediately, you had someone who knew someone, you'd be from Killala, oh I'm from Crossmolina, I'm from Ballina, whatever, an everyone knew everybody, you were never lost, if you walked into *The Roscoe* or *The Regent* on a Sunday lunchtime you were with people, you'd always find whatever you want, you'd get a job no problem that time and that was the kind of scene that people lived in up to 1970 then the Irish Centre took over and you left kinda the Irish music playing in pubs and that, although we started playing the Irish Centre, but that kinda scene was kinda left and you moved into the Irish Centre then where you had big bands coming over from Ireland and a dancehall and weddings were held up there.

[Michael, b. 1947, Leeds]

One Donegal man Lawrence recalls that these pubs were also collection points and drop off points for labouring men; wagons picked up men in the morning around Sheepscar Corner, at the Sheepscar library and outside the many Irish pubs in this area, depending on which firm they were working for.⁷¹

A typical Sunday for many Irish emigrants in the city in the 1950s, 60s and early 70s was an afternoon in Potternewton Park, Roundhay Park or at Halton Moor. Those in the Sheepscar/Chapelton area would then leave Roundhay Park around 5.30 and get a bus to the Holy Rosary for 6.30 mass. From here it was home to wash and eat before continuing to the pub; pubs in England were open from 12-2pm and from 7-10.30pm on Sundays. Then onwards to either The Shamrock or St. Francis' dancehalls:

So I used to play football up at Halton Moor you see Gaelic football on a Sunday and we used to play Huddersfield and there used to be hard games between Huddersfield and Leeds 'cause there was an awful lot of needle like ya know. And none of the Huddersfield lads liked you taking a girl, a Leeds lad taking a girl from Huddersfield. Oh Jesus you was, oh they'd, they'd kill ya like ya know so I din't know how I'd go on with this craic...I asked her in anyways, she was in at Halton Moor this Sunday like ya know and I said then we'd been up there all day from two o'clock...and then we went to Corpus Christi to the mass like you know to the evening mass up there like beside the Halton Moors...so I says do you want to come back to the aunt's house you know like and we'll go on to we'll wash then and have you know a clean up and then we'll go the dance.

[Martin, b. 1940, Co. Mayo]

The social fabric of the Leeds Irish Community has changed dramatically over the last 50 years; Michael recalls that the combination of community spread and the introduction of drink driving laws in the 1970s forever changed the city's Irish Community:

What took more from the pubs was the fact that as people prospered and moved on in life or whatever, they moved further out and as the breathalyser laws got stricter and stricter an' I mean the old crowd I mean from my era and beyond that, older than me, I mean they had no compunction about driving a car and drinking, it was the thing that everyone was used to

doing it in the 60s and there was no breathalyser of course in the early 1970s. So everyone just drink and drove, you did it and that was the way it was...well that got really keen and people really took it to heart eventually and I think then that stopped the pubs. I mean what they used to do on a Saturday night an' that, go from The Roscoe to The Vic, they'd bring cars I mean they weren't far apart but they'd drive from Harehills down an' people were getting' cars and getting' money, drive from there to The Vic, drive down to The Regent, maybe drive up to a Donegal pub, the one up the road, an' maybe drive up to the Irish Centre. Or everyone had a finishing up place, whether it be The Regent, whether it be The Harp, or The Roscoe, or wherever. That stopped then and what you had was people moving out with the breathalyser and people going to the local English Pub, so you had them going to local English Clubs as well: Labour Clubs and Conservative Clubs.

[Michael, b. 1947, Leeds]

As the Irish community prospered many began to move out of the inner-city areas and into more improved residential areas. Generally speaking since the 1970s the Irish have moved out of the Harehills and Chapeltown areas being replaced by other more recent immigrant groups, particularly Afro-Caribbean and Asian groups. Of course there were those who remained behind; in 1981 Harehills remained the ward with the greatest concentration of Irish, followed by the adjoining wards of Chapel Allerton and Burmantofts. Today the multiracial and multicultural areas of Harehills and Chapeltown are designated Urban Priority Areas and are associated with poor housing, underemployment, drugs, prostitution, crime and race riots. These are problems which are mirrored in other British inner-city areas and council estates.

Since 1981

As the twenty-first century dawns the situation of the Irish in Leeds is one of paradox, it appears that as the numbers of Irish-born have diminished the Irish community has matured culturally and socially. This has in part been attributed to the relative peace in Northern Ireland and the media focus on Asian, African, Eastern European and Middle Eastern immigrants; this shift in attention away from the Northern Ireland issue, the IRA and hence from the Irish community has allowed them to express themselves without fear of public and media disapproval. Martin recalls the affect that immigration from Commonwealth countries and the troubles had on Leeds Irish population:

So then when more coloured come in then it eased off on the Irish do ya understand, they got the derision, ya know, but then it came back then again when the troubles started in Northern Ireland...Then it 'twas only like then '69 an '70 when the outrage of the bombing started here that it 'twas back then to the bad old days of the Irish not being like d'ya see so. And I always remember when Mountbatten was killed that was a big, big blow here like ya know I could see...workmates ya worked with, English fellas, and they just looked at you totally different that Monday morning. It happened on a Saturday I always remember I think it was a

bank holiday Saturday here and when we went back on the Monday jayz a totally different atmosphere all altogether.

[Martin, *b.* 1940, Co. Mayo]

Theresa recalls the general '*thick paddy attitude*' amongst some of the native population of Leeds in the 1960s but has witnessed a gradual complete change in English attitudes towards the Irish. In recent years she has performed Irish traditional music at a number of English functions, including weddings, and believes it is improved education, television documentaries and travel that have broadened the English mind:

That has to be it, that has to be the reasoning, so people were becoming more educated, watching these programmes realising that they did, that there government did have input in the problems in Ireland over the years and also finding out, people who had visited Ireland, and found that you know that Irish people are nice people, very hospitable and the only thing they could complain about was the weather and they would always come back and have something good to say. So you had a lot more people crossing over the water here [Ireland] to see what it was like because they'd watched certain programmes on television...so that probably has had a lot to do with the change of attitude but definitely there's a high respect in comparison.

[Theresa, *b.* 1950, Co. Roscommon]

In 2001, the Irish-born population of Leeds stood at 5,685 - its lowest recorded figure for half a century; this figure had been 7,563 in 1981. Since 1981 a number of important social and cultural institutions have been established. Hurling, as a competitive sport, died out in Yorkshire in the 1970s, however, Gaelic Football remains alive and well. In the late 1980s there were four Senior Gaelic Clubs in Yorkshire, three of which operated from the LIC (Young Irelands GAA Club; Iona of Leeds GAA Club & Hugh O'Neill GAA Club) and one from the Irish Club in Huddersfield (Bros. Pearse GAA Club). In 2003, Leeds contributed three of the eight Gaelic football teams in the Senior Pennine League, which includes teams from Yorkshire and Lancashire.

In 1990 – the launch of a monthly magazine *News Centre* aimed specifically towards the Leeds Irish Community; the magazine, which was published in Hunslet had an initial print run of 20,000 copies, was distributed chiefly through the city's Irish and Catholic clubs.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed many successes by Leeds CCE in Regional and National *Fleadhanna*. In 1993 Leeds celebrated its centenary as a city; the Leeds branch of CCE was invited to play their part in the celebrations with a display at the West Yorkshire Playhouse. That same year book entitled *The Ham Shank* by Mary Patterson, whose family hail from County Mayo, was launched; it was penned half a century

previous and deals with life in the infamous Bank region of the city. In November of the same year Davitt House opened in Headingley; Davitt House is a retirement home aimed towards Irish emigrants in Leeds and was officially opened by former Irish President Mary Robinson.

Leeds Irish Health & Homes (LIHH) was established in 1996 following the receipt 9 months pilot funding through Leeds Social Services. The organisation came into being in response to studies which highlighted the fact that the Leeds Irish population had disproportionately high rates of homelessness, mental health and physical health difficulties compared to the indigenous population and other ethnic communities. LIHH initially provided supported housing to vulnerable single Irish people; by 2001 they were providing 58 supported tenancies. Elders Outreach and Health Outreach projects were later added with the result that LIHH services now aids 500 Irish people annually. Recently, the LIHH published a report entitled *Diggin' Deeper: a report on the health inequalities experienced by the Irish Community in Leeds*. The aim of the report was to highlight the health difficulties amongst the Leeds Irish community to the service providers and the specific services lacking to them and to formulate recommendations to address these inequalities.



Pl. 3.11: Slab laid by the Leeds Irish Community in 1995 to commemorate ‘The Great Hunger’.

In 1995 members of the Leeds Irish Community held a commemorative march in honour of those who suffered during the Great Hunger. A stone slab was also laid in a park on Marsh Lane near to the old Irish Quarter of the city [Pl. 3.11].

An Irish Festival has taken place in Beeston annually since 1997 and celebrates the many facets of Irish culture. Last August (2003) the festival took place in the South Leeds Stadium; the free event received support from Leeds City Council and local businesses. Since 1999 the St. Patrick's Day celebrations have been taken to the streets of Leeds. In 2003, the parade began from St. Peter's Church, behind the Playhouse Theatre, and continued through the city's main thoroughfares – via New York Street, Kirkgate, Briggate, The Headrow and Cookridge Street to the Millennium Square in front of the Leeds Civic Hall. Such an overt display of Irishness would have been unthinkable in the 1970s and 1980s when tensions ran high as a result of the Northern Ireland conflict.

The Harehills Irish Music Project (HIMP), Leeds has also in recent years been established and is a community based youth and cultural development project which provides access to and participation in Irish music and cultural activities. HIMP classes are currently held in St. Augustine's Church Hall, Harehills and in primary schools around Leeds.

In 2000, Leeds Metropolitan University developed the first Irish Studies curriculum in the North of England. In the same year, Bríd Duggan, a native of County Galway became the first Irishwoman in Leeds to be invited to be Lady Mayoress of the Occasion. She started working in Leeds City Hall in 1974, initially as a cleaner, and has worked there ever since. Stephen McHugh, from Mayo, who is private secretary to the Lord Mayor, Councillor Bernard Atha, clarified her position: '*she is not a permanent Lady Mayoress, but she accompanies the Mayor to functions at the request of the Lord Mayor*'.⁷² Bríd Duggan followed her husband to Leeds in 1963 and spoke no English, having being brought up in Connemara *Gaeltacht*:

I was pregnant when I came in 1963. Everything was foreign to me. Thomas was the only person with whom I could have a conversation. I felt very isolated. I couldn't read the newspapers, street signs, cooking instructions on cans of food – all the things we generally take for granted.⁷³

LIHH launched two community development projects in 2002; the first was the publication of their new-look 'Irish in Leeds' newsletter, which contains community

related articles and information. The second project was the inaugural assembly of an Open Community Forum for the Irish in Leeds – a platform from which persons can raise issues and ideas that they feel are relevant to the Irish community.

The LIC remains an important cultural and social focal point for the Leeds Irish community despite declining membership figures since the 1970s; Tommy McLoughlin, long-time manager of the centre, provided the following estimates of membership: 3,000 *circa* 1975, 2,000 *circa* 1990 with currently around 1,600 members (2003). Leeds CCE holds weekly tuition in traditional music, song and dance on Saturday afternoons with an open music session taking place on Tuesday evenings. The LIC also runs a 'Tuesday Club' for the city's elderly Irish population – this is a weekly gathering in the centre's Tara Suite where a light lunch is served; Irish music, Irish dance and bingo provide the afternoons entertainment. The club affords the opportunity for elderly Irish to meet with friends and fellow emigrants and provides an important social function; presently around 200 people attend the afternoon's recreation.

Last year (2003) Leeds City Council introduced the Breeze Project; the aim of the project is to introduce Gaelic Games to the curricula of selected schools throughout the city. During the summer months, the Yorkshire GAA in association with the Breeze Project was actively involved in bringing Gaelic Games to seven Leeds primary schools. A two-day summer camp was held in July at the LIC and 370 boys and girls of mixed race and origin were introduced to Gaelic football and hurling. Each of the seven schools was designated a local club within its catchment area and it is reported that the clubs are beginning to see the fruits of their efforts.⁷⁴

Conclusion

Leeds has witnessed almost two centuries of continuous Irish settlement, during which time they have contributed to the economic, social, cultural and religious fabric of the city. In the twentieth century, the 1950s to the 1970s was perhaps the heyday of the Irish community in Leeds when there was a constant stream of Irish pouring into the city and a vibrant social and cultural scene flourished. More recently, in 1999 there were 9,181 Irish-born persons, from both the Republic and Northern Ireland, of which 63% were 18-64 years of age and 15% were over 65 years. In 2001, the city's Irish population (born in

the Republic) stood at just 5,685 persons and without further immigration into the city to augment the existing Irish community it is difficult to foresee its long-term future and in the current Irish economic climate it is unlikely that Leeds will see the numbers of Irish immigrants it witnessed in the mid-twentieth century. However, at present it appears that for a variety of reasons the Irish in Leeds are more organised in terms of social and cultural clubs, and health and housing organisations, than at any time in their history reflecting the confidence and hard work of the city's Irish community.

ENDNOTES:

¹ This paragraph was drawn together from the following sources: Dr. Peter Bell, 'Leeds: The Evolution of a Multi-Cultural Society', *The British Council of Churches*, Sixteenth Assembly: 80th Meeting of the Council, Spring 1982 & Steven Burt & Kevin Grady, *The Illustrated History of Leeds*, 2002, p. 229.

² C.J. Morgan, 'Demographic change', in D. Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds*, 1980.

³ In 1827, the Select Committee on Emigration noted that in any major construction project of roads, canals or drains one 'should not feel in the least surprised to find, that of a hundred men employed in it, ninety were Irish'. *Second Report of the Select Committee on Emigration from the United Kingdom*, 1826-27, p. 155.

⁴ This information on the 'Paddy Line' was gleaned from material gathered for an exhibition entitled 'An Introduction to the Irish in Leeds: An exhibition of the Irish in Leeds since the 1830s with a pictorial display, parish registers, official documents etc.', which was organised by Leeds City Libraries & Irish in Britain Representation Group and put on display in the Leeds City Library in 1986.

⁵ Danny & Helen Kennally, 'From Roscrea to Leeds: an emigrant community', in *Tipperary Historical Journal*, 1992, p. 123.

⁶ *Report by the Statistical Committee of Town Council*, 1839, in J. F. C. Harrison, *Early Victorian Britain, 1832-51*, 1988, p. 65.

⁷ *Report by the Statistical Committee of Town Council*, 1839, in J. F. C. Harrison, *Early Victorian Britain, 1832-51*, 1988, p. 65.

⁸ T. Dillon, 'The Irish in Leeds, 1851-61', *The Thoresby Miscellany*, vol. 16, 1979, p. 7.

⁹ *Report by the Statistical Committee of Town Council*, 1839, p. 402.

¹⁰ *Report by the Statistical Committee of Town Council*, 1839, pp. 401-6.

¹¹ No self-respecting aged edifice is complete without its myths. There is a story, be it myth or actuality, of an English labourer who was working with an almost exclusive Irish gang on the building of Mount Saint Mary's. As ill luck would have it, this particular English labourer had a nasty fall from the heights of the church and found himself on his deathbed. In his last worldly hours his family heard him mutter a repeated incomprehensible chant, incomprehensible to his family that is. His fellow Irish workmates later explained this to be the 'Se do bheatha Mhuire...(*The Hail Mary* in Gaelic). The English labourer had become unconsciously familiar with the alien prayer as the Irish labourers worked whilst praying [Michael, b. 1947, Leeds]. Although this may seem like simple folklore, it was not unheard of for non-Catholic neighbours of Irish emigrants on "The Bank" to convert to Catholicism (See Pauline E. Freeman, 'Erin's Exiles – The Irish in Leeds', in Finnegan, Robert E., & Bradley, George T. (eds.), *Catholicism in Leeds: A Community of Faith, 1794-1994*, 1994, p. 83.) There are numerous other tales of myth and miracle associated with Mount Saint Mary's (See B. Dwyer, *But That's Another Story*, 1995; Gavan, Patrick, *Memories of Mount St. Mary's Church, Richmond Hill*, 2001 &)

¹² Quoted in Steven Burt & Kevin Grady, *The Illustrated History of Leeds*, 2002, pp. 155-6, from the *River Pollution Commission 1867*, evidence of Alderman Carter, p. 223.

¹³ T. Dillon, 'The Irish in Leeds, 1851-61', *The Thoresby Miscellany*, vol. 16, 1979, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴ W. White, *Directory and Gazetteer of Leeds, Bradford, Halifax, and the whole of the Clothing District of Yorkshire*, 1853 (Reprinted, Plymouth, 1969), p. 16 from T. Dillon, 'The Irish in Leeds, 1851-61', *The Thoresby Miscellany*, vol. 16, 1979, p. 2.

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- ¹⁵ Alan O'Day (ed.), *A Survey of the Irish in England (1872)*, 1990, p. 66 & p. xxii.
- ¹⁶ Sharon Lambert, *Irish Women in Lancashire, 1922-1960: Their Story*, 2001, p. 1.
- ¹⁷ R. Baker, 'Report on the State and the Condition of the town of Leeds', in Parliamentary Papers, XXIX, Sanitary Enquiry, 1842, p.15.
- ¹⁸ Edwin Chadwick, Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population, 1842, in David Newsome, *The Victorian World Picture*, 1997, p. 83.
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- ²⁰ Frank Neal, 'The Famine Irish in England and Wales', in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Meaning of the Famine*, 2000, p. 71.
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- ²² Christine Kinealy, 'Potatoes, providence and philanthropy', in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Meaning of the Famine*, *The Irish World Wide*, vol. 6, 2000, pp. 155-7.
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- ²⁴ Steven Burt & Kevin Grady, *The Illustrated History of Leeds*, 2002, p. 129.
- ²⁵ Rev. Edward Jackson, *A Pastor's Recollections*, no. 5, 1890, p.11.
- ²⁶ A. Reach, *The Morning Chronicle*, xx/12/1849.
- ²⁷ See for example Robert Baker's *Report on the Condition of the Residences of the Labouring Classes in the Town of Leeds in 1842* & Frederick Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England: From Personal Observation and Authentic Sources*, in which he speaks of the impoverished conditions of the Irish in Leeds in the mid-nineteenth century.
- ²⁸ J. F. C. Harrison, *Early Victorian Britain, 1832-51*, 1988, p. 27.
- ²⁹ T. Dillon, 'The Irish in Leeds, 1851-61', *The Thoresby Miscellany*, vol. 16, 1979, p. 15.
- ³⁰ Roger Swift, 'The Irish in Britain', in Patrick Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish in the New Communities*, *The Irish World Wide*, vol. 2, p. 65.
- ³¹ T. Dillon, 'The Irish in Leeds, 1851-61', *The Thoresby Miscellany*, vol. 16, 1979, pp. 1-29; Frances Finnegan, *Poverty and Prejudice: A Study of Irish Immigrants in York, 1840-75*, 1982, pp. 132-54 & Clem Richardson, 'The Irish in Victorian Bradford', *The Bradford Antiquary*, vol. 9, 1976, pp. 294-316.
- ³² T. Dillon, 'The Irish in Leeds, 1851-61', *The Thoresby Miscellany*, vol. 16, 1979, p. 14.
- ³³ Steven Burt & Kevin Grady, *The Illustrated History of Leeds*, 2002, p. 170.
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- ³⁷ Fitch's Report, *Parliamentary Papers*, liv, 357, 1870, p. 89 in Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851-75*, 1985, p. 151-2.
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- ⁴⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 11/05/1895.
- ⁴¹ Mary Patterson, *The Ham Shank*, 1993, p. 3.
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- ⁴⁴ Dr. Peter Bell, 'Leeds: The Evolution of a Multi-Cultural Society', *The British Council of Churches*, Sixteenth Assembly: 80th Meeting of the Council, spring 1982, p. 5.
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- ⁴⁶ Pauline E. Freeman, 'Erin's Exiles – The Irish in Leeds', in R. E. Finnegan and G.T. Bradley (eds.), *Catholicism in Leeds: A Community of Faith*, 1994, p. 83.
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- ⁴⁸ J. H. Treble, 'O'Connor, O'Connell and the Attitudes of Irish Immigrants towards Chartism in the North of England', in Butt, J. & I. F. Clarke (eds.), *The Victorians and Social Protest: A Symposium*, 1973, p. 46.
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- ⁵⁰ David Thornton, *Leeds: The Story of a City*, 2002, p.159.
- ⁵¹ Danny & Helen Kennally, 'From Roscrea to Leeds: an emigrant community', in *Tipperary Historical Journal*, Thurles, 1992, p. 130, from *Yorkshire Post*, 5th May, 1937 from an article entitled 'The Bank: Memories of Exciting Times'.
- ⁵² Mary J. Hickman, *The Irish Community in Britain: Myth or Reality?*, 1996, p. 7.
- ⁵³ G. Marshall (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, 1994, p. 73.
- ⁵⁴ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 1978, p. 156.
- ⁵⁵ Mary Patterson, *The Ham Shank*, 1993, p. 3.

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- ⁵⁶ Danny & Helen Kennally, 'From Roscrea to Leeds: an emigrant community', in *Tipperary Historical Journal*, 1992, p. 131.
- ⁵⁷ See, for example, Edwin Chadwick's *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population on Great Britain* published in 1842 and the first and second *Report of the Commissioners for Enquiring into the State of large Towns and Populous Districts* published in 1844 and 1845 respectively.
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- ⁵⁹ Enda Delaney, 'Almost a Class of Helots in an Alien Land: The British State and Irish Emigration, 1921-45', in Donald MacRaild (ed.), *The Great Famine and Beyond*, 2002, p. 241.
- ⁶⁰ Steven Burt & Kevin Grady, *The Illustrated History of Leeds*, 2002, p. 207.
- ⁶¹ Quoted in Kevin O'Connor, *The Irish in Britain*, 1972, pp. 72-3.
- ⁶² *Evening Post*, 26/09/1973.
- ⁶³ David Thornton, *Leeds: The Story of a City*, 2002, p. 227.
- ⁶⁴ Department of Geography & Geology. <<http://www.brixworth.demon.co.uk/leeds/leeds3.htm>> Accessed 13/05/2003.
- ⁶⁵ Enda Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-71*, 2000, p. 162.
- ⁶⁶ *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 15/06/1967.
- ⁶⁷ Dr. Peter Bell, 'Leeds: The Evolution of a Multi-Cultural Society', *The British Council of Churches*, Sixteenth Assembly: 80th Meeting of the Council, 1982, p. 7.
- ⁶⁸ Freedman, Murray, 'The Leeds Jewish Community: A sketch of its history and development' in Lynne Stevenson Tate (ed.), *Aspects of Leeds 1: Discovering Local History*, 1998, p. 170.
- ⁶⁹ Michael Fean, 'Down Memory Lane: Forty Years Ago', 1989, [no page number].
- ⁷⁰ Pearse Hutchinson, 'Leeds or Amsterdam (for Liam Ó Brádaigh)', in D. Kiberd & G. Fitzmaurice (eds.), *Crann Faoi Bláth (The Flowering Tree)*, Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1991. Pearse Hutchinson was born in Glasgow in 1927 of Irish parents, but reared in Dublin from 1932. The poem, originally penned in Irish, is translated by the author.
- ⁷¹ Lawrence, b. 1950, Co. Donegal.
- ⁷² *Irish Examiner*, 18/11/2000.
- ⁷³ *Irish Examiner*, 18/11/2000.
- ⁷⁴ Eddie Stapleton, 'Leeds schools take on GAA', <<http://www.irishabroad.com/news/irishpost/sport/LeedsSchoolsTake.asp>> Accessed 16/01/2004.

CHAPTER FOUR:

EMIGRATION & ARRIVAL

And people went from every house, there wasn't any house left that people hadn't gone away from, and it is a shame. When I was driving around and you seen houses that was lovely when you were going to school that were just derelict there, everyone had jusht gone away and left them. It was such a shame.¹

Gráinne, b. 1945, Co. Mayo

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is manifold. The primary aim is to investigate the reasons why Irish emigrants left the Republic for England between 1931 and 1981. Oral-historian Alistair Thomson has noted that '*though economic pressures often influence migration decisions, personal testimony reveals the complex weave of factors and influences which contribute to migration*'.² Thus if the respondent did not offer the information unprompted, they were asked to explain the circumstances of their emigration: how and why they emigrated from Ireland, and how they felt about the move at that time. This chapter also investigates the reasons why Irish emigrants chose Leeds as their direct or indirect destination and highlights some of the problems of settling in the city.

The Extent of Emigration from Ireland

The eminent historian Roy Foster remarked that '*emigration is the great fact of Irish social history from the nineteenth century*'.³ However, it may be argued that migration (that is both emigration and immigration) has been the greatest fact of Irish social history; in fact, prior to the eighteenth century Ireland gained more people than it lost. In recent centuries, however, emigration from Ireland has overshadowed immigration into the country.

Eighteenth century Irish emigrants made colonial North America their destination. These were predominantly, but by no means exclusively, relatively affluent Presbyterians from the province of Ulster. Their nineteenth century descendents applied the term 'Scotch-Irish' to their emigrant forefathers to differentiate and distance themselves from those subsequent impoverished Irish Catholic migrants who fled from Ireland from the 1820s.⁴ Although estimates vary, it is thought that during the period 1700-76 between

250,000 and 400,000 emigrated from Ireland, which had a mid-century population of around 2.4 million. By the late eighteenth century seasonal migration to Newfoundland and Britain was also an established aspect of Irish life and an integral part of the Irish agricultural economy.⁵ Between 1783 and 1815, following the American Revolution, a further 100,000 departed Ireland for the newly independent United States.⁶

It has been noted that Irish emigration over the last two centuries falls into three main temporal waves.⁷ The 'first wave' occurred between 1815 and 1920 with Britain and, to an even greater extent, North America the main destinations. The Napoleonic Wars (1803-15) between England and France ensured high war-time prices and brought relative prosperity to Irish agriculture; they were followed by a sharp economic depression and an increased outflow of emigrants. Although the Famine is often viewed as *the* watershed in Irish emigration history which prompted a mass exodus, by the 1830s large-scale emigration was endemic to all parts of Ireland to an extent unknown anywhere else in Europe: almost 1 million people had left Ireland for North America between 1815 and 1845.⁸ English towns and cities, which were prospering from the Industrial Revolution, were also increasingly the destination for Irish emigrants. However, the Famine certainly swelled the numbers of emigrants from Ireland [see Table 4.1] and a combination of death and emigration caused the Irish population to fall from 8.2 million in 1841 to 5.8 million in 1861. North America bore the bulk of the fleeing emigrants; between 1841 and 1860 some 1.7 million Irish had arrived at American seaports, by the time the Irish Free State was established in 1922 a further 2.4 million had joined them.⁹

Table 4.1: Number of Overseas Emigrants from Ireland (32 Counties): 1825-1860

Years	Total number of overseas emigrants
1825-30	99,968
1831-35	205,299
1836-40	190,182
1841-45	239,751
1846-50	939,609
1851-55	901,206
1856-60	315,059

Source: Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54.

In total it has been estimated that between 1801 and 1921 almost 8 million people departed these shores for new lives in Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the United States.¹⁰ The result of this mass exodus was that by the early 1920s 43% of Irish-born males and females were living outside of Ireland:

1,037,234	in the United States;
367,747	in England & Wales;
159,020	in Scotland;
105,033	in Australia;
93,301	in Canada;
34,419	in New Zealand;
12,289	in South Africa;
8,414	in India. ¹¹

This figure of 43% is all the more remarkable when compared to that of other European countries. Comparable figures from other countries with traditions of emigration such as Norway, Scotland and Sweden are 14.8%, 14.1% and 11.2% respectively for 1921; other European countries averaged 4% of their population residing outside of the country of their birth.¹²

From the 1930s England became the destination of choice for a 'second wave' of Irish emigrants. The Great Depression of the 1930s and the introduction of immigration quotas greatly reduced the numbers of Irish migrating to the United States; furthermore,

disruptions to transatlantic travel during the war curbed emigration to the U.S. and elsewhere.¹³ Increased labour demands throughout the war years and in the post-war rebuilding of Britain resulted in a surge of emigration from Ireland; by 1951 there were over half a million people born in the Republic residing in Britain, peaking at over 725,000 in 1961 [see Table 4.2]. Ireland's geographical position between the two great labour markets of the world, Britain and North America, and the fact that for many generations usually both, but at least one, of these markets have allowed Irish people unrestricted access has facilitated Irish emigration.¹⁴ The third wave (known also as the 'new wave') refers to renewed emigration in the 1980s and falls outside the time period under consideration in this thesis.

Table 4.2: Irish-born residents in Britain: 1931-81

Census	Born in Irish Republic	Born in Northern Ireland	Total
1931	367,424	137,961	505,385
1941	<i>No Census</i>	<i>No Census</i>	<i>No Census</i>
1951	537,709	178,319	716,028
1961	726,121	224,857	950,978
1971	709,235	248,595	957,830
1981	607,428	242,969	850,397

Source: Census of Population of England & Wales, 1931-1981.

Who left Ireland?

Geographical Origins of Irish Emigrants

Throughout the period under consideration the western provinces of Munster and Connaught supplied the bulk of emigrants. From the *Reports* of the Commission on Emigration the six counties with the highest volume of net emigration for the period 1926-36 were (in order) Cork, Mayo, Kerry, Donegal, Galway and, these being in total responsible for 62% of net emigration.¹⁵ For the period 1936-46 the order changed slightly: Cork, Mayo, Galway, Kerry, Donegal and Limerick, accounting for 52% of net emigration.¹⁶ Finally, for the period 1946-51 they were again similar: Cork, Galway, Kerry, Mayo, Donegal and Limerick, constituting 55% of net emigration.¹⁷ Although all

Irish counties were affected by emigration, it can be seen that the western seaboard counties of Cork, Mayo, Donegal, Kerry and Galway are overrepresented for the period 1926-51. Whilst not all migration was rural in origin the majority of emigrants were from a farming background. The Commission on Emigration noted that those counties with densely populated, poor quality land and relatively little urbanisation, particularly those on the western seaboard of Ireland were most susceptible to emigration:

Most of the counties which have had high rates of emigration have also some or all of the following characteristics – heavy density of rural population, low valuation of agricultural land per head, high percentage of population living in rural areas and high percentage of agricultural areas in small holdings.¹⁸

However, these statistics are in absolute and not relative terms. The counties that had the highest average annual rate of net emigration per 1,000 of the population from the end of World War II were for the intercensal period 1946-51 (in order) Leitrim, Kerry, Longford, Roscommon and Clare. In the 1950s, for the period 1951-56 they were Leitrim, Donegal, Monaghan, Mayo and Wicklow; for the period 1956-61 they were Monaghan, Leitrim, Cavan, Longford and Mayo. In the 1960s for the period 1961-66 they were Leitrim, Mayo, Longford, Donegal and Cavan, and finally for the period 1966-71 they were Leitrim, Mayo, Offaly, Longford and Roscommon.¹⁹ As can be seen Leitrim, Mayo, Longford, Cavan are over-represented in relative terms and again western counties are over-represented.

The majority of the oral history sample conforms to the pattern of emigrants originating from the western seaboard counties of Ireland [see Appendix C: Table 6]; of the sample of thirty-three respondents who provided life testimonies twenty-one hailed western seaboard counties (64%), five from Dublin City (15%) and seven from elsewhere in Ireland (21%). John A. Jackson noted in his seminal study of the Irish in Britain that *'the background from which the Irish immigrant to Great Britain has come has, in the main, been a rural one. This background has done little to prepare the immigrant for urban life in Britain but it is to this life that he has been constantly attracted'*.²⁰ Of the oral history sample twenty-five came from rural areas (76%), three came from county towns (9%) and five came from the city of Dublin (15%). The relatively high number of five emigrants from Dublin does not, however, correspond with the general trend of Irish emigration. The pattern of 'second-wave' female emigration is generally seen to be the

same as that of their male counterparts with the exception that male emigration from urban areas, particularly Dublin, was higher whilst that of rural areas was lower.²¹

The years in which the oral history sample departed Ireland range from 1933 to 1978, with the vast majority (82%) emigrating before 1963. The following table [4.3] highlights the decennial breakdown of respondents first year of departure.

Table 4.3: Decennial breakdown of respondents first year of departure

Decennial Period	No. of Respondents
1931-40	7
1941-50	5
1951-60	9
1961-70	11
1971-80	1

Source: Interviews with respondents.

Gender Distribution of Irish Emigrants

Between 1901 and 1971, with the exception of two intercensal periods (1911-26 and 1936-46), female emigrants outnumbered their male counterparts [see Table 4.4]; these two periods correspond with major British overseas conflicts during which time many Irishmen were recruited into the British Army.²² Additionally, female emigration was subject to restrictions during the war years; for example, Irish females under twenty-two years of age were only permitted to emigrate if they were going to train as teachers, nurses or midwives and only women over the age of twenty-two were allowed to take up work in the factories of Britain.²³ Nonetheless, for the majority of the period under study female emigrants outnumbered their male counterparts; this was despite suggestions by the church that steps should be taken by the government to curb female emigration.²⁴ Of the 33 emigrant life stories recorded for this thesis, 18 or 45.5% were female.

Table 4.4: Annual net emigration from Ireland: 1926-1981

Period	Annual net emigration		
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>
1926-36	- 7,255	- 9,420	- 16,675
1936-46	- 11,258	- 7,454	- 18,712
1947-51	- 10,309	- 14,075	- 24,384
1951-56	- 21,657	- 17,696	- 39,353
1956-61	- 21,914	- 20,486	- 42,400
1961-66	- 7,523	- 8,598	-16,121
1966-71	- 4,950	- 5,831	-10,781
1971-79	+ 7,659	+ 5,958	+ 13,617
1979-81	- 1,606	- 6,345	- 2,523

Source: P. J. Drudy, 'Migration between Ireland and Britain since Independence', in P. J. Drudy (ed.), *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain Since 1922*, 1986, p. 109.

Age Distribution of Irish Emigrants

Family emigration (that of adults and children moving together) was predominant during the Famine years; this pattern drastically declined from the 1890s when young adults between the ages of 15 and 24 began to constitute the bulk of the emigrants and continued throughout the period covered by this thesis.²⁵ Between 1924 and 1939, 54% of all Irish emigrants were in the 15-24 age group and a further 16% were in the 25-29 category.²⁶ From 1939 to 1952, Irish emigrants who intended to travel to England were obliged to obtain travel and employment permits or travel identity cards. In the 1940s there was a noticeable increase in the emigration of older males to Britain in contrast to the continued predominance of younger females; of those who received travel permits between 1943 and 1951, 46% of males and 69% of females were under 25 years of age.²⁷ As a result of wartime restrictions family emigration all but disappeared but reappeared again in the 1950s, whereas the emigration of older Irish males declined.²⁸ The oral history sample generally corresponded to the trends outlined above. Of the sample of thirty-three, eight persons left Ireland under the age of 15 as part of a family. Excluding those who left as part of a family, 92% of the female respondents emigrated from Ireland between the ages of 15 and 24 years of age. Similarly 92% of the male respondents first left Ireland aged between 15 and 24.

Explanations for Emigration

During the fifty-year period under consideration around one million people emigrated from the Republic of Ireland, the vast majority relocating to Britain; it is estimated that since 1900 two out of every three Irish emigrants made Britain their destination.²⁹ Why did so many people leave Ireland? And why did they migrate to certain regions?

The 1950s *Reports* of the Commission on Emigration identified economic reasons as the root cause of emigration, adding, however, that in the majority of cases the decision to leave Ireland could not be regarded as belonging to any one motive but to the interplay of several motives.³⁰ The authors further qualified this statement by ascribing social, political, cultural and psychological causes, in addition to economic, of emigration. The authors of the *Reports* recognised that the 'push-pull' model that was used to explain migration was unsatisfactory in that '*both forces operate together even in the case of an individual, and taking the country as a whole it is extremely difficult to decide which of them has been the more potent*'.³¹ However, they concluded that at some periods the 'push' factor was the predominant force influencing emigration and at others the 'pull' factor: '*It was undoubtedly a "push" during and after the Famine and following poor harvests, whereas there was a strong element of "pull" during periods of full employment in Great Britain*'.³²

Undoubtedly, both male and female emigration was fuelled largely by the same general factors: the obvious factors being the mass availability of work in Britain and the disparity in wage levels between the two countries. In the 1920s and 1930s '*one out of every two persons born in the twenty-six county state failed to secure permanent employment there*;³³ the alternatives were to take the boat or to remain at home and endure '*chronic idleness*'. For those who emigrated, wages in Britain were substantially higher than in Ireland during the war and in the immediate post-war years; in fact The Emergency orders restricted wage levels in Ireland.³⁴ Cormac Ó Gráda, when comparing industry-wide levels in 1938 and 1946, noted that the difference between Irish and British wages increased from 16% to 32% for males, 'whilst that of females increased from 8% to 31%'.³⁵ The establishment of the modern British Welfare State by the Labour government in the second half of the 1940s also ensured better conditions for the working classes in England. Successive Acts of Parliament sought to counter the '*five giant evils of Want,*

Disease, Squalor, Ignorance and Idleness with its *'five giants on the road to recovery'*: social security, a national health service, housing provision, state education and a commitment to full employment.³⁶ The Irish were even better off on the dole in post-war Britain than at home as unemployment money in England was double that of Ireland.³⁷ In contrast the 1940s and 1950s are remembered as decades of *'turmoil and malaise'* in Ireland.³⁸ The economic war which dominated Anglo-Irish relations throughout the 1930s was finally resolved in 1938, the following year the long expected war had arrived. Consequently, it wasn't until 1945 that the Irish Government could begin to operate in terms of expansion rather than mere subsistence. Slowly and laboriously, the new State faced the gargantuan task of creating an effective infrastructure (housing, social welfare services, hospitals, health care, electric power, roads, transport and communications), without which economic development could not take place. However, for many these changes were too little, too late and tens of thousands of de Valera's *'comely maidens'* and *'athletic youths'* swapped the *'frugal comforts'* of rural Ireland for the materialistic comforts of urban Britain. The 1950s in Ireland were primarily characterised by *'severe economic difficulties, difficulties which were exacerbated by the political instability of the period'*,³⁹ emigration levels soared and the population of the State fell to 2.9 million. Essentially for much of the period under consideration Irish emigrants were moving from a static economy to a dynamic economy in Britain.

As previously mentioned the oral history respondents were asked to explain the circumstances of their emigration. The following sections deal with the explanations given by the respondents. Male and female responses are dealt with separately because, as the Commission on Emigration acknowledged, male and female emigration was often influenced by different factors.

Although female emigration, like male, is the result of a variety of causes, the purely economic cause is not always so dominant. For the female emigrant improvement in personal status is of no less importance than higher wages and better conditions of employment abroad.⁴⁰

Female Emigration

For the majority of the female respondents interviewed there were two main reasons cited for needing or wanting to emigrate. First, there seemed to be a strong desire to be independent and, second, to better themselves and England it appeared provided better

opportunities for individual improvement:

When I, you know, got old enough I wanted to do me own thing and I left Ireland, I come over here in 1959.

[Nuala, *b.* 1931, Co. Wexford]

Well I wasn't making anything of my life there and I wanted to get on a bit you see so...

[Clare, *b.* 1913, Co. Leitrim]

The majority of the women interviewed had left school in their early teens, and sometimes as young as eleven, to help on the family farm, take up employment locally or to look after an ill or aged family member. Several of the women spoke of dissatisfaction with the education they received and the fact that farm-work often took precedence:

Well between going and coming, we may as well stay at home, because what we learned was nothing, some days our books were never looked at. It was shocking, you now, to bring ya family up like that, we'd be out, if it was a nice day, we'd be out saving turf for the winter and bringing it in, made bring it in as well, you know, and store for the winter inside.

[Eithne, *b.* 1911, Co. Mayo]

Almost of the women had worked at home on the farm or in near-by towns as domestics or child-minders for a few years before deciding to migrate to England. In many cases it was the experience of working these menial jobs that led to the decision to leave Ireland. Eithne left school at eleven and worked on the family farm for a decade before leaving for Leeds:

Well we done the farm, we were on the farm; there were nothing else to do until I come here.

[Eithne, *b.* 1911, Co. Mayo]

Eileen, at thirteen years of age, was forced by economic necessity to leave school early and take up a position locally as a childminder:

She was offering a pound a month and you were a skivvy, you weren't looking after children you were doing everything, you were dusting, polishing, cleaning, everything and washing, oh it was horrible...then I left there 'cause I was jusht a skivvy and I thought I would be jusht looking after the children...and I left there and I went to Killala to a teacher there and her, they were both teachers but they had a big family and the grandmother was looking after the children, they wanted help, well help was jusht another skivvy [laughs] so you know I jusht got tired of it and I wrote to me mother and I said, "Come down with the sidecar and take me home from this blooming place" I said. I stuck it about six months I said "I'm tired and tired of working and being a skivvy for them" and there was seven or eight children in it, you know, it was hard going and I was only a kid meself but they expected you to work there like a slave so I left there and then I went to Ballina to another teacher and his wife...

[Eileen, *b.* 1918, Co. Mayo]

There was a distinct lack of opportunity available to women in the newly independent Ireland and the fact of the matter was that they were unwilling to spend their lives eking a meagre living from the land. In 1936 there were 19,000 female relatives

working on the farms of Connaught, by 1951 this figure had fallen to less than 9,000; whilst the number of female relatives had decreased by more than 50%, only 25% of male relatives departed during the same period.⁴¹ England afforded more employment opportunities to women than Ireland; Delia realised that staying at home in Mayo left her with few options:

I think if I'd stayed at home I end up as a waitress or a cleaner or something because, or maybe a shop assistant, serve me time for two years, you know, working for ten shillings a week or something 'cos that's how it was then, they expected you to serve your time as a shop assistant... [but] the idea of doing nursing and having a profession was more important I thought.

[Delia, b. 1934, Co. Mayo]

Bridget, also from Mayo, concurs with Delia in that working as a shopkeeper's apprentice offered little attraction or long-term security:

In those days [1930s] you'd have to pay to be an apprentice for three years and afterwards they might let you go; that wasn't for me.

[Bridget, b. 1918, Co. Mayo]

Honora's uncle sent her passage to America when she was 15, however, Honora's mother refused to let her go to America because she was so young. Instead she was sent to Tuam to work as a shopkeeper's assistant:

Phwen I was about, I think I was 15 when I went into Tuam, me uncle Dennis, he never got married and he was me Godfather, he sent me passage from America and because in them days you had to do what your parents told ya, and without your parents permission you had to be 21, even to come to England in them days an' you had to have a letter from your parish priest to a parish priest over here, all the lot, all the paraphernalia, because they used to say if girls came to London they were put in the white slave traffic as prostitutes, now phwether it was right or not or phwether it was jusht fairy tales I don't know...me mam wouldn't let me go until I was 21, in the meantime she sent me in to Tuam to serve me time in a shop called John Burke's in Tuam, she said "the way you'll have something to your back if you do go to America". And in them days you had to call the boss 'Sir' and you had to be in at night no later than nine o'clock.

[Honora, b. 1914, Co. Galway]

Within Article 41 of the 1937 *Constitution of Ireland*, which replaced the 1922 *Constitution of the Irish Free State*, the 'official' role of females was enshrined identifying all women with motherhood and domesticity. However, not all women were willing to accept their assigned roles; they wanted more from their lives and felt that England afforded them a better opportunity. Eithne left school aged eleven and afterwards worked on the farm because there was little else to do. Explaining her reason for leaving Ireland she says:

Well there were nothing to do and you know and they wanted you to get married at home and be in poverty again; so it was no use being like that. So I didn't want that; I wanted to travel. So I did.

[Eithne, b. 1911, Co. Mayo]

Several of the women expressed dissatisfaction with their lives in Ireland; they wanted what they felt they could not achieve in Ireland: independence and betterment. Agnes' story is typical of those related by many of the female respondents; it's a story which expresses a desire to be autonomous whilst being restrained by familial and social circumstances. Agnes grew up on a 92-acre farm in Co. Roscommon in the 1920s and early 1930s; the family's income from agriculture was supplemented by her father's army pension. Growing up she wanted to be a nurse but her mother was '*kind of an invalid all her life*' and her father decided that she would stay at home and look after her. Agnes realises that the family was relatively well off but she desired independence:

I really had a good life, a wonderful life, you know, in comparison to some people, but I didn't want it. I wanted to do something for myself.

[Agnes, b. 1918, Co. Roscommon]

However, independence was not easily obtained as family commitments and expectations bound her at home. Unbeknownst to her parents, Agnes used to reply to newspaper advertisements recruiting trainees in a variety of positions. Her father discovered one of these letters one day and responded:

"You? Work!" he says "in there", he said, "a hairdressers, you wouldn't earn enough money to keep you in nylon stockings".

[Agnes, b. 1918, Co. Roscommon]

So that was ruled out for her. Furthermore, Agnes was secretly meeting a Donegal man, whom she later married in Leeds, but again her parents exercised control in this aspect of her life:

In them days they didn't believe in courtship or anything; they only believed in, you know, matchmaking, making, you know, matches...I might be wrong, I might have judged them wrong but I always thought they [parents] wanted me to marry this man you know and he was a lot older than me. He was a cattle jabber. And he used to take these cattle to the station; send them all over you know export them and all this. I always thought now this is what they had in their minds. If you think this, I'm not having it!

[Agnes, b. 1918, Co. Roscommon]

One day in 1938, aged 20 years Agnes decided that she'd had enough of being told what to do; as was usual Agnes went to collect her father's army pension, she handed in his pension book and used the money to go to England. Although, her sudden unannounced

departure was untypical, her motives were similar to many of the other female respondents. Agnes' account of her departure, as with those of other respondents, is neither simple nor straightforward but involves a number of competing elements.

Almost all of the female respondents left Ireland single in their late teens or early twenties; this corresponds with one of the unique features of Irish emigration:

Unlike females in other ethnic groups, Irish females do not leave the country of their birth as part of a family, that is as wives and daughters of the males who have emigrated to find work. Most of them emigrate as economically active young, single females.⁴²

For these females the towns and cities of England offered almost unlimited employment opportunities for both the skilled and unskilled worker in factories and hospitals, shops and restaurants, on trams and buses, as domestics and cleaners.

There were other reasons too that a woman might emigrate, one such reason was to conceal a pregnancy outside of marriage. Sex and sexuality were taboo subjects in the decades after Independence and contraceptives and abortions were damned by Church and State. Consequently unmarried mothers were often ostracised by family and community and many chose to flee to England rather than cause embarrassment to their family:

I was 12; I didn't know where babies come from. I thought the nurse brought them in the big black bag at the back of the bicycle; I didn't know, I knew nothing about it, we knew nothing...and if a girl had a baby out of wedlock at home she never came back to the village – "Oh what would the neighbours say" – they lived for the neighbours in them days, especially in the country.

[Honora, b. 1914, Co. Galway]

Male Emigration

The majority of the male respondents finished their education in their early teens; according to *Investment in Education*, 82% of Irish-born residents in Britain in 1961 had left school at the age of 15 or under.⁴³ It appears to have been common practice to keep young males at home from school when the farm-work required extra pairs of hands. Austin finally left school at 13 but recalls that:

I finished school early 'cause I was the oldest of the family and whenever there was turf to be saved, or turf to be spread, or hay to be made I was kept at home from school to help on the farm, so I didn't get no schooling at all. I got a schooling but not what you'd call a right schooling, ya know.

[Austin, b. 1916, Co. Roscommon]

Although Owen is almost three decades Austin's junior his reminiscences are similar:

I went to school in Straide, but only jusht the national school, 12 I left...that was alright like you know I was glad to get away from it. They say that your school days is the best days of yer life, they weren't for me. I was glad to got out, I was kept home half the time anyway, like you know, the father'd say, if it was a fine day, "take this day off now Owen and we'll go to the bog" or "take this day off and we'll go to the haymaking" and if it was raining then I'd be ran out to school.

[Owen, *b.* 1943, Co. Mayo]

Post-education opportunities were also limited for males; those from moneyed backgrounds could continue to second level education, some found occasional work locally, whilst others moved to Dublin. However, many spent a period on the farm at home, worked as part-time farmers and seasonal migrants or emigrated permanently to England. In contrast in Britain there was a seemingly insatiable demand for labour on construction sites or on the massive civil engineering projects in the decades after the war. The journalist and social commentator John Healy noted of males from rural backgrounds that: *'as soon as he could he left primary school for he was "wanted at home", to mould spuds, to make hay, to save turf. In due time he would go to Lincolnshire to the farmer, often with his father or older brother and the town would not miss him'*.⁴⁴ Furthermore, traditionally the eldest son inherited the farm so for the others staying on the farm was not a long term option; Honora tells that the younger of her two brothers had to emigrate:

You see he was the second son, its only ower Michael that could stay on the farrum. He had to get a job outside and all us girls had to leave. Only the oldest son could stay on the place.

[Honora, *b.* 1914, Co. Galway]

Agnes too recalls this common practice; she had one sister and two brothers and recalls that:

My brother and sister went to America. In them days there was two was sent away to America and the other two was married. And in them days the arrangement was you know was one would have the place and the other one got a fortune.

[Agnes, *b.* 1918, Co. Roscommon]

The paradoxical result was that the younger siblings often felt bitter about having to emigrate whilst the eldest regretted having to stay on the farm, both feeling that they had been given a worse deal.

Economic reasons featured strongly amongst the male respondents for having or desiring to leave Ireland. Additionally, if there was a family or local tradition of emigration the respondent appeared to follow the pattern without reflecting on why they

were leaving. J. A. Jackson writing in the early 1960s realised the affect that retuning emigrants were having on those left behind at home:

An important factor in deciding the girls to go, and this is equally true of the men, is likely to be the contact they have with return emigrants...back for their holidays from English cities and already urbanites, in appearance 'grand' and sophisticated in contrast to those left at home. Life in Britain appeared more attractive and those who returned do little to discourage others from following.⁴⁵

This is certainly true and the influence of the retuning emigrant with money to burn, or at least superficially so, was a strong draw on the prospective emigrant. One Mayo man who emigrated in 1960 describes exactly what it was about the retuning emigrant that influenced his decision to go:

Well everyone was comin' that time, all me mates was going away like you know, an' I jusht wanted to see it, to see what it was like. I seen them all comin' home with black fuckin' suits on them and lovely ties, and rakes of money, an' takin' all the women off the young bucks at home – all the lads that had no money – comin' home an' hiring cars out and all this, Jayz shure you'd definitely go or want to go, if you were able like.

[Owen, b. 1943, Co. Mayo]

To Owen it appeared that everyone was going to England, particularly those of his own age (late teens and early twenties). For Owen it wasn't so much that the returned emigrant seemed 'grand' or more 'sophisticated' but that they were flashing their earnings, were well dressed and were wooing the local girls away from the local boys when they were home. He further recalls that as the second of nine children reared on a 25-acre farm there was little resistance at home to his going:

And there was no such thing as being stopped goin', they'd be glad to get rid of ya [laughs]...too many mouths around the table.

[Owen, b. 1943, Co. Mayo]

A sense of adventure and a desire 'to see what it was like' also drew many young males across the Irish Sea. Jeremiah had a relatively prosperous car-hire business in Monaghan town in the 1950s but decided to leave and join his brother who worked as a watchmaker in Sheffield:

Many a chap had to go because he couldn't get work but I had a little business going...I fancied to see what the other side of the globe was like.

[Jeremiah, b. 1932, Co. Monaghan]

Another, less documented, reason that a young man might emigrate was when it was to avoid a jail term; in many cases the excuse that the offender was soon to be taking the boat was sufficient to escape the long arm of the law:

At that time if a fella was up in court one of the pleas in his defence to let him off and not give him a sentence was "leave him off your honour he's going to England tomorrow morning" as if like this was a mitigating circumstance he was goin' to be out of the way, we were going to export our criminals, in inverted commas, off over to England, to the old enemy, so I can remember that like very well and if you go back and you read these stories in the paper at that time you'll find those fairly common. I can think of one like, as I talk to you, I can think of one lad in particular who got into a bit of bother, now by modern day standards it would be harmless fun in our time but maybe at that time it wasn't seen as such harmless fun. I mean there was no malice, there was no personal injury, there might be injury to property a little bit but it was borne out of maybe boredom, frustration, all the things that adolescents have when they grow up if they don't have outlets for them and he ended up in America...he was a local lad well known to us all...that would have been very much part and parcel of our environment at that time [1950s].

[Fr. Dominic, b. 1947, Co. Kerry]

The following section will deal with the reasons why Irish emigrants chose Leeds as a destination.

Why did Irish emigrants go to Leeds?

As has been highlighted in chapter three, Leeds had a tradition of Irish settlement from the early 1800s; the 1841 Census recorded 5,027 Irish-born persons in Leeds Borough, by 1861 this figure had increased to 10,333 persons. Thereafter there was a decline in the number of Irish-born persons in Leeds in both absolute and relative terms falling to just 3,165 in 1931. As may be seen in Table 4.5 the Irish-born population of the city greatly increased between 1931 and 1961 (by 110%), peaking in 1971 at 7,580 persons.

Table 4.5: Irish-born Population of Leeds (Borough): 1931-1981

Census year	Irish-born population	% change of Irish-born population	Total population of Leeds
1931	3,165	n/a	482,809
1941	<i>No Census</i>	<i>No Census</i>	<i>No Census</i>
1951	4,788	+ 51.3	505,219
1961	6,632	+ 38.5	510,676
1971	7,580	+ 14.3	496,009
1981*	7,563	- 0.2	696,714

Source: *Census of Population of England & Wales: 1921-1981, County Reports.*

Note: * These figures are for Leeds Metropolitan District and not Leeds Borough.

Again, if the respondents did not offer the information unprompted, they were asked to explain why they migrated, either directly or indirectly, to Leeds. It transpired that England was not the first choice of destination for some of the older emigrants interviewed; several of the respondents had initially hoped to join elder siblings or relations who had emigrated to the United States (other respondents had parents who spent some time in America and later returned to Ireland). Eithne had hoped to follow her siblings to the US but immigration restrictions prevented her from doing so; a series of quota restrictions were imposed from 1921 and in 1930 measures were introduced which excluded immigrants who lacked finances and/or prospective employment.⁴⁶

There was four older than me, two brothers an' two sisters, an' they went to, me brother, me sisters went to America an' I wanted to go then, ya know but it was closed so I had to, I come here instead...I thought I might get to America, ya know, but then me sisters in America tried to get me out there but I'm glad I didn't now because when I was out in America I didn't like it. I didn't like American ways, they were all bluffing ya know, an' what they had an' what they hadn't an' they hadn't half the things we had. Ya know an' they had it in their mind that we were down an' out here ya know an' we weren't ya know. We had as nice a place as they have had out there.

[Eithne, *b.* 1911, Co. Mayo]

Furthermore, of those who chose to go to England it transpired that Leeds was often not the first destination for many of the respondents; almost two-thirds of those interviewed initially emigrated to places other than Leeds [see Appendix C: Table 7]. So how and why did these emigrants eventually end up in this city?

Many of the older male respondents who left Ireland in the 1930s to 1950s initially went with family members or in local gangs to work in the fields of Britain. The arduous work was seasonal, usually from the end of May until November, and could include anything from haymaking to potato picking, milking cows, mucking out, beet hoeing, dyke mowing and harvesting. Several of the male respondents had worked as farm labourers throughout Britain before eventually settling in Leeds. Austin emigrated to Chester in 1937 and found work as a farm labourer; he stayed on the farm and lived in a shant:⁴⁷

Farm work, milking cows and mucking out an' all that kind of thing ya know, an' then it was the haytime ya know...I stayed in a shant and a nice one an' I tell ya what was nice about it, I was lucky. It was a harness room, you see where they used to keep the harness and they kept horses there before my time and it was a harness room and there was a fireplace and a fine bed an' bed clothes, everything an' you got a Sunday dinner as well, they cooked a Sunday dinner for ya, you did your own cooking like up to that but you could have a bath up at the farmhouse...£2 a week, well it twas and it twasn't [good money] for the hours you see ya worked Sunday an' all ya know, it twasn't great, Naw!

[Austin, b. 1916, Co. Roscommon]

From their early teens Seamus and his brother went 'tattie hoking' (potato digging) to Scotland with their parents but they eventually went their own way; in the mid-1950s they moved south of the boarder to England:

When we [Seamus & brother] got up to seventeen and eighteen [mid-1950s] we went ower own way, we came to England, we head for, phwat do you call it, we head for Lincolnshire for the farmers, we yoused to go to the farmers then, we yoused to do the, we yoused to do eight weeks at the beet, the sugar beet; we'd go then we'd go to this farmer outside Peterborough called Marsh an' we'd mow dykes for him...he'd pay us so much a chain, it was more or less piece work. An' then we'd be at him for a few weeks and then we'd lave him and we'd go back to this farmer that we hoed the beet at an' we'd, we yoused do harvest for him, he had horshes and carts and he yoused to have, phwat do you call it, a machine an' it yoused to cut wheat and we'd go after an' we'd make shtookes o' it, in the field. An' then when we'd finished all the making, maybe sixshy or seventy acres he had a horse and cart and there was two of us then, one on the bottom, me brother on the bottom, me on the top and I'd build it and bring it into the farm...it was a hard auld life too, washn't it?

There was six o' us that went to the farmer there, picking spuds, we done the beet...the six o' us yoused to cook together an' we had two double beds, three o' us in each bed, yes [laughs] yeah the three o' us in each bed; we had a big hut...We were on good money, I mean like, the money we were on that time was the only way we could make the money, we were on piece work, phwatever we'd earn we'd have to go for it even when we were picking spuds, we'd get so much an acre o' spuds and we'd, phwat do you call it, make a good weeks wages.

[Seamus, b. 1936, Co. Mayo]

It was noted in a publication first published in 1968 and entitled *Life & Tradition in the Yorkshire Dales* that 'as far as can be judged, Irishmen have come to the Dales for hay-time for well over a hundred years, and were hired at local markets or at June Fairs such as those at Bentham or Skipton'.⁴⁸ It also appears that there is a long established traditional path between Mayo and the English midland farms of Yorkshire, Lancashire and Lincolnshire (Traditionally seasonal migrants from Achill in county Mayo and county Donegal made Scotland their primary destination). In researching her book *Spalpeens and Tattie Hokers*, Anne O'Dowd interviewed several elderly former migratory labourers from two areas of Co. Mayo; the first an area in west Mayo around Achill, Curraun and Belmullet, the second an area in east Mayo around Kiltimagh, Kilkelly, Straide and Swinford. The taped interviews were recorded in the early 1980s

with men who had migrated to work for English farmers and a significant number of those interviewed had worked in Yorkshire. Thus it appears that Yorkshire was a traditional destination for Mayo's seasonal agricultural migrants. And information gleaned from the oral history accounts would seem to confirm the existence of such a link. Of the oral history respondents several had fathers, brothers and husbands who had initially come to Yorkshire as seasonal migrants in the early decades of the twentieth century. Both Bridget's father and eldest brother worked for farmers in the vicinity of Leeds, additionally her future husband along with many young men from his homeplace in north-east Mayo also worked in gangs as farm labourers around Yorkshire. Martin's father spent many seasons working on a big estate farm in a place called the Haws, Gunnerside in North Yorkshire:

The thing of them days was like a crowd of lads from the village would go, 'bout might be ten or twelve like, would go from the village and go to England for the hay and the harvest like ya know and eh... sometimes the spuds and the mangels [a large beet used to feed cattle] like ya know. And so there used to be the same crowd used to go, you know, year after year like ya know to England; and his last year was in 1947 like and I always remember then him then coming back you know like and he brought a horses collar home with him and he got a Raleigh bicycle for the girl like and I'll always remember him getting that and he got me something. But it was awful hard like was, you had to go to Skipton here in, in outside Leeds, it's about twenty miles outside Leeds a place called Skipton and that used to be for the hiring and all the farmers from all around North the Yorkshire all the big farmers used to come there and all the Irish lads used to have to line up there and the farmer, the big farmers used to walk up and down the line and say "I'll have you and I'll have you" and it was just like ya know you've seen that thing called *Roots* like taking, you know, and but they used always tried to get together those lads that was from the village like ya know used to like want to get to the one farmer if not you know somewhere near each other.

But then they used to be there brought out and then my father used to tell me how he used to sleep in the barn with the cattle, like you know, bed down with the hay like you know and sleep. This farmer, he used to tell me, had four sons and the first one would go out in the morning at six o'clock with them ya know and work like the clappers like ya know and he'd go back and he'd have his breakfast like you know then another fresh one would come down and that's how it was done all day you know the those there who had rested you know would from the earlier ones would come out again in the afternoon and in the early evening you know to work the lads really to the core and you know it was all scythe work in them days as well you know like mowing with the scythe and everything and it was awful hard as he often described to me like ya know. But then probably on a Sunday they say they used to have to walk five or six miles to this church like you know that they used to like to go to and then they you know used to have a little drink but it was no bicycles or nothing it was all walking ya know, it was hard like ya know. But this farmer I always remember later on he used to send him a Christmas card every year you know like to keep in touch like you know even though my father wasn't going then you know when my father was older. But that's what they used to do like you know and they used to form a relationship sometimes like that you know and sometimes they were treated well like you know and more times there was, I suppose there was good and bad in everything like ya know but that was it like, you wouldn't get the young lads today to do that like. Thank goodness time has moved on.

[Martin, b. 1940, Co. Mayo]

After a few seasons farm-labouring, particularly during the 1940s, many seasonal migrants gravitated to urban centres where all-year-round work could be found. Gradually more and more Irishmen were opting to work as part of England's army of workmen for its war effort; the pay was better, the working day and week were shorter, they could live in digs instead of in farm outhouses and be nearer to fellow Irishmen and the two central Irish institutions: the church and the public house. Another reason which affected the seasonal agricultural migrant's decision to turn to the cities for permanent work was that they were often denigrated by '*the townie*'; John Healy observed '*the migratory farm worker was not an emigrant with any glamour or appeal*'.⁴⁹ Often even the very words '*spalpeens*' and '*tattie hokers*' were used as terms of derision.⁵⁰ For those working on Yorkshire farms, Leeds was the main urban centre and thus the natural choice for work. The city was also situated at a midpoint for those who worked in agriculture in North Yorkshire, Lincolnshire in the east and Lancashire in the west.

It is a social truism that emigration begets emigration. Many respondents remarked that it appeared that everybody who was young and able was going to England and were duly influenced by their actions:

Well, at that time everybody was goin' t'England; there was nothing else.
[Austin, b. 1916, Co. Roscommon]

Well everyone was comin' that time, all me mates was going away like...
[Owen, b. 1943, Co. Mayo]

The *Reports* of the Commission on Emigration further remarked that the places in which Irish emigrants settled would lure prospective emigrants:

Recent emigration to Great Britain is building up centres of attraction in that country and, because of the facility of movement between the two countries, there is a danger that these may become magnets as powerful as the Irish centres in the United States in the 19th and early 20th centuries.⁵¹

Census evidence supports this conjecture; the Irish population of cities such as London, Manchester, Birmingham, Coventry and Leeds for example increased dramatically between 1951 and 1971 [see Table 4.6]. Liverpool is one notable exception. Furthermore, emigration to these cities facilitated further and continued emigration from Ireland, and authors of the *Reports* recognised that:

Tradition and example have also been very powerful influences...For very many emigrants there was a traditional path "from the known to the known", that is to say, from areas where they lived to places where their friends and relations awaited them.⁵²

Table 4.6: Irish-born population in England: selected cities: 1951-81

City	1951	1961	1971	1981
<i>London (a)</i>	171,618 (b)	253,576 (b)	241,220	199,460
<i>Birmingham</i>	28,098	47,582	44,865	37,375
<i>Manchester</i>	16,280	24,577	23,040	18,135
<i>Liverpool</i>	14,122	12,006	8,470	5,759
<i>Coventry</i>	7,689	13,396	15,830	12,606
<i>Leeds</i>	4,778	6,632	7,580	7,563
<i>Leicester</i>	3,102	4,814	4,920	3,886
<i>Sheffield</i>	2,622	3,186	2,945	2,458
<i>Nottingham</i>	2,476	4,161	3,990	3,331
<i>Luton</i>	1,485	6,661	7,670	6,591
<i>Northampton</i>	1,336	2,357	2,915	2,458
<i>Newcastle</i>	1,326	1,356	1,040	1,093

Source: Census of Population of England & Wales: 1951-81, County Reports.

Note: (a) Greater London; (b) Estimated

It became clear from the oral history interviews that although emigrants from every county in Ireland could be found in any British urban centre, certain towns and cities became associated with particular Irish counties. For example, Leeds is strongly associated with emigrants from Mayo and Donegal (but particularly the former), Huddersfield with emigrants from the Gaeltacht regions of Connemara and Kerry, and Sheffield with Galway.

There was a rake of men coming from Huddersfield [into Leeds] that time, Connemara men that was their home that time, Connemara men like come to Huddersfield, it 'twas like the same in Leeds like Mayomen coming to Leeds, they had different towns o' coming to, ya see.

[Seamus, b. 1936, Co. Mayo]

Sheffield is a big Galway town.

[Jeremiah, b. 1932, Co. Monaghan]

Thus emigrants Mayo would follow their fellow countymen (and women) to Leeds because of its reputation as a '*Mayo town*'. Before 1921, the census of England and Wales recorded the county of birth of Irish emigrants, thus we know that in 1861 18.1% of the Irish in Leeds were born in Dublin, 8.9% in Tipperary, 8.7% in Queen's County and 7.3% in Mayo, etc.⁵³ Since then, however, Irish-born persons living in England are sub-divided on the basis of whether they were born in the twenty-six or six counties.

Therefore, it is only through oral testimony and personal memory that one can get a clear impression of the Irish composition of Leeds. By general consensus Leeds is long-recognised, from the 1930s at least, as being a Mayo town. Eithne recalls the Irish make-up of Leeds when she arrived in the early 1930s:

Oh they were from all parts; Mayo most of them in Leeds.

[Eithne, *b.* 1911, Co. Mayo]

One Mayo veteran described his memories of being Irish in 1930s Leeds:

We were all very sensitive and unsure then. We'd cling together a lot with lads from our own county. After Mass we'd go to a pub in Leeds frequented by Mayo men. The talk would be mostly about Mayo and who was doing what back there – or about Mayo men here.⁵⁴

Honora recalls of Leeds in the late 1930s that:

There was hardly any Galway people, except the Joyce's, they came over as tailors with my husband, they were here... I think I knew only about four from Galway altogether, unless they were in other parts of the districts of Leeds. Everyone was from Mayo, every single wan was from Mayo and they used all go to St. Francis [Church Dancehall], that was out in Holbeck, was it, where was St. Francis? Hunslett.

[Honora, *b.* 1914, Co. Galway]

Austin who moved into Leeds on 1938 recalls that:

There was a lot of Irish, like that they were from Connemara mostly, a lot of Mayomen in Leeds, you know, a lot of Mayos as well. But I didn't really know any of them at that time you know I was a kind o a stranger even among me own like I didn't meet anyone that I knew from home there was nobody from Roscommon or from my place in Leeds at that time, in the later years they did come.

[Austin, *b.* 1916, Co. Roscommon]

Additionally, Nuala and Gráinne attest to the fact that Leeds continued to attract Mayo men and women:

You know, I don't meet a lot of Wexford people you know, very few I've bumped into very few Wexford people, I think mostly all Mayo...

[Nuala, *b.* 1931, Co. Wexford]

Donegal and Mayo took over Leeds, you know in the 70s an' 80s. Even in the Irish Centre they have the Donegal bar and they have the Mayo bar.

[Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo]

This last remark refers to the Tara Suite (main function room) of the Leeds Irish Centre in which there are two bars unofficially known as the Mayo bar and the Donegal bar. Although by no means completely exclusive to either county they tend to attract their own countymen. This association of English cities with Irish counties is also supported by the writings of Donall MacAmhlaigh who worked as a navvy in England in the mid-1950s:

I was working with another gang today for an hour or two...three of the people I was with were from Galway City and they lived in Coventry. By all accounts, you'd be hard put to find any difference between the two cities, so many Galway people are in Coventry.⁵⁵

In fact, the whole of West Yorkshire is recognised as having special connections with the Western Seaboard of Ireland and in particular '*is distinguished by the large numbers from County Mayo*'.⁵⁶ In 1990, the Metropolitan District of Calderdale in West Yorkshire [see Appendix A: Fig. 4] was officially twinned with Mayo. The Mayo-born Mayor of Calderdale, Councillor Joe Kneafsey, led a delegation from Yorkshire to Castlebar to sign a charter which it was hoped would lead to a stimulus in tourism and industrial activity in the two regions. The manager of the LIC, Mr. Tommy McLoughlin, spoke of the benefits to emigrants from the west of Ireland who were arriving in Leeds:

Émigrés from Mayo and the Western Seaboard usually have family or friends in Leeds and other parts of Yorkshire who can help them to find their feet over the difficult first few months. It is the people from the east, from places like Dublin, who usually need the most help because they are less likely to have anyone established in the city to fall back on.⁵⁷

In fact one prominent member of the Leeds Irish Community went as far as to further sub-divide the Mayo composition of Leeds, stating that in fact the bulk of Irish emigrants in the city were from North Mayo:

I mean the most of the people in Leeds were from Swinford, Foxford, Crossmolina, Lahardaun, Belmullet, but then the absolute bulk of the Irish were from Attymass, Bonniconlon, Ballina, all this area, Killala, and then there was a minority then from, you might as well put South Mayo in with Kerry, Cork an' all the rest of the country, there was a spattering of people over from Roscommon but the bulk of the people were from here, from Attymass and Bonniconlon.

[Michael, b. 1947, Leeds]

In addition to being associated with Irish counties, certain English towns and cities became synonymous with certain types of work within Irish circles, particularly amongst Irish males. Since they were for the most-part transient economic migrants in search of work it would seem logical that certain places would become associated with certain

employment opportunities and this information would be disseminated within the Irish community in England. Edward emigrated from Dublin to Leicester in 1954, because he had heard talk of it:

But the trouble is that it were a woman's town, ya know nylon stockings an' shoes an' you know they wouldn't have had a lot of building, you know it hadn't been badly bombed.

[Edward, *b.* 1933, Dublin]

Additionally, cities that had been heavily bombed during the war – Birmingham, Coventry, Liverpool, London and Sheffield – were all in desperate need of labourers for their reconstruction and thus they became associated with building-work. In Yorkshire, traditionally Sheffield was synonymous with steelworks and Leeds with textiles. In the early decades of the twentieth century Leeds was primarily a textile and engineering city and was by all accounts heavily industrialised with plenty of employment opportunities in its countless mills, foundries and factories; the city was in particular strongly associated with the factory-made clothing industry. As with other English cities, the unskilled emigrant could secure employment in shops and restaurants, on trams and buses, in factories and mills, in domestic service or on construction sites. The economy of Leeds suffered a decline in the 1920s and 1930s, in particular in the heavy industries and unemployment in the city was high.⁵⁸ However, in the inter-war years unemployment remained significantly below that of other major north of England centres – 17% in 1930, peaking at 21% in 1931 and falling to 9% in 1937. Austin recalls that most Irishmen in Leeds in the 1930s were doing '*navvy-work*':

You know it was all building then, there was building goin' on at the time. Now it was very bad up to the end of 1938 when the war clouds, then things began to brisk up because they knew there was war coming; now prior to that when I went there first you'd see notices up in factories 'No Irish Need Apply' and then all of a sudden that changed from 'Irishmen Wanted'. You know it amazing, you know, how they could change so quick when it suits them like...you weren't wanted, you were given to understand there, it was there for you to read 'No Irishman Need Apply' and then all of a sudden 'Irishmen Wanted'. Anyone unless you were stupid would know why you were wanted, because there were war coming; they wanted ya, not just in there at the factory, they wanted ya, what meant by that was that they wanted ya in the army.

[Austin, *b.* 1916, Co. Roscommon]

High male unemployment, economic depression and social tensions caused resentment towards Irish men in the workforce, and thus the identification of 'Irish' with 'outsider' was intensified. Austin, however, saw no specific malice towards the Irish in these kinds of notices; he believes that at times when jobs were scarce in Leeds in the 1930s that it

was only natural for Englishmen to want to hire their own people:

Of course unemployment was rife at the time and the English people they wanted jobs and the idea of taking on these Irishmen, these rebels from Ireland, and all these so and so's that caused us all the trouble, you see they looked at it that we caused them a lot of trouble...the English people were nice but if it come to that an Englishman wanted a job down in the factory, it was a different shtory like, you couldn't blame 'em in a way like if he wanted the job. Well that's it, he'd have to be there in preference to an Irishman, wouldn't he?

[Austin, *b.* 1916, Co. Roscommon]

Leeds, however, was notably prosperous in the 1950s, 60s and early 70s with a remarkably low unemployment level at less than 1% in the boom years of 1955, 1961 and 1965 (levels that can be greatly contrasted to the 21% of 1931).⁵⁹ This is despite the fact that the city's manufacturing base was in gradual decline from the 1920s to the 1970s; this decline was offset by the rise of an array of service industries:

While employment in mainstream engineering remained static, sharp declines in employment in metal and vehicle manufacture, textiles, clothing and footwear were more than counter balanced by rapid growth in building, gas, electricity and water, the distributive trades, insurance and banking, professional and scientific services and miscellaneous services. Between 1951 and 1973 while 37,000 jobs were lost in manufacturing, 32,000 jobs were gained in the service industries.⁶⁰

Thus for the majority of the period under study many Irish men and women were attracted to Leeds by the availability and variety of work:

Leeds was good for work, part of the time, there now after the war. They were trying to build up and they had to do something, the wages weren't great but...there were all types of work then, Irish lads mostly and it was all in the building trade.

[Austin, *b.* 1916, Co. Roscommon]

Well that time, that was the late 50s, early 60s, you could get...have a different job every day of the week that time...Oh I'd jump around from Wimpeys, McAlpines, worked for UK, United Kingdom, that was underground gas-mains, putting underground gas-mains in. Then I went with Green Murphy's, jumping around with different firms.

[Vincent, *b.* 1939, Co. Galway]

We was in cloud nine, ya know, at that time, ya know, in the 60s the Irish was prospering and everything and really building and there was great lots of work going on construction, there was motorways being built and everything was booming in the 60s here like, ya know, and you couldn't be out of work I mean you'd have to been as lazy as sin not to have a job.

[Martin, *b.* 1940, Co. Mayo]

You jusht walked into the pub and got the shtart in the morning, no problem at all.

[Timothy, *b.* 1944, Co. Kerry]

However, by the mid-1970s the unemployment figures began to reflect the continued decline in the manufacturing industry; in January 1976 unemployment in the city had risen to 5.5%.⁶¹ Yet when compared to national standards Leeds fared favourably in the 1980s and 1990s.

Another reason for moving to Leeds was to follow family and friends who were settled there. Family, relations and friends in England were not only important as an example to others who wished to emigrate but they also provided support and encouragement. Several of the respondents had friends or relatives already living in Leeds when they arrived in the city and in many cases this was the primary reason why the city was their chosen destination.

The reason we came to Leeds, it could have been anywhere but it was Leeds because my father had a younger brother who lived here...otherwise it could have been anywhere Liverpool, London, Manchester or wherever; and I've lived in Leeds ever since, we came here in 1955.

[Thomas, *b.* 1941, Dublin]

I came in the first place because it was just a family friend that was here, because I didn't know where to go and I just thought Leeds. I heard everybody talking about Leeds.

[Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo]

Family emigration networks were of great importance amongst the respondents. For Eileen, Leeds was the obvious choice of destination; she had three siblings in England, two of which were living in Leeds:

And she [mother] said "What do you want to do now?" I said "I want to go to England, I want to go over to ower Annie, me sister, 'cause I had Jackie an' Annie here at the time, me brother, an' I had Jim here, you know they never waited at home, they all, well there wasn't room for them, the lot of them. So I went to England when I was 17, [19]35.

[Eileen, *b.* 1918, Co. Mayo]

Eileen moved in with her sister on arrival into digs. Austin followed his future wife to Leeds; he had been working in Chester when she emigrated from Roscommon to cousins in the city:

Me wife now, God rest her, she was in Leeds then and I went to Leeds and I stayed with friends of hers as well.

[Austin, *b.* 1916, Co. Roscommon]

Agnes arrived in Liverpool on a whim in 1938 but soon made her way to Leeds:

And this cousin of mine, she got to know I was here...and she got in touch with me [so] I came to Leeds.

[Agnes, *b.* 1918, Co. Roscommon]

Austin's daughter, Theresa, recalls the sequence of events that led to the eventual emigration of the whole family and the support network in Leeds that influenced their decision to leave Ireland and provided a support network on their arrival:

I tell a lie, there was once in went on holidays to Leeds with mam in 1959 and I was there for about five weeks. I stayed with an aunt of mine, well there was plenty of 'em in Leeds so...and while we were in England Johnny [brother] decided to move to England he thought it was his best opportunity because he knew that if he left while mam was still in the house there'd be, you know, she'd be so emotional, because it was desperate when Timmy left...as it turned out we went to England three years later...My two older brothers were in Leeds, the next brother then was twenty, so I suppose they would have automatically come, that he would go as well an' I think the general there was encouragement from England as well to come over, the wonderful life in England, ya know. I would have known later that that encouragement had been there not beforehand but later I would have known that that encouragement was coming. Dad went over on a couple of holidays himself and he he'd got great encouragement while he was there – come over to England, bring the family over they'll have better opportunities, this, that and the other – and so he was kind of drawn to that then and also like what he said himself since is that he could see in the future that we would have all been gone and there'd be just himself and mam there and the way mam felt about the family being away would it not be better if we were all together an' move over, it seemed a logical kind of an answer to the whole thing. I think that's why mam went along with it 'cause she would have her family together but as it turned out Paddy [brother] didn't come with us, he didn't go with us, he lived at home for two more years and then he got to a point where he didn't have a choice, he had to go to England and that was that. So it was that way, that's basically how that happened...

BMcG: And did you have family or friends waiting there for you when you got over?

Yeah, well Timmy and Johnny were in the house, the house that we went to, Timmy and Johnny were actually living in that house. I had an aunt in Leeds who bought houses and rented them out to people and things like that, she was big into that type of thing, so she had found this house and they had gone in living to it before we went over so that's where we went. It was around the Chapeltown area. The accommodation was there, and initially when we went there dad went on the building sites out I suppose with my brother Johnny at the time but then he joined the post office shortly after.

[Theresa, *b.* 1950, Co. Roscommon]

The emigrant's transition could be made easier by accessing an established network in the city. Friends and relations facilitated the move across the Irish Sea and provided practical support, helping out with accommodation and securing employment. Owen's recollections highlight the advantages to the greenhorn of having contacts in the city:

I came to the other side of the town now to here, Hyde Park, an' into a digs in Brudenell Mount that's in beside Hyde Park Corner; that was 60, 1960, yeah Hyde Park Corner. The first morning I remember coming over an' I was shtanding at the bus-stop along with me brother, the brother was here a year before me or so an' I was looking up at the bush-shtop like that an' I seen LST [sic] written up on the bush-shtop an' I says "What's LST [sic] mean?" "Leeds fuckin' City Transport" Hughie said "Don't let anybody hear ya saying that." [laughs] Liam McDonnell was labour manager over Yorkshire an' he was a townie of mine then an' he got me into work shtraight away.

[Owen, *b.* 1943, Co. Mayo]

Many respondents told how once they had settled family members and relatives followed in their footsteps and came to Leeds; they in turn were able to provide or help with finding accommodation. Following the death of Eileen's mother her younger siblings came from Galway to live with her and her husband in Leeds. And Bridget told how her and her husband's siblings, nieces and nephews arrived in Leeds, initially or permanently staying in their home; they often worked as labourers with her husband's small construction firm. Therefore, having family and kin in Leeds often determined this city as an initial destination since accommodation was immediately available.

However, it wasn't necessary to have family and friends in Leeds to succeed in finding work and employment; Irish pubs, often known as '*Paddy's Exchange*', were also important as places where accommodation and employment could be found. Seamus first arrived in Leeds from Euston Station, London in 1964:

I got into Leeds on a Saturday, Saturday morning early and I fell asleep below at the railway station, I didn't know Leeds but I knew I heard them on about Chapeltown an' I asked this man where is Chapeltown I didn't know Leeds. Oh he said "you go up there an' you'll get a bus, do you know Chapeltown?" "I don't" I said "I never been in Leeds." An' I med me way up about half-eleven an' I went into this pub, it was an Irish pub, there a song about it – if ya want to go to go to work or meet the Irish that was the phwat do you call it, come to Chapeltown to the Roscoe – an' I went in there an' I met a few fellas in there. This Leeds was fill with work then, Leeds, in Leeds. I went in an' I met these two fellas an' I started talking to them, one of them was from Ballina, Murray was his name, an' this other fella was Grannon, he was from around Ballina an' all too. An' they were off on Saturday; drink was cheap then, I said "Are ya having a drink? 'cause they hadn't a lot of money, they were working out with Layden and a few others, I bought a drink an' they said to me "We haven't seen you before" "I said no, I jusht came into Leeds." "Well" they said "you come into a good town, there's plenty o' work in it." He said "We're working, I'm a ganger" he said "I'm a gangerman" Murray, a cap on him, they had a nickname on him, they called him the horsheen Murray, he was an awful busy little man...he said "well, if you go up now, drink that pint, it won't take you long, in about twenty minutes" he said "and you'll be down here again, go up to Francis Street 25 he says an' you'll get a room." He said "We're living there an' I'll put you to work on Monday."

[Seamus, *b.* 1936, Co. Mayo]

Seamus got a room for 25 shillings a week in the lodging house, which was run by an old Polish couple, and ended up in The Shamrock that same night with his newfound friends.

Leaving Home

As already mentioned, the respondents were asked how they felt when they initially left home for England. In response to this question Owen articulated:

Oh well, I felt lonesome like you know leaving, well I didn't feel lonesome the first year I'll tell ya the truth, I didn't, I was too excited, dya' know, but after spending a few years here

then and going back and coming over again you be sort of lonesome because you knew what was there for ya like ya know, there was Murphy's graft and fork an' a big bastard o' a ganger-man roaring and shouting there at ya all day long if you weren't pulling yer weight and ya knew you had to work like.

[Owen, *b.* 1943, Co. Mayo]

Austin recalled an emigration poem which for him summed up his experience of leaving:

Ah, no I didn't [mind going to England the first time], it didn't worry me, no not in the least no. I did mind leaving home, I felt very sad for me mother you know and all that kind of thing because there was a poem about that wasn't it, what was it:

My father blessed me fervently but little did yet complain,
But solely will me mother sigh till I come back again.

I did feel a bit put out about me mother like, because I knew me father felt me going like saddened but he wouldn't show it.

[Austin, *b.* 1916, Co. Roscommon]

His concern was not about what lay before him but about his parents and the loneliness they felt at his departure. Owen's remark that '*I didn't feel lonesome the first year*' and Austin's that '*I didn't mind, it didn't worry me*' were common responses from those interviewed. Many were too excited at the prospect of meeting up with family and friends already departed and of the thoughts of the impending freedom, nightlife and high wages they had heard so much about from returned emigrants. Gráinne recalls that initially she:

Thought tha' everything was brilliant, that it was so new to me, that I could go dancing an' [laughs], Friday, Saturday and Sundays. The Shamrock and St Francis' and then oh I thought it was great.

[Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo]

However, several of the respondents qualified their remarks by adding that after a number of years of coming home on holidays they became less and less eager to return to England. Owen's words counter the opinion of the emigration commissioners that emigrants '*find an easy alternative in emigration*'.⁶² Indeed the renowned playwright John B. Keane, who had first-hand experience of emigration, acutely observed this transition in his emotive musical play *Many Young Men of Twenty* in which the character Danger Mulally remarks:

I'll watch hundreds o' 'em goin' back again till the summer's over – back to their night shifts, an' filthy digs an' thievin' landladies. I'll be lookin' at them with their long faces leanin' out o' the carriage windows, with all their hard-earned money gone, an' their hearts broke with the thoughts of what's waitin' over. 'Tisn't so bad this time. This time it's an adventure. But wait till ye'll be goin' back the next time an' the time after that an' the time after that again. 'Twon't be an adventure then.⁶³

Keane was well aware of the loneliness of emigration, himself having spent two years in England in the 1950s; Keane's *Self-Portrait* deals in part with his days in Northampton and London:

All around us as we left Dun Laoghaire, there was drunkenness. The younger men were drunk – not violently so but tragically so, as I was, to forget the dreadful loneliness of having to leave home...For us, as it was then, it was the brink of hell and don't think I use the word lightly!⁶⁴

John O'Donohue, too, wrote of the loneliness of those leaving Ireland for England: '*hundreds of people, young and old, with red eyes and lonesome faces*'; whilst Donall MacAmhlaigh penned that his heart felt like '*a solid black mass inside [his] breast*'.⁶⁵

Arriving in Leeds

As discussed in chapter three, Leeds established itself as a commercial centre of note in the nineteenth century. However, the cost of this industrial growth was that social and living conditions in the town deteriorated rapidly. The public face of Leeds was gradually and laboriously transformed from the 1870s; slums were cleared, sanitation was extended, the appearance and width of the town's streets were improved and there were an increase in public services and amenities. Leeds also possessed ultramodern transport and communications systems. The town had an efficient tramway system from the late 1800s; by 1936 the bus was fast becoming the dominant mode of public transport, with 170 kilometres of bus routes, eventually making the tram redundant in 1959.⁶⁶ In 1918, the largest automatic telephone exchange in Europe was opened in Leeds with 6,800 initial subscribers. In 1928 Leeds became the first English city to install automatic traffic lights. Leeds Corporation Gas Department was long since providing cheap gas for heating, lighting, cooking and for industry and by 1937 Leeds Corporation was supplying electricity to 148,194 customers.⁶⁷ Also the townspeople of Leeds were gradually replacing the old hobs and ranges with gas cookers. The city centre received a face lift in the early decades of the twentieth century; the present-day Headrow, Leeds' one kilometre long and 27 metre wide main avenue, was refurbished in 1927 at an estimated cost of half a million pounds and in 1932 Lewis's state-of-the-art department store was opened on the Headrow at a cost of one million pounds.⁶⁸ The city centre also contained

numerous Victorian shopping arcades, department stores, markets, cocoa houses, coffee shops, cafés and restaurants, cinemas, ballrooms, etc. [see Appendix B: Plates 18-23].

For those arriving from a comparatively ‘*backward*’ Ireland, Leeds was a different world; even in the 1930s Leeds was as advanced and as modern a city as could be found anywhere in the British Isles and seemed wondrous to newly arrived Irish emigrants particularly for those who had come directly from rural Ireland. As wondrous as Leeds may have been to the new arrivals, the vast majority of the respondents have poor first impressions of the city. For all its wealth and urban splendour Leeds was a city literally blackened by its industrial base; smoke and smog in the city centre killed its trees and stained its statues and buildings. Smoke pollution in Leeds was a serious problem from the early nineteenth century; however, it wasn’t until the 1970s that the use of smokeless fuels began to alleviate the situation. In 1921 the *Yorkshire Evening News* noted that ‘*Smoke and Leeds are almost as inseparably connected in the public mind as bacon and eggs*’.⁶⁹ The dominant memory of the city of those who arrived in Leeds between the 1930s and 1960s is one of a dirty, smoky, malodorous and over-industrialised urban sprawl:

That was 1938...Leeds was, I’ll tell ya what it was I hated it for one thing the smell of gas was horrible in it at that time. You know gas to a countryman then, that was brought up in the country, was horrible; people that were born and reared there wouldn’t notice it you see but I hated the smell of gas it was horrible.

[Austin, b. 1916, Co. Roscommon]

But was I sorry [laughs], I hated it, I detested it, them days [late 1930s] there was no such thing as a blue sky, it was black with soot and muck, even the footpaths were black with muck, the walls were black with muck, it was a terrible, it was, what do you call, an industrial city, and I couldn’t understand why it was so black. An; if ya went outside with a white coat on ya or a white dress you had to wash it the minute you come in, it was all smut, it was terrible.

[Eileen, b. 1918, Co. Mayo]

It was as black with soot and muck, you couldn’t see your hand...you had to keep the doors closed, with the filth and the muck and the soot coming in.

[Honora, b. 1914, Co. Galway]

It was always known as ‘Muchky Leeds’ in my time, my early time [1930s].

[Austin, b. 1916, Co. Roscommon]

When Honora followed her husband to Leeds in 1938, she arrived in Wellington station and inquired of all the black buildings in the city in contrast to the whitewashed cottages that littered her native rural Galway:

Anyways I says to my husband "Why do they paint everything black 'ere?" So Christy Joyce said "Jaysus Christ Honora" he said "that's filth, you'll know 'bout it when you're 'ere, that's filth." And do you know you couldn't put your clothes out on a Monday morning because we were in between three hospicals an' in them days they hadn't these disposal thing they used to burn everything in a big furnace and take the top of the chimney and let it all out...oh the fog, we were lost, oh we were lost, once I went out ya know and I had a torch, a little torch an' during the war ya had a hood over it you couldn't show any light ya know an' I got lost an' I was going around an' they were all out looking for me. An' I was only in two streets away from ower own house and I couldn't find me way home; it was scary, it was really scary, it was.

[Honora, *b.* 1914, Co. Galway]

Even for those who came from Dublin, the Republic's most industrialised centre, the smog in Leeds was hard to take; Edward, who was brought up in the Liberties in central Dublin, arrived in Leeds in 1957 and recalls that:

When we come to Leeds it were awful you know smog and fog and you know we couldn't breathe sometimes, could we mam? Everything were black you know.

[Edward, *b.* 1933, Dublin]

The situation worsened during the winter months when the city's thousands of coal fires were lit to stave off the bitter cold. Those living in the inner city fared worse as the smog settled in these lower lying areas. These areas were characterised by heavy industry and high concentrations of immigrants, including the Irish. Lawrence recalls:

When the fog hit there wasn't an air...there wasn't a tree or a bush or a plant living down in Chapeltown.

[Lawrence, *b.* 1950, Co. Donegal]

However, it wasn't merely the air-pollution to which the emigrant had to adapt. Paschal, who arrived in the city in 1963 from west Mayo remembers the openness of his native rural homeplace and the claustrophobic feeling of urban Leeds:

When I come to Leeds the firsht day an' I got this digs down in Blackman Lane in Leeds an' looked out the window an' I seen all these bloody roofs, no grass and no trees from me and I couldn't see no relations, I tell you something I was as well off as if I was in jail, there'd be no difference. It was shocking; if I'd have had enough money I'd have gone home again. But I'd left no money to go back.

[Paschal, *b.* 1944, Co. Mayo]

For natives of Dublin, or other Irish cities or larger county towns, the move to another urban area was perhaps less traumatic:

It was probably different for me because I was well used to cities anyway, you know, and essentially Leeds and Dublin weren't that different, you know, I was used to sort of buses, trams, houses, cinemas, all that kind of stuff. I think it would have been a lot different for somebody from say you know the depths of Mayo or Galway maybe miles away from the nearest town you know it was probably a different experience, so I didn't find it all that daunting in that sense.

[Thomas, *b.* 1941, Dublin]

Urbanised Leeds often came as a shock to the emigrant's system, particularly to those who had never travelled outside their own rural environment. Martin and Eamonn arrived in Leeds as children in 1949 and 1961 respectively:

[We] had got a house just in a place called Copton Place, Leeds 2, its just in the middle of the ring road now, it was only a stones throw from St Anne's Cathedral and I always remember we went down to half nine mass on the Sunday morning, it was a huge church like you know I had never seen such big buildings in all me life like you know because coming from the rural like you only just seen odd houses like but there was all these terraced houses joined together.

[Martin, *b.* 1940, Co. Mayo]

We come over like [1961] and the shock, the culture shock of coming from a place like that [Mayo] coming into Leeds, well that hit me hard, it couldn't have hit me harder like you know...coming out of Leeds City Centre and you get these big massive cars, buses, I never seen 'ought like that in me life before, like you know, cars, buses and people running about and there thousands of people like. I've still got that memory to this day actually.

[Eamonn, *b.* 1952, Co. Mayo]

Owen's recollections of rural Mayo in the 1950s contrast greatly with the above memories of modern urban Leeds in the 1930s; it would appear to anyone who had experienced both that Ireland was caught in a time-warp untouched by the advancements of the modern world:

When I was young if we seen a train we'd nearly jump in front of it, or a car on the road, you'd never see a car on the road hardly. I remember the first car I seen on the road, I do yeah. An' I remember the first black man I seen, in at the fair-day in Foxford, we were round about after him all day long, wondering what sort of a fuckin' man he was weighing him up an' looking at him and rubbing him to see would ya, was it paint or what was it.

[Owen, *b.* 1943, Co. Mayo]

Whilst some of the respondents remember settling in to city life with relative ease, especially if they had family and friends in the city, others were initially very lonely:

I had no problem settling I because it was full board I went into, and me brother was in the house and three or four more lads that I knew but there was lads there now, there was this Micky Gallagher and he didn't come out o' the room or come out for anything to eat for nearly a fortnight after him coming over...because he was lonesome, that lonesome.

[Owen, *b.* 1943, Co. Mayo]

I was over here one week and I hated it, every minute of it...I just got home sick.

[Margaret, *b.* 195x, Co. Mayo]

However, Eileen recalls that having family in Leeds didn't always ensure that the emigrant would feel at home in their new urban home:

I got homesick after six weeks and Annie [sister] had the doctor into me and all this, we lived in Compton Road at the time, two nice old ladies, two widows, and they were lovely and they treated me as a baby you see, but I was very ill and they called the doctor in, the doctor in, three weeks in bed and nothing wrong with me jusht being homesick an' me sister said "you'll have to go to work, we cannot keep ya any longer", she had to pay me board, so and I

think that was 12 shillings a week then, so I went to work...she said "there's no money for ya to go home, I have no money to send ya home so you'll have to stay". So I had to stay din't I?

[Eileen, b. 1918, Co. Mayo]

Many respondents expressed having some communication difficulties when they initially arrived in Leeds because of the 'broad' Yorkshire accent:

I do remember my Dublin accent, you know, being teased about my accent and wondering why I was being teased when they weren't speaking English at all, the natives, as far as I was concerned; I had great difficulty in understanding the Yorkshire accent, you know.

[Thomas, b. 1941, Dublin]

Since English was the first language of the majority of Irish emigrants, it is easy to dismiss the fact that there was a communication barrier, or rather a dialect barrier, between emigrant and native: between Hiberno-English and Yorkshire Dialect. Language is indicative of identity; in an autobiographical account, one Chilean expatriate wrote that of his linguistic displacement that: '*I wanted someone to understand what it is like to see your life suddenly cut down, your points of reference blurred, your ability to express emotions and feelings impaired by the pervasive presence of a different culture and language*'.⁷⁰ However, dialect and accent are also potent indicators of identity. The Yorkshire Dialect, which has its own idiosyncratic grammar and distinct pronunciation and is littered with Saxon, Old Norse and Icelandic words, often proved difficult for the uninitiated. Many of the respondents spoke of the difficulties in both understanding and being understood by Leeds natives. Yorkshire folk commonly used '*lass*' and '*lad*' for girl and boy, '*aye*' and '*nay*' for yes and no; one humorous observation on Yorkshire Dialect was made by William Benn in his work *Wortley-de-Leeds: 'Two men met at the Exchange [Employment Centre], one said "Owt?" and the other said "Nowt", and they passed on*';⁷¹ '*owt*' means anything and '*nowt*' means nothing. Martin arrived in the city, aged nine, from rural Mayo:

It was a very, very, very hard to be honest like ya know, you are, you see, you come from such a rural part of Ireland and to come to such an environment of everything, big monstrosities of buildings like you know and then there also was also the accent, the Yorkshire accent is improved a lot now that you don't hear as much, but for 'water' like, as we would say at the time, was '*watta*' ya know and awful lingo it 'twas like very hard to understand like ya know I found it awful, awful hard that like ya know to understand the accent like ya know it was terribly hard was that...and all you heard in the morning when you went in was "did thou see telly last neet?" you know "did thou watch that programme ont' telly last neet?" and that's the way they used to talk.

[Martin, b. 1940, Co. Mayo]

Eamonn was also very young when his family left Mayo for Leeds; he arrived in the city in 1961, aged nine; he recalls his Irish accent being ridiculed in school, so much so that he consciously mimicked the city accent:

And the biggest thing, culture shock I got were when I end up going to school and I had this accent a really, you know, strong like yourself...well that was it, you stood out like a sore thumb like you know like and I really got, I didn't really like it you know you got called a Paddy.

[Eamonn, b. 1952, Co. Mayo]

Linguistic scholars have noted '*that recent years have seen a marked decline in the use of the traditional dialects of Yorkshire*'.⁷² The decline can be attributed to a number of factors, some of which have also been instrumental in the decline in use of Hiberno-English.⁷³ These factors include the influence of Standard English (SE) and the media's tendency to use uniformity of vocabulary. Social changes and geographical mobility have also eroded regional diversity. Additionally, education, with its focus upon SE and its intolerance for non-standard varieties of the language, and the social attitude, which associates SE with breeding and intelligence, have contributed to the decline of Yorkshire Dialect. Martin has witnessed this change over the last half-century:

But its not as much noticeable now even to you wouldn't notice it as much now as we did 50 years ago when we come here like so because they've improved themselves has the Yorkshire people like ya know speaking better but there was '*watta*' [water] and '*nowt*' [nothing] and all that sort of craic, ya know. And it 'twas so difficult to understand from our way of talking.

[Martin, b. 1940, Co. Mayo]

The vast majority of the respondents have retained a distinct Irish accent, although an occasional word sometimes betrays the fact that they have lived in Britain for most of their lives.

Additionally, the linguistic transition must have been compounded for emigrants from the *Gaeltacht* who had little or no English. Bríd Duggan, the Leeds 'Lady Mayoress of the Occasion' and a native of County Galway, recalls the difficulties encountered by those who arrived in Leeds from Irish speaking areas without the English language: '*I felt very isolated. I couldn't read the newspapers, street signs, cooking instructions on cans of food – all the things we generally take for granted*'.⁷⁴ Gráinne recalls that those from the *Gaeltacht* were also often ostracised from their fellow Irish:

The Connemaras, I know a lot of people couldn't get on with them, a lot of people couldn't get on with them. They were very fiery, very fiery, especially if they had a few drinks on them. And they seemed to be really, really clannish. And they were the *Gaeltacht* they spoke a lot of Irish there you see and I think that would be it.

[Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo]

There were of course other social changes to adapt to also; one of the most common remarks was that most of the respondents had never seen a black person before arriving in England. As a result of active recruiting in the Caribbean colonies in order to fill lower-paid jobs, Leeds along with other large English cities witnessed an increase in foreign immigration in the late 1950s. By 1961 2.7% of the population was born overseas, of who around half were from Commonwealth countries.⁷⁵

In the afternoon we went out for a walk to explore around the area like you know and I seen this black man, the first one I'd ever seen and I let this roar out I said "Hey, look look a black man" and I never knew that there was such a thing existed to be honest like I didn't and the next thing you know I got me ear pulled and I could see these big white eyes of this black fella like looking over across the road like you know and Jasus but I was soon chastised for saying that like but I never knew there was such a black man in me life, I never seen one like, it seems so funny today like but anyways.

[Martin, *b.* 1940, Co. Mayo]

Eventually the emigrant was faced with three choices: to return home to Ireland, to adapt to urban life and make new lives in the city or to stay and tolerate their predicament.

At first I was a bit dubious, you know, I thought every week I was going to leave, I wasn't going to stop but then I soon settled in.

[Nuala, *b.* 1931, Co. Wexford]

Without doubt some returned to Ireland after a short or long duration in the city, many more settled in and established themselves in the city after an initial adjustment period.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this chapter there were three main aims set out, the first of which was to investigate the reasons why Irish emigrants left for England between 1931 and 1981. The evidence supplied by the respondents confirms that there was a variety of interplaying motives which brought about a situation where the person made the decision to emigrate. The evidence also attests to the fact that generally speaking males and females were motivated by different factors: males more so by a lack of regular

employment or a wish to earn better money and females more so by a wish to be self-reliant and independent.

The second of the aims was to investigate the reasons why Irish emigrants chose Leeds as a destination. The primary conclusion is that from the late 1930s to the mid-1970s Leeds as an emigrant destination had much to offer: there was a long-established tradition of Irish settlement in the city and the Irish community was relatively small (numbering no more than 8,000 Irish-born in the period under consideration) with a tight functioning network. Also work was plentiful for much of the period and perhaps consequently there was a vibrant Irish social scene.

The third aim was to highlight some of the initial problems of settling in the city. Homesickness and loneliness were, obviously, commonly cited as initial problems. Many respondents spoke of being initially nostalgic for home and family; nostalgia, the literal meaning of which come from the words 'nostros' for home and 'algos' for pain.⁷⁶ However, others recalled that they were too excited by the prospect of emigration to be lonesome but that the longing for home gradually came to them after a number of return visits.

The difficulty in adapting to an industrialised city and to the pollution caused by Leeds' industrial base was *the* dominant respondent memory (as highlighted in chapter 3, these problems were rooted in the Industrial Revolution). Another difficulty cited was the initial language/communication barrier between emigrant and native. One point of note is that only one respondent encountered hostile racism in Leeds and most went to great pains to stress that they were always treated well in the city.

In the next chapter, the theme of emigrant communication with home is explored with particular regard to the practice of remittance sending. The theme of return visits is also dealt with as prelude to the discussion on permanent return in chapter six.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo.

² Alistair Thomson, 'Moving Stories: Oral History and Migration Studies', *Oral History: Migration*, vol. 27, no. 1, spring 1999, p. 28.

³ R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*, 1989, p. 345.

⁴ C. J. Houston & W. J. Smyth, 'The Irish Diaspora: Emigration to the New World, 1720-1920', in B. J. Graham & L. J. Proudfoot (eds.), *An Historical Geography of Ireland*, 1993, pp. 340-1.

⁵ R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*, 1989, p. 348.

⁶ C. J. Houston & W. J. Smyth, 'The Irish Diaspora: Emigration to the New World, 1720-1920', in B. J. Graham & L. J. Proudfoot (eds.), *An Historical Geography of Ireland*, 1993, p. 341.

⁷ Russell King, Ian Shuttleworth & Alan Strachan, 'The Irish in Coventry: the Social Geography of a Relict Community', *Irish Geography*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1989, p. 65; Alan Strachan, 'Post-war Migration and Settlement in England and Wales 1951-1981', *Geographical Society of Ireland Special Publications 6*, 1991, pp. 21-2 and Enda Delaney, 'Almost a Class of Helots in an Alien Land: The British State and Irish Immigration, 1921-45', in Donald MacRaild (ed.), *The Great Famine and Beyond*, 2002, p. 241.

⁸ Séan Duffy (ed.), *The Atlas of Irish History*, 2000, p. 90.

⁹ P. J. Drudy, 'Migration between Ireland and Britain since Independence', in P.J. Drudy (ed.), *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain Since 1922*, 1986, p. 107.

¹⁰ P. J. Drudy, 'Migration between Ireland and Britain since Independence', in P.J. Drudy (ed.), *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain Since 1922*, 1986, p. 107.

¹¹ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922 to the Present*, 1985, p. 18.

¹² Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922 to the Present*, 1985, p. 18.

¹³ Tracey Connolly, 'Emigration from Ireland to Britain During the Second World War', in Andy Bielenberg (ed.), *The Irish Diaspora*, 2000, p. 51.

¹⁴ *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, para. 8, p. 369.

¹⁵ *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, para. 280, p. 130.

¹⁶ *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, para. 280, p. 130.

¹⁷ *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, para. 280, p. 130.

¹⁸ *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, para. 282, p. 131.

¹⁹ Appendix 12 and 14 in Enda Delaney, *Demography, State & Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-71*, 2000, pp. 311-3.

²⁰ John A. Jackson, *The Irish in Britain*, 1963, p. 81.

²¹ Pauric Travers, 'There was nothing for me there: Irish female emigration, 1922-71', in Patrick O'Sullivan, *The Irish Worldwide. Volume 4: Irish Women and Irish Migration*, 1995, p. 149.

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- ²² Bronwen Walter, 'Gender and Recent Irish Migration to Britain', *Geographical Society of Ireland Special Publications* 6, 1991, p. 11.
- ²³ Sharon Lambert, *Irish Women in Lancashire, 1922-60: Their Story*, 2001, pp. 12-3.
- ²⁴ Peter Moser, 'Rural Economy and Female Emigration in the West of Ireland, 1936-56', *UCG Women's Studies Centre Review*, vol. 2, 1993, p. 47.
- ²⁵ See Table 29 ('Age-Distribution of Emigrants from the Whole of Ireland, 1852-1921') of the Statistical Appendix of the *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, p. 320.
- ²⁶ Enda Delaney, *Demography, State & Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-71*, 2000, p. 48.
- ²⁷ *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, para. 276, p. 129.
- ²⁸ Pauric Travers, 'There was nothing for me there: Irish female emigration, 1922-71', in Patrick O'Sullivan, *The Irish Worldwide. Volume 4: Irish Women and Irish Migration*, 1995, p. 148
- ²⁹ Liam Ryan, 'Irish Emigration to Britain Since World War II', in Kearney, Richard (ed.), *Ireland: The Emigrant Nursery and the World Economy*, 1990, p. 46.
- ³⁰ *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, para. 290, p. 134.
- ³¹ *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, para. 300, p. 137.
- ³² *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, para. 300, p. 137.
- ³³ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, 1996, pp. 474-5.
- ³⁴ Tracey Connolly, 'Emigration from Ireland to Britain During the Second World War', in Andy Bielenberg (ed.), *The Irish Diaspora*, 2000, p. 58.
- ³⁵ Tracey Connolly, 'Emigration from Ireland to Britain During the Second World War', in Andy Bielenberg (ed.), *The Irish Diaspora*, 2000, p. 58.
- ³⁶ John Cannon (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to British History*, 1997, p. 973.
- ³⁷ Kevin O'Connor, *The Irish in Britain*, 1972, p. 83.
- ³⁸ Séan Duffy (ed.), *The Atlas of Irish History*, 2000, p. 120.
- ³⁹ Séan Duffy (ed.), *The Atlas of Irish History*, 2000, p. 120.
- ⁴⁰ *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, para. 303, p. 138.
- ⁴¹ Peter Moser, 'Rural Economy and Female Emigration in the West of Ireland, 1936-56', *UCG Women's Studies Centre Review*, vol. 2, 1993, p. 41.
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- ⁴³ *Investment in Education*, Stationary Office, Dublin, 1966.
- ⁴⁴ John Healy, *No-one Shouted Stop! (Formerly Death of an Irish Town)*, 1988, p 15.

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- ⁴⁵ John A. Jackson, *The Irish in Britain*, 1963, p. 28.
- ⁴⁶ Sean Glynn, 'Irish Emigration to Britain, 1911-1951: Patterns and Policy', *Irish Economic and Social History*, VIII, 1981, p. 51.
- ⁴⁷ Shants or Shanty's from the Irish *seantán* or *sean tigh*. These were usually farm out-houses converted, with little effort, to accommodate seasonal labourers.
- ⁴⁸ Marie Hartley & Joan Ingilby, *Life & Tradition in the Yorkshire Dales*, 1973, p. 73.
- ⁴⁹ John Healy, *No-one Shouted Stop!* (Formerly *Death of an Irish Town*), 1988, p. 15.
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- ⁵⁸ Steven Burt & Kevin Grady, *The Illustrated History of Leeds*, 2002, p. 207.
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- ⁶⁰ Steven Burt & Kevin Grady, *The Illustrated History of Leeds*, 2002, p. 231.
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⁷⁴ *The Irish Examiner*, 18/11/2000.

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CHAPTER FIVE:

ACROSS THE IRISH SEA: KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH HOME

I used to always write and, you know, go home, not every year, you know, when I could afford it I used to go.¹

Nuala, b. 1931, Co. Wexford

When things were bad here we took the boat to England to enable us to send home the weekly telegram for the upkeep of our families – keeping the home fires burning. While we worked hard to build up England, we also kept Ireland's upkeep and the wolf from the door.²

Letter to the editor, *Irish Independent*, 12/05/2003

Introduction

England as a destination for Irish emigrants has been described as '*the nearest place that wasn't Ireland*'.³ This close proximity of England to Ireland and vice versa allowed a level of contact and communication not available to Irish emigrants, for example, in the US. Once the emigrant arrived in England and found their feet they could chose the means and degree of contact they maintained with home.

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the ways in which emigrants kept in touch with home and to what extent they either maintained or rejected family and community ties with Ireland following emigration. All of those interviewed during the course of this study either provided unprompted information or, if they did not, were asked specifically regarding the contact they kept with home. Oral life testimonies are an ideal source for looking into this very personal aspect of emigration; respondents' life histories reveal the various ways in which the emigrant kept in touch with family in Ireland and how they were informed of happenings in their native community. This chapter will also show that, if desired, the emigrant in England could remain closely connected to their home community whilst away.

The journalist and commentator Fintan O'Toole remarked that, in Irish culture, the word '*home*' has no meaning without '*away*', that '*the sense of belonging to a place has often been, in modern Irish culture, in direct proportion to one's distance from it: the further away "home" is, the larger it looms*'.⁴ O'Toole further expanded on this concept of '*home*':

One of the things that culture reminds us is that home is much more than a name we give to a dwelling place. It is also a whole set of connections and affections, the web of mutual recognition that we spin around ourselves and that gives us a place in the world. Older languages tend to contain this idea within themselves. In Irish, the terms *sa mbaile* and *sa bhaile*, the equivalents of the English at home, are never used in the narrow sense of home as a dwelling. They imply, instead, that wider sense of a place in the world, a feeling of belonging that is buried deep within the word's meaning.⁵

O'Toole's is an acute and accurate observation. Commonly an emigrant who has returned on holiday is greeted with 'you're welcome home'; this is a broad welcome – a welcome back to Ireland, to the community, to the neighbourhood not merely to their family residence but to a social network.

Post, Telegram & Telephone

Almost all of the respondents kept in regular contact with home by a variety of means. The telephone was a well established mode of international communication during the period of this study. Ireland's first telephone exchange was opened in Dublin in 1880 and within two decades this had increased to 56 exchanges; trunks linked London to Birmingham in 1890, Paris in 1891, and Glasgow, Belfast and Dublin in 1895. However, by the 1930s County Donegal and western Mayo still remained unconnected;⁶ this meant that for those leaving these areas, which had particularly high levels of emigration, the postal service provided the sole regular contact with home. By 1945, the Irish Free State had 107 exchanges providing 23,700 subscribers with continuous service and a further 732 exchanges giving 5,900 subscribers restricted-hour service.⁷ Nonetheless, few respondents spoke of the telephone as an important means of contact with home; for most it was not even a mode of communication. Indeed, by the 1970s it would appear that for parts of Mayo, at least, there were still few telephones in rural districts. Michael, a Leeds born son of Mayo emigrants, remembers that there was little telephone contact between Leeds and rural Mayo:

Well other than writing letters there was no phones really, the only phone contact you could make was to ring Mulherne's Hotel and they'd go out on the bicycle to the house and pass a message.

[Michael, b. 1947, Leeds]

Thus, since many Irish homes did not have telephone access for the most of the period covered by this study and that telephone access was not generally available to working-class emigrants in England, postal communication remained the primary means of

communication across the Irish Sea; and indeed most of the respondents spoke of keeping in regular contact by post with Ireland after leaving. For the most-part it was the female respondents that spoke of writing to and receiving letters from their families in Ireland.

We wrote nearly every day, there was always letters and then my others sisters, it was only tuppence ha'penny then to stamp, and postage seemed to be very good because everybody got letters every day 'cause some sisters or other would write or me mother. And sometimes there'd be three or four letters in an envelope.

[Delia, *b.* 1934, Co. Mayo]

Letters home were not merely a source of information but also a source of entertainment for the family left behind in Ireland. In 1951 Delia left her native Mayo to go nursing in St. Andrew's hospital in London; she wrote home regularly telling her mother and sisters about life in the English capital and of her newly acquired skills:

I wrote home and you know told them about London, and the trains and the tubes and things like that...the first time I gave an injection, or the first time I took a stitch out, or bandaged somebody, or things like that.

[Delia, *b.* 1934, Co. Mayo]

However, not all letters contained joyous information but they were, nonetheless, an important means by which to maintain a link with home. Theresa was aged just twelve when she and her family left their native Roscommon for a new life in Leeds in the 1960s; she recalls sending letters containing little significant information, as she saw it, but recognised that for her these letters were an important link with home:

I wrote to friends and I kept in constant contact with Liam [brother] while he was still here [Ireland]. I wrote to neighbours I kept in total contact... Arrah I suppose I'd be telling them how much I hated the place [Leeds] and that I wished I was back home again and that type of thing, you know, and I suppose any daft stuff that was happening...the usual run of the mill stuff really I suppose. It was just a matter of keeping a link, you may not have had much to say, there might not have been a lot after the first few letters; I suppose there wouldn't have been an enormous amount to tell because it would be the same thing you would be repeating I suppose, it was just a matter of keeping in contact and that was very important.

[Theresa, *b.* 1950, Co. Roscommon]

Not all letters bore welcome communication from Ireland either. Bridget told how, following the death of her father, her mother continually sent letters concerning her deceased father. These letters upset Bridget greatly, so much so that she couldn't eat and lost a lot of weight. A priest wrote to Bridget's mother on her behalf explaining that these letters were affecting her daughter's life; from then onwards the letters were less morbid in content and the only mention of her father was a postscript blessing on his soul. Agnes' father used to contact her telling that her mother was on her deathbed in order to

get her to come home; he never wanted her to leave home 'my mother was kind of an invalid all her life and my dad decided that I would stay at home and look after her'. Agnes would rush home to be by her mother's side to find her alive and well.

Letters were an especially important means of contact when the emigrant couldn't afford the journey home. Nuala worked as an auxiliary nurse in Leeds from 1963 and recalls that as a result of low wages and short annual holidays she couldn't always make the journey home:

I used to always write and, you know, go home, not every year, you know, when I could afford it I used to go.

[Nuala, *b.* 1931, Co. Wexford]

Jeremiah emigrated from Monaghan in 1957 and recalls that because Christmas holidays were so short letter writing remained the only contact with home:

Well we used to get, try and get home twice a year but Christmas, we had very short spells here then, you only had about 4 or 5 days off at Christmas time, so you had to be back quite quickly and most of the time your travel then was by boat 'cause planes weren't plentiful, an' aeroplanes were expensive to travel so we used to travel on the boat so it was a day going and a day coming back and you didn't have a lot of time there and the only way you kept in touch during the time was by letter you know...so emigration's not easy.

[Jeremiah, *b.* 1932, Co. Monaghan]

However, for the majority of the male respondents letter writing was less used as a form of communication; instead the sending of remittances (of which more later) allowed basic contact, a sign that they were at least employed, earning money and thinking of those at home:

I'd write a letter, or not a letter, I mightn't write a letter, but I'd send money every week as soon as I'd get paid I'd send half the wages.

[Owen, *b.* 1943, Co. Mayo]

The male respondents appeared to have less reliance on letters from family members as a source of information about home; with a constant stream of young men coming from Ireland and joining the workforce, particularly the building trade, there was always fresh news of home being transmitted in the workplace and pub:

My mother used to write regular, anyway you'd be out all around with Irish lads like and no matter what happened you'd hear it, you'd be right up to date in the pub or at work or, you'd know everything that was happening.

[Owen, *b.* 1943, Co. Mayo]

In addition, Leeds was predominantly a 'Mayo town' with family, friends, neighbours and townies often those initially contacted to find work and a bed and thus there was a

virtually unbroken stream of information about the home-place.

Letters from England often fuelled a desire to join older siblings in a land where life seemed somewhat easier; Gráinne spoke of her contentment with life in rural Mayo in the 1950s until her older brother's letters unsettled her:

I liked it [life in Ireland] before I heard of England more or less, heard what it 'twas like there. I knew no different getting up in the morning at 6 o'clock, helping on the farm, even from then six years old I'd have to collect the eggs and feed the calves and it used to annoy me 'cause me brothers were getting away with doing nothing more or less. And then they'd be getting ready going to the dances and what have you, and I'd be polishing their shoes and ironing their shirts with the block iron, ya know done on the fire. I started baking our own bread at eleven, when I was eleven years old, I loved it, making our own butter, an' everything was ploughed back into the land, nothing was wasted. The only thing we bought was sugar that was it, because everything else was done from the land. I thought it was brilliant... And then as I say the lads used to write to me and say how good life was over here, you got a bus and you got this.

[Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo]

The *Reports* of the Commission on Emigration recognised the effect that these emigrant letters had on those who remained at home:

There is widespread awareness of the existence of opportunities abroad and the realisation of differences between conditions at home and in other countries. This is conformed and encouraged by the reports of emigrants...by glowing accounts in letters of high incomes and easy conditions...These accounts, which rarely paint any other side of the picture – and there is another side to it – are frequently exaggerated, and make a strong impression on the minds of young people.⁸

Martin concurs with the fact that there often was another side to the emigrant's account; he heard often of his father's tales of being a farm labourer in Yorkshire in the 1940s – the hard work, the long hours, the poor accommodation. He remembers the importance of letter writing between families and their loved ones in England, realising that their letters only told half the story of life across the Irish Sea.

There was a lot of letter writing...and some people was prolific at that, like you know letter writing but they told a story did each letter din't they, you know like; but I suppose it never could convey the hardship, you know, the people at home couldn't understand the hardship that their husbands was going through, you know, your fathers, you know, I think they're owed a great, great debt really in my estimation, you know.

[Martin, *b.* 1940, Co. Mayo]

However, hearing Gráinne's account of rural life it is little wonder that these letters made such a strong impression on her mind and the minds of others. Several of the female respondents spoke of their gruelling daily grind on the farms of rural Ireland; many of the male members of their family were seasonal migrants to England leaving the female members of the family to tackle the farm-work for six months a year:

I done me share as well, haymaking and setting the potatoes in the early part of the year and then digging them out in the autumn and all the rest of it.

[Clare, *b.* 1913, Co. Leitrim]

I was the one who did all the bakin' an' washin' an' ironin' an'...even when I was eleven years old.

[Margaret, *b.* 195x, Co. Mayo]

Furthermore, in contrast to the opinion of the authors of the *Reports*, Gráinne found these glowing accounts of life in England to be little exaggerated, except perhaps for the television:

I was 17 before I seen my first television, because I expected, very disappointed, I expected it to be the size of a cinema screen and then I seen this little box in the corner...and I thought when you switched it off it'd stop there until ya switched it back on again; I didn't realise that it would go onto a different programme. And it opened my eyes a bit, when I did come to England and realised I could go and buy shop bread, and shop butter, I didn't have to make it I thought it twas heaven. I mean you hear the expression the best thing since sliced bread but that was. And the fact that you could jump on a bus, you didn't have to walk...life was so different...I was on four pound and I was paying a pound a week for my bed-sit and it had an electric meter that you put six pence in, this six pence and so I thought that was good, I thought that was brilliant that I could...the odd week send a pound or two home to daddy.

[Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo]

When asked if she believed life in England was as good as her brother's letters had made out, Gráinne says:

It was because there was work, there was a lot of work then, you see, so obviously if worked you had your wage at the end of the week and you could spend it, and I think it was the fact of the company as well there was so many people, you know like we were out from the town of Foxford so you were more or less isolated and you only seen the people that was there when you went to the dance, you went to the pictures was the same people, whereas here there was such a difference, you know. And when they'd come home they'd have the new clothes and everything and you'd think oh God look at them swanking around, yeah.

[Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo]

Postal communication was not only important between emigrants and home, but also between seasonal migrants and their employers. Some of the large farmers created a rapport with their workers and contact was maintained years after they had ceased making the seasonal journey. Martin, from Mayo recounted his own memories and those of his father who in the 1940s went haymaking to Gunnerside, North Yorkshire:

This farmer I always remember, later on, he used to send him a Christmas card every year you know like to keep in touch like you know even though my father wasn't going then, you know, when my father was older...As I say like obviously like he was well thought of by the farmer for him to send a Christmas card each year like, ya know, because ya know once you're gone you're soon forgotten but like obviously they wasn't like, ya know. And of course, as I say, they would know like then, they would know form a bond... because they would write for them to come like once they got attached to one farmer and they was treated alright well ya know they would keep going to that farmer you know and that farmer would want a known product that he knew that he could get the work out of ya know. I suppose it

worked both ways really.

[Martin, *b.* 1940, Co. Mayo]

Cards were also another form of postal communication sent to mark those important dates on the calendar such as Christmas, birthdays and shamrock was often sent from Ireland for St. Patrick's Day:

When daddy was alive mammy used to send me Christmas cards, shamrock on Paddy's Day, birthday cards 'cause daddy used to tell her to do it, but then when daddy died it all stopped, all stopped completely.

[Margaret, *b.* 195x, Co. Mayo]

Several of the respondents could not read or write; for those who were illiterate or suffered from dyslexia (a condition little recognised until recent times) contact was either lost or friends were relied upon to keep in touch with home:

Well I can't write so...I can't read and write properly. My friend she writes mainly stuff for me...she sorts all my bills out and all that lot.

[Rose, *b.* 1957, Co. Kildare]

In addition to postal communication, telegrams provided a quick and reliable way in which to transmit urgent or important information across the Irish Sea. By the 1930s, telephone infrastructure was such that the public telegraph had ceased to become the dominant form of communication, however, it remained an important service for those who did not have a telephone. It was also useful for those who did not want one to one contact. Agnes, who had left her native Roscommon on a whim without her parents' knowledge, found her way to Liverpool; she eventually located her friend's sister who insisted Agnes send a telegram to her parents to put their minds at ease. She was reluctant but conceded; the telegram simply read:

ARRIVED IN LIVERPOOL – SECURED JOB - WRITE YOU LATER

[Agnes, *b.* 1918, Co. Roscommon]

It was common also to receive telegrams of congratulation on wedding days from family and friends who could not make the trip for the big day [Plate 7.2]. Telegrams were of little use in private or personal communication, since the message would be read by as many operators it would take to send, relay and receive it.



Pl. 5.2: Telegram sent from Mayo to Leeds, on occasion of wedding, 1974.

Remittances: keeping the home fires burning

One crucial way in which emigrants kept in touch with their families was by sending money home and the Irish have long been recognised as generous in their remittances to their homeland. From the early eighteenth-century, there was a steady flow of emigrants leaving Ireland for what is now the United States. In the years following the Napoleonic Wars, because of agricultural depression, this steady flow became a mass exodus. However, it wasn't until 1845 that the annual figure broke the 50,000 mark; between 1841 and 1847 (generally regarded as the worst year of the Great Hunger) more than 300,000 Irish left these shores for the United States. The emigrants may have left their homeland forever, but they didn't forget about their loved ones left behind. In 1847, Jacob Harvey, a social commentator, approached all the banks of New York City in order to obtain an estimate of the amount remitted by the Irish in bank drafts for the previous year. A report from *The New York Tribune* in January 1847 stated that Harvey was supplied with '*an accurate return of the amount received for these small drafts for the entire year 1846 - \$808,000, of which there were in November and December \$175,000*'.⁹

Harvey pointed out that *'it has required no public meeting, no special address, to bring forth these remittances from the poor, nor do they look for any praise for what they have done. It is the natural instinct of the Irish peasant to share his mite – be it money or potatoes – with those poorer than himself'*.¹⁰ However, it is not only from the New World that remittances were received. In 1862 the *Irish Times*, from the figures compiled by the Emigration Commissioners, informed its readership that *'the most remarkable fact ever recorded in history, probably, is contained in the following words: - "The remittance sent home by emigrants to their friends in fourteen years amounted to upwards of twelve millions sterling". What a tale of industry, thrift, and love of kin is here!'*¹¹ In 1867, a journalist for *The Times* wrote that:

They [The Irish] certainly excel the English in the sacrifices they will make for relations, and even for neighbours and friends adopted into the place of relations. It is but rarely an Englishman sends home from the colonies the money for bringing out someone left behind. Irish remittances of this kind amounted to a million sterling in one year.¹²

The eminent scholar David Fitzpatrick has estimated that between 1867 and 1880 Mayo's 10,000 or so migratory labourers returned home postal orders amounting to more than £100,000 annually.¹³ The inspectors' reports to the Congested Districts Board for Ireland, which were submitted in the early 1890s, also highlight the dependency of those on the western seaboard of Ireland on remittances and migrant seasonal earnings.¹⁴

The theme of emigrant remittances runs deep throughout the pages of John Healy's autobiographical narrative *Nineteen Acres*. Healy tells of the advice his grandmother gave her daughters in the early years of the twentieth century when one by one they departed for America: *'Keep your mouth and legs closed. Keep your ears open and send the ticket home for [the next daughter in line].'* This advice was repeated until it was the turn of the last child to emigrate when the advice was changed: *'Keep your mouth and legs closed. Keep your ears open – an' between ye, let ye send home the slates'*.¹⁵ Healy tells of cabled funeral expenses, the annual Easter \$50 and Christmas \$100 and also of packages received from the United States throughout the 1940s, acknowledging that *'the world will never know how much the sacred, brave, sometimes ignorant but always loyal emigrants to the New World sent home in dollars and parcels to the old people in the old country'*.¹⁶ Emigrant remittances escalated during the war; in 1939 postal and money orders received from Britain and Northern Ireland amounted to just

over £1 million, by 1941 this total had doubled.¹⁷ In 1956, the *Reports* of the Commission highlighted the importance of emigrant remittances to the Irish economy:

Many of the families of those who have emigrated have had their incomes increased by emigrants' remittances. In some cases, this increase in income has made it unnecessary for other members of the family to emigrate, but, in other cases, it has been the means of enabling them to do so. Emigrants' remittances are an important item in the national economy: they partly redress the adverse balance of trade, they may stimulate production, or in certain circumstances they may have a limited inflationary effect. Their social effect is to bring about greater equality in the distribution of wealth.¹⁸

The annual accounts of the Irish Government highlight the staggering scale of the contribution by emigrant remittances from Britain to the national economy in the post-war years. For example, in 1961 emigrant's remittances amounted to £13.5 million, which almost equaled the total cost of £14 million for both primary and secondary level education in the Republic; by 1970 this contribution had risen to over £24 million.¹⁹ Other reports estimate that in the 1950s and 1960s Irish emigrants sent back £3.5 billion (thousand million) in total from Britain to the country of their birth, often sustaining families and communities.²⁰ Whatever the exact figure, their contribution to the Irish economy was astonishing. In 1999, Dr. Seamus Caulfield, suggested the Irish Government should consider repaying a small portion of this interest-free debt which Ireland received over the previous half century from her children in Britain. He proposed an 'Emigrants Remittances Fund' of £65 million to be paid over a five year period to appropriate Irish and British bodies to help ageing Irish emigrants with health and social problems.²¹ However, to date the Irish Government has failed to make any significant monetary commitment to the Irish in Britain. In 2003, the Díon Fund (for the Irish voluntary sector in Britain) received €2.7 million from the Irish exchequer; in 2004 the fund will receive just over €4 million according to government spending estimates.²² By comparison, the Department of Social Welfare will spend over €10.5 billion in 2004; the Department of Foreign Affairs will spend €160 million and an additional €400 million on development aid to the third world.²³ And some emigrants are quick to remind the government of their obligation to those who sent remittances. The following is an extract from a letter directed to the editor of the *Irish Independent* in response to *An Taoiseach* Bertie Ahern's €500 weekly pay increase against that of €50 for pensioners:

Mr. Ahern should remember we are the people who kept the economy going for 40 or 50 years. When things were bad here we took the boat to England to enable us to send home the weekly telegram for the upkeep of our families – keeping the home fires burning. While we

worked hard to build up England, we also kept Ireland's upkeep and the wolf from the door.²⁴

The recollections from the majority of respondents confirm that the practice of sending money and parcels home was widespread amongst Irish emigrants. For many Irish families, these remittances from husbands, fathers, sons and daughters in England were a life-line. Edward grew up in a Dublin tenement and was only a child when his father went to work in England, he recalls seeing him just once a year; however, a weekly telegram arrived from England on which the family was utterly dependent:

He used to send money, yeah, he forgot in '43, he met his nevyew, and they went on the sauce, and he forgot to send us money; we were starving. I remember me sister and brother shared crumbs...me mother wouldn't have any, she was stood at the window crying and we listening out for telegraph boys...but then they wouldn't come to our house. He [father] apologised and everything you know, after Christmas, but we had to beg, you know, off neighbours to survive.

[Edward, *b.* 1933, Dublin]

The money that was sent was often to keep the family surviving on a week-to-week, or hand-to-mouth basis, and was in many cases the only form of family income:

He [father] used come to England about the end of April...and he'd send the bit of money every fortnight, maybe every week whatever he could do, to me mother, to keep the home place going, an' he'd go home then... at the end of November.

[Seamus, *b.* 1936, Co. Mayo]

Seamus spent four seasons working in Scotland with his father and mother. When he was seventeen he went his own way and found work in Lincolnshire hoeing beet, mowing dykes, picking potatoes and harvesting wheat. Seamus, his brother and four cousins worked together on the one farm, the six of them sharing two beds in a hut. Every fortnight he used to send money home to his parents:

We'd get so much an acre o' spuds and we'd make a good week's wages; we'd make money and we'd save money and we'd send money home to me father and mother and we had a little bit of pocket money ourself and we had money and we'd go home then a week, maybe a fortnight before Christmas and we had money for the winter. And our mother would save what we sent home...she'd save a few pound. An' we had two sisters, meself and the brother would send the sisters home a few pound to buy a coat for themselves, Mary and Nora, a coat and a pair of shoes, and they were nicely dressed up for the Christmas. An' they used like us for that...I was about eighteen and me brother was about nineteen, nineteen and a half. We'd buy some gear for me father, we'd send a few pound to me mother to buy something for herself, an' we'd know me father's size, we used to go into Lincoln, there was bits of cheap shops there, we'd buy a trouser for me father and a jacket and a pullover an' a couple of, phwat do you call it, they were good for the winter, we used to call them the John L's...Long Johns. And we used to know the size that would fit me father and they were delighted; they used to look forward to that every year.

[Seamus, *b.* 1936, Co. Mayo]

Seamus' recollections show that his parents and sisters were grateful for the money sent and the gifts of clothes brought home; implicit in the tone of this extract is the fact that Seamus was very proud to be able to provide for his family at such a young age.

So why did the emigrant send home their hard earned wages from England? Owen explains of his own decision to leave Mayo for Leeds that: '*There was no such thing as being stopped goin'; they'd be glad to get rid of ya [laughs]...too many mouths around the table*'. Although Owen made light of this last remark, both John B. Keane and John Healy have been vocal about some who viewed sons and daughters merely as a source of income and exported them across the waves.²⁵ Owen was the second eldest of nine children brought up on a farm of 25 acres; he left Ireland, aged seventeen, with his older brother. They soon found work with Wimpey's, a well-known construction firm with a history of hiring Irish labourers:

Oh the money was good at the time, we had plenty of money to buy clothes and go to the tailor, an' get a tailor-made suit, an' go home every Christmas, send money home, well I was sending half me wages home for seven or eight years after coming over...that was to keep the other lot going...there was six going to school.

[Owen, b. 1943, Co. Mayo]

Delia was also the second eldest of a family of nine children, but was the first to emigrate leaving west Mayo to train as a nurse in London in the 1950s. Delia recalls that as a trainee nurse she earned:

£6, 18 and 4 pence a month, but we had our uniform and we stayed in the nurses home and we had all our meals and everything so that was our sort of pocket money. Then you decided how many stockings an' toothpaste an' soap an' shampoos and things like that that you bought and the rest then was you know for dancing or spending on clothes. But I always, you know, because I was the second eldest I used to send money home as well, I used to send two pounds home every month...nobody asked me to but I think then it was acceptable [accepted] that people sent money home to their families when the eldest left.

[Delia, b. 1934, Co. Mayo]

Both Owen's and Delia's recollections highlight that it was widespread practice for the older siblings to send money home to support the younger members of the family. However, they also indicated that they still had enough money to live comfortably in England and didn't leave themselves short, both mentioning buying clothes as a main expense. The respondents' interviews indicated that the sending of remittances was not begrudged, in fact, as Gráinne's recollections show, many seemed proud to have been able to help their families:

I thought that was brilliant that I could even the odd week send a pound or two home to daddy.

[Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo]

There is further evidence that the sending of remittances was a social obligation and that fellow emigrant's were quick to remind each other of this obligation and encourage its practice:

I met a nice Mayo man...we used to walk home together and he'd buy two pints, he wouldn't let you buy any, he'd buy one and then he'd buy the other and then he'd say "Are ya sending your mother a few bob?" "Well I am". He said "You'll put a bit extra and you'll go to mass and...you'll attend church."...And he looked after ya...I were only twenty one, he would be in his forties I think.

[Edward, *b.* 1933, Dublin]

Martin recalls that it was not only a labourers pay that came from England, when his father would return from the harvest in he would bring gifts for all the family:

So there used to be the same crowd used to go you know year after year like ya know to England; and his last year was in 1947, like, and I always remember then him then coming back, you know like, and he brought a horses collar home with him and he got a Raleigh bicycle for the girl like and I'll always remember him getting that and he got me something.

[Martin, *b.* 1940, Co. Mayo]

Although estimates have been made regarding how much by way of remittances Irish emigrants returned to their families in Ireland, it would be futile to attempt to calculate the amount brought home by way of gifts.

Gifts from Home

It is little recorded that those left behind in Ireland often sent what little they could as a gesture to their loved ones in England. Michael remembered that at Christmas time the household received welcome parcels from the west of Ireland:

At Christmas you'd get a goose through the post or a chicken from me grandmother and I'll always remember them coming with these big brown paper parcels and they'd be all a track of blood down the side and a string around it. I mean it wouldn't be allowed now [laughs]. But there'd be geese coming through and chickens...you'd get one from me grandmother, and then the next day maybe two of me aunts would send one...and then me grandmother in Cullane would send one, you'd more geese and chickens at Christmas than you could cope with...the post wasn't that good that time, it might have been three or four or five days before hand they were posted. I don't know how they kept but they were always ate and they were always tasty but I can't remember them throwing anyone out.

[Michael, *b.* 1947, Leeds]

Michael was from a relatively affluent Irish family who were not reliant on these parcels of fowl, but his recollections show that gifts from Ireland were gratefully received and were a feature of the emigrant experience. Although it has been possible to estimate the extent of emigrant's remittances by examining the Irish Government's Annual Accounts these reverse remittances are little recorded but in memory.

Martin recalled that as a child his cousin used to send the local newspaper and twenty cigarettes from Mayo to her husband who was a seasonal migrant in England:

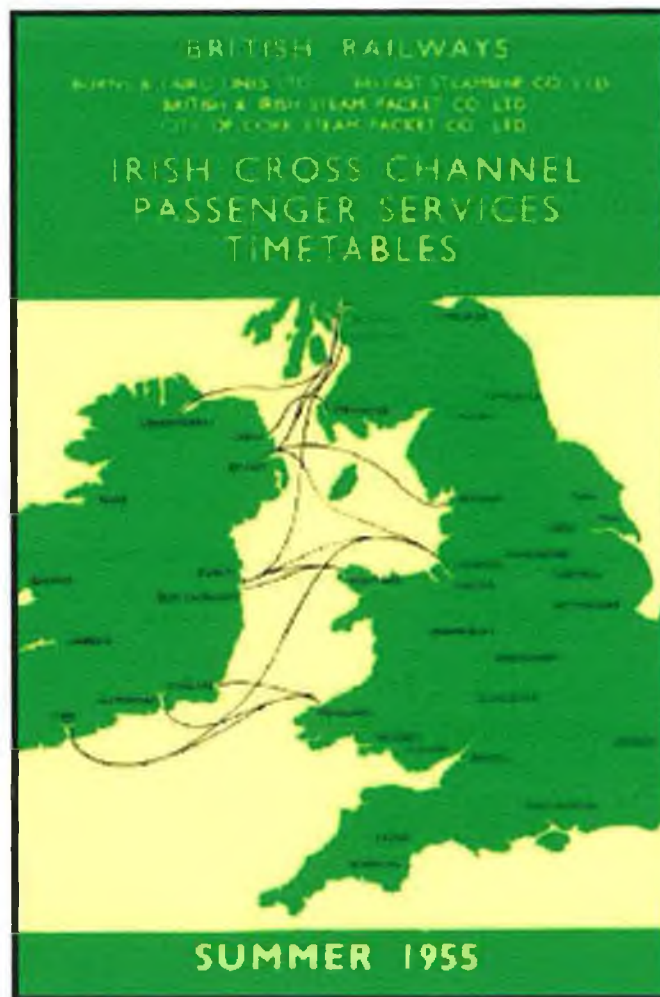
And I always remember my aunt's daughter when she became pregnant like and I mean I din't know what it was you see and the husband John was in England went over for the hay and the harvest. And she used to send him the *Western People* every week you see and always twenty Players in the Western an' pressed with the iron like you know because things wasn't rationed here, in England you see, and I always used to tie a string around it and parcel it lovely and it was a work of art the way they used to fold it and put the cigarettes into it and send these twenty Players off to England for, you know, her husband.

[Martin, *b.* 1940, Co. Mayo]

With restrictions in England, the local newspaper and a packet of cigarettes were an invaluable and welcome bounty to a seasonal migrant residing in the outhouses of an English farm.

Return Visits

Unlike emigration to the United States, emigration from Ireland to England has never had the same sense of permanency, primarily because of geographical location. Ireland's close proximity to England has resulted in a constant flow of human traffic between the two islands. The short distance across the Irish Sea and regular sailings at an affordable price from Holyhead and Liverpool has allowed Irish emigrants in the twentieth century to return home from England frequently, if they so wished. Austin, who left Roscommon for England in 1937, recalls that the emigrant was always safe in England if he had '*the Dublin money*'; he explained this as just enough money to get the boat across the Irish Sea to Dublin from whence you could walk home if need be.



Pl. 5.3: Cover page of Irish Cross Channel Passenger Services Timetables (1955).

Many of the emigrants interviewed made the journey across the Irish Sea regularly, citing a variety of reasons for returning. Without exception Ireland was the usual holiday destination of those interviewed; the respondents spoke of spending their annual holidays in Ireland when finances allowed:

I used to always write and you know go home...not every year, you know, when I could afford it I used to go.

[Nuala, *b.* 1931, Co. Wexford]

As a mid-wife Delia was in a secure, relatively well-paid job with lengthy holidays:

We went home every year, we got a months holiday every year.

[Delia, *b.* 1934, Co. Mayo]

A holiday to Ireland provided respite from the hustle and bustle of city life and a chance to catch up with family and friends. Ironically, for those on lower incomes, having

children restricted their ability to visit their families in Ireland. Liam married an English-woman, whose grandfather was from Mayo, and together they had seven sons; he recalls that 'the money wasn't there' for the family to visit Ireland:

All I was interested in was rearing the family, 'cause I was working seven days a week to keep the family, you know what I mean, and then you get your few bob for the drink, the rest of it went on the kids.

[Liam, *b.*, 1934, Co. Wexford]

Martha recalls that because her husband, a carpenter by trade, wasn't in continuous or regular employment, she was the sole breadwinner for the family of five and was working two jobs:

We didn't go that much, no, because he was always in and out of work, he didn't work for years...he always had a work problem, he had a nervous breakdown...there was always a sort of a problem there so holidays to Ireland wasn't that frequent; there was one time I didn't get home for 10 years because he'd take a fit and he'd stay in the house and then there was always something wrong, and then he had this trouble with his hip, arthritis and I don't think he was meant for buildings really.

[Martha, *b.* 1946, Co. Longford]

Eileen came to Leeds with her husband in the mid-1940s; her husband suffered from depression and alcoholism and died at the age of 53 from gangrene; he hadn't worked for 13 years as a result of the disease. With six children to raise, Eileen had to work 'on the transport 'cause you got a man's wage' whilst also looking after her young children. She spent almost 10 years as a bus conductress and subsequently 14 years as an auxiliary nurse on night-shifts; consequently, Eileen didn't make the trip from Leeds to Ireland from the time her first child was born until her last child married:

I used to write to me mother, but I couldn't, I couldn't go on holidays; I couldn't go anywhere while me children was at home...And when they got engaged that was another thing, you couldn't have a holiday because they were getting engaged, they were twenty ones, then there was, that was a party, then they got engaged that was another party and a present, then they got married and that was another party and a present, so I never got a holidays while, until the last of them got married and after that then me money was me own. So I started going to Ireland and I've been all round Ireland on buses and stayed in hotels and had a lovely time.

[Eileen, *b.* 1918, Co. Mayo]

For others in better circumstances the holidays gave children, brought up in the streets and lanes of Leeds, a taste of rural life and a chance to get to know their aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. Many of those interviewed spoke of the contrast between the feelings of safety and freedom in rural Ireland and the sense of confinement in urban Leeds [see Appendix B: Plates 41-43]. Delia met and married a Mayo-man in

Leeds and together they had two children; they returned to Mayo every year during the summer holidays, which her children enjoyed:

Because they were free, you know, like here they're all right too because they could roam around as children here [1960s] it was safe. But at home they could go through the fields or go down to the sea or, you know, they used to love the cows and the calves and they had names for them all and they used to putting the cows up, driving them up the field and having the dog.

[Delia, *b.* 1934, Co. Mayo]

Parents could relax in the knowledge that their children could roam the countryside in relative safety and the children enjoyed the freedom which was not allowed to them in their urban home:

The freedom I think over there they loved, you know when we used to go to me brothers and everything they could run out on the farm and they could go out playing, everything was so safe more or less.

[Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo]

The children also enjoyed the attention they received from their Irish relatives who were usually only seen once a year:

I used to love going home and the kids used to love going home...they thought they were the bee's knees because everybody was making fuss of them.

[Agnes, *b.* 1918, Co. Roscommon]

Michael, whose parents hail from Mayo, spent every summer holiday in Ireland during his youth and remembers the sense of excitement and anticipation of the annual trip:

We come over every year. It was a massive deal coming over, a big deal in the way that you'd be excited for about six weeks before hand, you know it was a really major thing. The reason it was major; I think it was two things, you were coming from back streets, rows of terraced houses into open fields and freedom, you were allowed out and you just wandered, and there were no restrictions. And the other thing was that when you came here the people at that time, well it was because you were with relations mostly, they had a way of making you feel as though you were a kind of a...a prince, a king or something. You were really special; I mean they really made you feel special. I don't know whether that thing is still there for youngsters now, whether they make youngsters feel good about themselves...you were anything, you were the number one, you'd get rides, you'd drive the tractor, you'd be at the head of the table, you'd...if all them were in there after out at the hay, you'd be sat in at the table with them, and you were just as important.

[Michael, *b.* 1947, Leeds]

Michael's parents came from nearby townlands in the same parish, thereby allowing him to spend the duration of his summer holidays in the one location. However, if parents came from different parts of the country (or indeed from different countries) the holidays were sometimes split between the two locations, thus shortening the length of time

emigrants spend with their own families. Gráinne, originally from Mayo, met and married her husband, who came from Donegal, in Leeds:

I started going back then every year, after the three kids were born, we used to go every year, an' we'd take it in turns we'd go, if we went we went to Mayo for Christmas we'd go to Donegal for New Year, and the next year we'd go to Donegal for Christmas and Mayo for the New Year.

[Gráinne, b. 1945, Co. Mayo]

Therefore, it may be seen that getting married and having children were life-cycle stages which inevitably impacted or even prevented return visits home.

Many of those interviewed expressed a desire that their children keep in touch with Ireland. Ronan hopes that as his children reach maturity and can travel unaccompanied that they will keep on the family tradition of returning to Ireland:

The children love Ireland, I mean they're more Irish than you could imagine, I mean they haven't spent a lot of time other than holidays there and hopefully as they get older they'll spend more time there, they'll spend some time with their family when they can travel independently.

[Ronan, b. 1951, Co. Clare]

There is currently a campaign to reintroduce a Knock-Leeds flight service; there is no direct flight from Leeds to anywhere in the West of Ireland at present. However, in the days before air travel was cheap or common the journey from Leeds to Ireland took the most part of a day; first by train to Holyhead, then by boat to Dublin from where connections could be made to the four corners of the country. Michael recalls making the long journey from Leeds to Mayo with his mother and two younger sisters in the 1950s:

It was a long journey like, 'cause you had to get a train in Leeds, at eight o'clock in the evening, you had to change in Manchester at nine o'clock, you had ten minutes to run up across the bridge and down the other side with a load of cases, to get the ten past nine train for Holyhead and that didn't get in there till about two o'clock in the morning. Then about three, I mean you queued then, there was long queues of people, it's not like now where there's cars...you queued in a passage way about as wide as this room, jam packed shoulder to shoulder, move from here to that chair [a short distance] with cases, drop down, it was like that and it seemed to take all night...getting on the boat then and sat there all night on the boat, get off in the morning, get the train from Dun Laoighre into Dublin. Then you got the nine o'clock train from Western Row, down to Manulla Junction and then change at Manulla, you got down here round about two in the afternoon the next day, so you were travelling for nearly eighteen hours.

[Michael, b. 1947, Leeds]

Martin too recalls the '*horrendous journey*' from Mayo to Leeds in the late 1940s:

But anyways we come over to England then and it was we left the 16th of September 1949 and that was like a Friday and we arrived on the Saturday and it twas the Princess Maude that was the boat and there was cattle in it as well as the passengers. I always remember that journey from Holyhead was awful; you had to change at Chester and then you had to change

at Manchester and then you had to go on to Leeds like and it was a horrendous journey nothing like it is today.

[Martin, *b.* 1940, Co. Mayo]

One of the disadvantages that rural Ireland had when compared with urban Leeds was that there were no toilets or washrooms in many of the homes. In 1946 the census recorded that only 5% of farm dwellings had an indoor lavatory, whilst 80% were without any 'special facilities' at all. Gradually indoor lavatories and washrooms became a standard feature in most Irish homes, however, Michael recalls of his grandmother's home in Mayo in the 1960s and 1970s that:

This was the way it was and you just adapted to that, which was the way it was. So you did...you carried on, the way that things were done. You know, you come out with your basin of water and I used to put it on the ditch when I was shaving even right up to...in me late twenties it was the same. You come out to the ditch with the basin and you put the mirror up there and on a summer's morning you'd be shaving there by the ditch...There was no toilet either, it was the late, I'd be in me late twenties before there were toilets, that would be around the seventies.

[Michael, *b.* 1947, Leeds]

These were 'backward' conditions in comparison with those in Leeds. From 1945 Leeds witnessed radical housing and health changes; during the 1950s and 1960s many Leeds residents moved from the pre-1870 back-to-backs and old terraces into newly built council dwellings and to multi-storey blocks of council flats.²⁶ Sanitation facilities were standard.

However, stories of these backward conditions in rural Ireland were not relayed to neighbours and school friends in Leeds after the holidays:

You probably knew that it wasn't [pauses] that the people would think it was really strange...There were lots of things that you kept under your cap like, you wouldn't relate, not that there would be any major incidents that would have caused problems for anyone but you'd...it was a different way of life that they didn't know about.

[Michael, *b.* 1947, Leeds]

These words suggest that even a child could recognise that the way of life in rural Ireland was radically different to and less advanced than life in urban Leeds, or indeed any English city; many emigrants were drawn to England or pushed from Ireland by this disparity. Michael's words also highlight that the general English population were unaware of conditions in Ireland, conditions which in part contributed to Irish emigration. A sense of shame or embarrassment is also implicit in Michael's quote.

Later in the interview, Michael further recalled his childhood memories of his holidays in rural Ireland, and the lasting impression it had on a child of the city:

And you couldn't explain the beauty of the freedom. I mean it really was. I couldn't even put into words what it was like going on holiday to Ireland at that time. I wish I could get the same feel for... you know looking at stones on ditches, with all the bits of moss and what have you on it. It was like magical...it was like looking in a storybook with these vivid pictures...really magical. And unless you lived it and went through it, unless you smelt the smoke, unless you were there at an open fire, unless you could pick mushrooms around in the field and stand into a cows clap or whatever ya – shite – unless you could live that, and see it, and smell it and go into a cows...I used to love the smell of a cows...of this cow's shite, the smell was beautiful and you couldn't tell anyone that. You couldn't explain, it was just pointless; you couldn't bring any story back.

[Michael, *b.* 1947, Leeds]

Michael recalls that, in a time when few working-class took international holidays, a trip to Ireland to children raised in the street and lanes of Leeds was an exotic holiday:

And all the kids envied ya, because that time there was no-one going abroad, I mean that was going abroad really, going to Ireland, but all the local kids mightn't have gotten as far as, if they got out of the city they'd be lucky. If they got to Roundhay Park or Potternewton Park...If they got to the seaside that was major but for us going out [to Ireland] for other kids that was really something.

[Michael, *b.* 1947, Leeds]

Some of the women interviewed spoke of going home to Ireland to give birth to their children, others of bringing their newly born child home for a period. Ronan, originally from Co. Clare, married an English woman, who converted from Protestantism to Catholicism; they have two children both of who were brought back to Ireland to be baptised, he explains:

I don't know [why], nothing other than to go back to our local parish church I think, my wife was keen to do it; I said "fine, it's no problem, we'll take them home". It was a bit of an occasion for my family as well, I suppose, to take the children back...to show respect for them, shall we say.

[Ronan, *b.* 1951, Co. Clare]

Emigrants also returned home to Ireland for reasons other than holidays; many returned to care for old or ill family members. When Gráinne's father lost his sight, she returned to Mayo for three weeks a year keep him company:

And then nine years before dad died he went totally blind so we got him a little cottage down jusht over the bridge in Foxford...he was there and I used to go home twice a year to him, two weeks in May and one week in October to sort...to be with him or whatever. So he died in 1994, I think it was, it was 1994 he died. So since then I've only been home about three times, since then.

[Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo]

On occasion the return visit to care for a relative became a lengthy stay; Eileen was 'volunteered' by her sisters to return to Ireland to help their mother look after their dying father:

I went back to Ireland because me father got ill...that was in 1939 before the war shtarted an' me mother said some one of us had to go back that me father was very ill so me sister Ann, and I had another sister here then, she said "Well we'll make the fare up, and we'll sent Eileen home"...So I went home and I must be twenty at the time and me father was very ill so we had to get a Belmullet doctor out to him an' he told us, six weeks he gev him to live, he had a big cancer of the stomach. So I told me mother and she had a lot of young children at the time on the floor; so the rest of them they all come home for the funeral, he died within six weeks...so mother said I'd better stay home for a while with her, and Ann said "Yes, you keep Eileen at home 'cause she's frightened of her shadow and the war is over there and she doesn't like England anyway". So I stayed at home.

[Eileen, *b.* 1918, Co. Mayo]

From the interviews it appears that female emigrants were more likely than their male counterparts to return home to care for a sick family member; in the event of a family member taking ill, male emigrants were more likely to return home to help with farm-work or to take over the farm:

We went back to Ireland, me father wasn't well, so I was running the place.

[Owen, *b.* 1943, Co. Mayo]

Life-cycle stages of the family unit remaining in Ireland also had an impact on the contact an emigrant had with home. The death of a parent, more precisely the last living parent, symbolised for many respondents the end of an era; many reported that when their parents had passed away, and as many of their friends had died or emigrated their home-place held little attraction to them. Nuala used to go home to Wexford when she could afford it but says:

I didn't go back then so much after me mother dying...I haven't been home now for years. 'Cause when me mother and father are gone you see and that I don't think it's the same.

[Nuala, *b.* 1931, Co. Wexford]

Margaret expresses similar sentiment; she hasn't returned to her native Mayo since the death of her father some thirteen years ago:

When daddy died, when I went to the funeral I was really upset and I always think it'll never be the same if I go home, it wouldn't be the same without daddy, no...

[Margaret, *b.* 195x, Co. Mayo]

Eithne tells that she returned home annually for a weeks holiday whilst her mother was living:

I used to come home every year when me mother was...she lived to be ninety-five and I used to go home every year to see her.

[Eithne, *b.* 1911, Co. Mayo]

Margaret further explained that she previously had a close relationship with her father but was somewhat distant with her mother; she returned home for a period following the

death of her father:

When I was home for that six months after all them years I thought mammy had changed, I thought she'd be right nice to me, she hadn't seen me for so many years. I was only there a couple of weeks and she went back to her normal way...so I haven't been back since, that's the reason.

[Margaret, *b.* 195x, Co. Mayo]

These life-cycle stages also, in many cases, affected the decision to move home permanently (of which more in chapter seven):

The people I went to school with at home are gone to America, in fact there's only one at home that has settled at home, all the others are in America or England in my class and I might meet them on holidays or that. And my parents are dead as well...I'd be a foreigner there now if I went home...because I'm 68 that generation has gone, and my mother's generation, they were lovely saintly people, and father's, but they're all dead and the younger generation then that are in their forties, I'd be an old woman amongst them.

[Delia, *b.* 1934, Co. Mayo]

Eamonn, who was born in Mayo and emigrated to Leeds with his family as a child, tells a different story; he explains that his father '*never went back [to Ireland], never even mentioned it*'. However, following the death of his father in Leeds, Eamonn brought his mother home, which was their first return trip. Then, years later, his English wife persuaded him introduce her to his birthplace:

The first time we come over after we come over 'ere were in 1968 when me father passed away and we took me mother back home and I went over with me mother...And then I went back four years later and then I missed it again and I just left it and then when I got married to me wife about, I think it's going back five or six years ago, she wanted to go over to Ireland; she says "I want to see where you were born and your family and your roots and that...so I took her over, she thoroughly enjoyed it; now we go back every year.

[Eamonn, *b.* 1952, Co. Mayo]

Liam emigrated to Leeds with his family in 1947; during the course of the next three decades he paid just one visit home to Wexford. Eventually, Liam returned for an uncle's funeral:

The first time I went back was in 1956 and after that I never went back for it must have been twenty-odd years and then there were an auld uncle and that and I only went across for the funeral.

[Liam, *b.* 1934, Co. Wexford]

In consequence of return trips to tend to ill family members, care for elderly parents, to help out on the farm, for holidays, for funerals, etc. the Irish gained a negative reputation as having this tendency to return home frequently; Marian's friend was refused a job by a factory's Nigerian manager on account of this Irish emigrant's fondness for retuning to Ireland:

He interviewed her for this job and everything was going well and he says you know “well where do you come from?” and she says “I’m Irish”, so he asked her “what part and how often do you go home to Ireland” and she said “well I go over on me holidays or if something happened that I needed to go over”. He says “Well I’m not giving you a job ” he says “because all you Irish are the same” he says “if somebody dies belonging to ya beyond your straight over for a week or a fortnight” he said “and I can’t do with that”; so no doubt she told him what he could do with the job.

[Marian, *b.* 1942, Dublin]

Other emigrants, like Seamus, eventually lost touch with home and didn’t return to Ireland for many years, having left it so long that they didn’t feel comfortable going home:

I used to go back regular one time and send her [mother] money but after a while then I didn’t go back at all then you see...it jusht...it went from year to year an’ I had money an’ I put it off...I wasn’t back before that for 37 years...I knocked about here, and I travelled here and there in different towns, and coming and going, I was working here and drinking here and there, an’ I never, phwat do you call it, me father died, an’ me brother got married...and I never bothered goin’ home.

[Seamus, *b.* 1936, Co. Mayo]

Others again, such as Vincent who was an orphan and was adopted by an aging farmwoman have no family in Ireland to return to; Vincent left his native county in 1956, his sole return visits to Ireland have been a couple of trips to Dublin to see the All-Ireland Hurling Final in the 1960s. Every story tells a different tale, thus it is difficult to draw one solid conclusion about return visits from the respondent’s interviews. Tim Pat Coogan has so acutely observed about the Irish in Britain, that ‘*for every view there is a counter-view. All are authentic. Individually, all of them can be misleading*’.²⁷ What is clear is that the ‘life-cycles’²⁸ of the emigrants and their parents/siblings notably influenced return visit patterns; for some the death of a relative prompted a long delayed return visit to Ireland, for others it signaled the end of an era of visiting home.

There were many other reasons cited during the courses of the interviews which gave cause to return to Ireland. Some attended or took part in the annual *Fleadhanna*; regularly Leeds *Comhaltas* competed at these competitions and brought with them coach loads of supporters from Leeds. Others when in retirement decided to travel around Ireland to places they never visited whilst living there. In September 2002, LIHH organised a week long visit to Mayo for nine of its tenants; some of the respondents were part of that group. One individual, who started studying the Irish language in Leeds in recent years, went to the Gaeltacht in Kerry to practice his newly acquired language. The point to be made here is that regardless of the circumstance which necessitated a return

visit Ireland was but a short trip from Leeds.

Conclusion

Leeds has long been a transport and communications centre; it is situated roughly equidistant between the Irish Sea and the North Sea and during the period of this study was well linked by road and rail with Liverpool and Holyhead. A twenty-four hour trip separated the emigrant from his or her home and transport became more regular and affordable as demand increased and infrastructure improved. Although the telephone was little used as a means of communication for the majority of the respondents, the emigrant could keep in touch via post and telegram. Local and regional newspapers were sent from Ireland and, in later years, were purchased in the Leeds Irish Centre thus keeping the emigrant informed of current local affairs. Furthermore, a constant flow of information carried from Ireland, particularly from the counties of Mayo and Donegal, was being circulated in the workplace and in the public houses of Leeds as the Irish community of the city was augmented by a flood of the post-war emigrants. This form of contact with home was most important for male emigrants many of whom, for a variety of reasons, tended to work with and for fellow Irishmen; female respondents tended to rely on correspondence from family members as a means of information. However, this flow of information often crossed over between males and females, for example in general conversation between married couples. Gráinne tells that she'd hear about her husband's day at work and who else had arrived in Leeds looking for a job:

I'd hear Andy [husband] talking about the jobs even, you know...he'd go so and so came up today looking today for a job and he'd say shure he came from so and so place.

[Gráinne, b. 1945, Co. Mayo]

Emigrants at home on holiday and letters from relatives ensured that work conditions and living standards in Ireland were being compared and contrasted to those in England, usually in favour of the latter. Undoubtedly this had an impact on the prospective emigrant's decision to leave rural Ireland for Industrial England; as one commentator remarked: '*the widespread existence of British points of reference for judging the adequacy of conditions at home is probably one of the most influential local consequences of our recent emigration history*'.²⁹

The conclusion drawn from all those respondents who spoke of sending remittances is that it was a social and familial responsibility, an act carried out without resentment. The respondents particularly felt the responsibility if they were the eldest sibling or the eldest one to have left home to work in England. The sending of remittances, particularly large and regular sums of money, appeared to be a practice which had a temporal limitation; if the emigrants reached the 'life-cycle stage' where they married and had children of their own, financial priorities changed and the needs of the immediate family usually superseded that of the family at home.

The main finding of this chapter, which concurs with that of Sharon Lambert's study on Irish women in Lancashire during a similar period, is that life-cycle stages had a profound effect on the emigrant's level of contact with home. (However, unlike Lambert's study this conjecture is based on interviews with both male and female respondents). For those emigrants recently arrived in Leeds, particularly those who were young and single, '*the Dublin money*' was all that separated them from home. The young and single emigrant in Leeds who was regularly employed could usually afford to send remittances and to take an annual holiday home; many, in fact, returned twice a year. Those who had few commitments in England could be called upon to return home to the bedside of a sick or ageing family member, or to help on a farm if a member of the family took ill; the emigrant's close ties to the family in Ireland was occasionally seen as a negative attribute by English employers who felt that Irish employees were too quick to return home on a whim and often took extended holidays.³⁰ However, as the emigrant gradually settled into the city, found long-term accommodation and regular work, married and had children, financial and familial commitments affected regular trips home to Ireland. Those families, who were better-off, with one or two parents in regular well-paid employment, might be able to afford an annual visit to Ireland but were restricted time-wise by work commitments and school holidays.

Although, the distance from Leeds even to the furthest reaches in the west of Ireland was relatively short, it was a distance only made short by those the emigrant left behind.

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ Nuala, b. 1931, Co. Wexford.
- ² Excerpt from a letter to the editor, *Irish Independent*, 12/05/2003.
- ³ Ruth-Ann Harris, *The nearest place that wasn't Ireland: nineteenth century Irish labour migration*, Athens, USA, 1994.
- ⁴ Fintan O'Toole, *The Ex-Isle of Erin: Images of a Global Ireland*, 1998, p.134.
- ⁵ Fintan O'Toole, *The Ex-Isle of Erin: Images of a Global Ireland*, 1998, p. 136.
- ⁶ S. J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, 1999, p. 536.
- ⁷ S. J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, 1999, p. 536.
- ⁸ *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, para. 302, p. 137.
- ⁹ *New York Tribune*, 09/01/1847.
- ¹⁰ *New York Tribune*, 09/01/1847.
- ¹¹ Quoted from the *Irish Times*, 27/06/1862, in Graham Davies, *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1914*, 1991, p. 79.
- ¹² Quoted from *The Times*, 17/12/1867, in Sheridan Gilley, 'English Attitudes to the Irish in England, 1780-1900', in Colin Holmes (ed.), *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society*, 1978, p. 96.
- ¹³ David Fitzpatrick, 'A curious middle place: the Irish in Britain, 1871-1921', in Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939*, 1989, p. 19.
- ¹⁴ James Morrissey (ed.), *On the Verge of Want: A unique insight into the living conditions along Ireland's Western seaboard in the late 19th century*, 2001.
- ¹⁵ John Healy, *Nineteen Acres*, 1987, pp. 1-2.
- ¹⁶ John Healy, *Nineteen Acres*, 1987, p. 61.
- ¹⁷ Tracey Connolly, 'Emigration from Ireland to Britain During the Second World War', in Andy Bielenberg (ed.), *The Irish Diaspora*, 2000, p. 59.
- ¹⁸ *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, para. 313, p. 140.
- ¹⁹ *The Irish Times*, 02/08/1999.
- ²⁰ *Prime Time* report by Paul Rouse, RTÉ 1, aired on the 22/12/2003 & *Sunday Business Post*, 21/12/2003.
- ²¹ *The Irish Times*, 02/08/1999.
- ²² *Sunday Business Post*, 21/12/2003.
- ²³ *Sunday Business Post*, 21/12/2003.
- ²⁴ *Irish Independent*, 12/05/2003.

²⁵ John B. Keane, *Many Young Men of Twenty*, [no date], pp. 131-4; John Healy, *No One Shouted Stop* (Formerly *Death of an Irish Town*), 1987, p. 18.

²⁶ Steven Burt & Kevin Grady, *The Illustrated History of Leeds*, 2002, p. 241.

²⁷ T. P. Coogan, *Wherever Green is Worn: The Story of the Irish Diaspora*, 2000, p. 135.

²⁸ In this context the 'life cycle' concept refers to both personal development (childhood, adolescence, mid-life, old age and death) and to the life-cycle of the family or household (a process which includes marriage, child-rearing, children leaving home and the dissolution of the family unit).

²⁹ Damien Hannon, 'Irish Emigration Since the War', typescript of unpublished RTE Thomas Davis Lecture, 1973, p. 9, quoted in Enda Delaney, *Demography, State & Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-71*, 2000, p. 172.

³⁰ These were complaints commonly expressed by English employers. See J. A. Jackson, *The Irish in Britain*, 1963, p. 108.

CHAPTER SIX:

THE MYTH OF RETURN

A sense of displacement, a desire to return home and the sometimes painful adaptation to the norms of the new society feature prominently in the oral testimony of all migrants.¹

Enda Delaney

Introduction

Social historian Enda Delaney has noted that: '*invariably, migrants living abroad do express a desire to return permanently, although whether this aspiration is ever realized is quite another matter*'.² Then perhaps it was inevitable that the subject of return migration was raised during the course of the life narratives, with most respondents admitting that, at one time or other, they had considered returning permanently to Ireland.

Following a brief overview of 20th century Irish return migration, for the purpose of a coherent structure this chapter has been subdivided into two sections. The first section is entitled 'Why Return to Ireland?' and deals with the push and pull factors to return home; the second section 'Why stay in Leeds?' discusses the push to stay away from Ireland and the pull to stay in Leeds.

20th Century Irish Return Migration

Post-war migration to England, unlike the 'first wave' exodus to North America, was not necessarily thought of by migrants as a permanent or lifelong move.³ The occasion of leaving for England wasn't marked with anything in the way of an 'American wake' (an all night gathering of family and friends which was common up until the 1960s and took place on the eve of the departure of one of their number for America, often never to return). Many emigrants left with the view of staying and working in England for a few years before eventually returning to Ireland. This is a common feature of migration; for example in his study of Pakistanis in Britain Muhammad Anwar noted that Pakistanis left with the intention of returning home with enough money to buy property, build better houses and raise their social status.⁴ The *Reports* of the Commission on Emigration observed of Irish emigrants that '*in many cases, the out-going traveller was not, in any sense, a permanent emigrant and frequently came and went like a seasonal migrant*'.⁵ However, the vast majority of Irish emigrants did not return to settle in Ireland; gravestones in Killingbeck R.C.

Cemetery, on York road, bearing Irish surnames (Barrett, Conroy, Clarke, Delaney, Fitzgerald, Gavaghan, Kelly, Kerrigan, Kirrane, Lally, McGowan, McHale, McHugh, McLoughlin, Meehan, Quinn, Reilly, etc.) and prefixed by common Irish names such as Patrick, Seamus, Bridget, Mary and Kathleen bear testament to the fact that for many the move to England *was* to be permanent. These headstones are interspersed by many bearing Polish names (Chelczynska, Kolacz, Lipka, Olszewski, Pawlik, Poznysz, Prokop, Szczepański, Wojciech, etc.); the Poles constituted another large portion of Leeds Catholic community, many of whom fled to Leeds during the Second World War.



Pl. 6.1: Killingbeck Cemetery on York Rd.

The eminent sociologist J. A. Jackson carried out two important social surveys in the mid-1960s; the first, a study on the market-town of Skibbereen, Co. Cork in 1964, followed in 1965 by a survey of emigrants from the town living in Britain. The latter survey consisted of a sample of 111 people of which 62% expressed a desire to return permanently to Ireland.⁶ In a separate study conducted in 1965, 110 Irish migrants were interviewed in Bristol; almost half of those interviewed stated that when leaving Ireland they had intended to return at a later point, however, at the time of interviewing more than two-thirds had decided to stay in England, with only one-

fifth intending to return to Ireland.⁷ By 1981 there remained 7,563 Irish-born persons living in Leeds who had not made the permanent transition home. In that same year, there were 607,428 Irish emigrants residing throughout Britain. So why then did so many Irish who departed with the intention of a brief venture never return to settle in Ireland permanently? And why after spending so many years (in every case the vast majority of the respondents' lives) residing in England do so many Irish emigrants still desire to return to live in Ireland?

Before considering these questions it is useful to make reference to those migrants who did return to Ireland. From census data it is evident that in the period under consideration a substantial number of elderly Irish emigrants have returned to live in Ireland; Table 6.1 shows that in every intercensal period from 1945 there has been a net in-migration (net migration is the difference between outflows and inflows) of older people (aged 65+) to Ireland.

Table 6.1: Net in-migration of older people (65+) for intercensal periods 1946-81 (000s)

Periods	Net in-migration
1946-51	9.6
1951-56	6.3
1956-61	6.3
1961-66	1.8
1966-71	7.3
1971-81	18.2

Source: Nessa Winston, *The Return of Older Irish Emigrants: An assessment of needs and issues*, Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants & The Department for Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2002, p. 31.

Furthermore, census evidence highlights that the vast majority of these elderly return migrants were from the UK [Table 6.2]; between 1951 and 1980, 80% of the 20,000 elderly Irish-born return migrants stated that their country of previous residence had been the UK, compared with 13% who gave the USA as their previous place of residence. However, these figures for elderly return migrants are negligible when compared to the figures that departed these shores; by 1951 there was more than half a million people born in the Irish Republic in Britain.

Table 6.2: Older (65+) Irish-born persons who resided abroad for 1 year or more by year of taking up residence in Ireland and country of previous residence (Census 1996)

Year moved to Ireland	Country of previous residence			
	UK	USA	Other	Total
<i>Pre 1951</i>	3,417	273	237	3,937
<i>1951-60</i>	4,204	542	370	5,026
<i>1961-70</i>	5,355	859	666	6,880
<i>1971-80</i>	6,242	975	681	7,898

Source: Nessa Winston, *The Return of Older Irish Emigrants: An assessment of needs and issues*, Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants & The Department for Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2002, p. 31.

And indeed Ireland is no exception to the truism that return migration was a feature of European migration patterns in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸ The 1960s witnessed export-orientated economic policies and foreign investment in the Republic which gradually brought about increased employment opportunities and an improved economic climate.⁹ Undoubtedly, this relative prosperity influenced the substantial return migration witnessed in the 1970s. Donal Garvey's study of migration flows in the Republic of Ireland highlighted that between 1961 and 1971 a trend occurred whereby Irish emigrants were returning from Britain with their families; during this period Ireland's total population increased by 160,000, of which around 32,000 were British-born children under the age of 15 years.¹⁰ Emigrants who left for Britain during the war and in post-war period, who married, started families and eventually returned to Ireland account for this unprecedented increase. Further to this, between 1971 and 1981 Ireland gained more people than it exported: the result being a net inflow of 104,000 persons.¹¹ During this period the Leeds Irish-born population declined, albeit slightly, from 7,580 in 1971 to 7,563 in 1981; however, it is unclear if this decrease was brought about as the result of return migration, migration within Britain or a natural decrease in an aging population. Enda Delaney has highlighted the limitations of using census data as a record of return migration to Ireland:

Estimates of Irish net migration clearly do not take into account of the fact that a substantial number of people may have left the country and subsequently returned between the time the two enumerations were taken. Therefore, the scale of return migration across intercensal periods is not readily quantifiable owing to the absence of frontier controls.¹²

Nonetheless, although there has been substantial return migration throughout the period under consideration, the fact remains that England continued to play host to the majority of Irish emigrants.

Push-Pull Model of Migration

Historians and scholars of migration have commonly used the 'pull-push' models of migration when discussing emigration from Ireland,¹³ generally citing lack of employment opportunities and poor wages in Ireland as 'push' factors and higher living standards, increased employment opportunities and the attraction of urban life abroad as 'pull' factors.¹⁴ However, this push-pull model may be equally applied to the study of Irish return migration. During the course of the life narratives, the respondents spoke of a number of diverse push and pull factors which fuelled their desire to return permanently to Ireland or have influenced their decision to remain in Leeds.

Why Return to Ireland?

The Push to Return to Ireland

Although some members of the Leeds Irish community have come to regard the city as their home, others found emigration to be a ruinous experience and never fully settled in urban England. Martha's family migrated to Australia when she was eleven years of age in order to be with her father who worked in the Northern Territory in a uranium mine; he was tragically killed in a site accident soon after their arrival and the family returned to Ireland. In 1961, following the death of her mother, Martha, her elder brother and sister moved to Leeds:

No we didn't want to go, it was an awful thing, I never wanted to leave Ireland, I still miss Ireland a lot, I still miss, I've always got that thing to go home and yet I left it young, I don't what it is, it's sort of stuck in me mind the roads an'; I've never settled here. I've always been goin' since the day I came, that's why I'm in the state I am here because I've never bought a house or settled down in it except this auld thing, we rented for years and then we got a chance to buy it cheap so we just bought it 'cause I thought well when I retire I'll go home, or the first opportunity I'll go back home. And when I got this arthritis I said I would go, so that's when I took the fit to go...but then at the last minute he [husband] backed down.

I hated it. I hated the sight of England. I hated it; I never liked it...I don't know, I jusht didn't like it, I like the country thing, I like country roads an'...I jusht think, I still think Ireland's a lovely place. They say some people can't leave Ireland, they can't leave it behind them, it's a thing. I'd go tomorrow, if the opportunity came, I'd go tomorrow.

[Martha, *b.* 1946, Co. Longford]

Of Martha's 57 years, she has spent just 14 in Ireland, yet she retains a strong desire to return and feels this has impeded her fully settling in England. Martha and her family have also experienced many years of anti-Irish racism (verbal abuse, intimidation and property damage) since they moved to the Bramley area of the city; the trouble began when a Northern Irish couple living in the area began spreading the rumour that her family were IRA bomb-makers. Undoubtedly, this has also contributed to Martha's desire to retire home to Ireland. Again others, such as Eileen, who has spent almost all of her adult life in Leeds and admits that she has 'done well' in England, still have not acquired a love for their adopted country:

An' I shtill hate this country, an' I done well in it but I have no love for England, in't it funny, but I read all the histories and everything about what they did to Ireland and how they took our lands an', you know, and how they starved us, and how they killed my relatives. Oh an' I think it's awful. Maybe that shtuck in me mind.

[Eileen, b. 1918, Co. Mayo]

Even for those who have come to accept that because of family commitments they are unlikely to return admit that even after any decades of life in urban Britain they have not fully come to feel at home in their urban surroundings:

To this day I cannot get used to being so close to my next-door neighbour, I cannot...you know you can hear every noise, and I cannot get used to that after 40 years, I can't. I think it's because we were in the farm and you had all open space about ya. You were going to the neighbours and it took you fifteen-twenty minutes to walk to them [laughs]. You know, that *was* the neighbour.

[Gráinne, b. 1945, Co. Mayo]

Thomas was fourteen when his father, an insurance broker, became unemployed and the family emigrated from Dublin to Leeds. Although Thomas has spent 40 of his 60 years in England he still expresses a longing for Ireland.

I've never felt right here, no, even though all my friends are here, I've only relations in Ireland now, but I still miss it terribly, you know. I'm not sure I'd go back because its...you maybe can't go back into your past and Ireland has changed a lot anyhow and you know, I've got a daughter over here, I married here and my two brothers are her and just about everybody I know, but I still miss Ireland, I still consider myself first and foremost Irish.

[Thomas, b. 1941, Dublin]

Joe Horgan, writing for *The Irish Post*, acknowledged that '*the past and memory [are] the immigrant's curse. Especially the Irish. The Irish pushed out of Ireland were left with one thing and that was their memory*'.¹⁵ It is these memories that remain fresh with Irish migrants, sometimes for many decades, which impede their settlement in their adoptive home and keep the dream of an eventual return home alive.

Several of the respondents spoke of the strong desire to return to Ireland when they encountered hardships or emotional difficulties in Leeds, such as the death of a partner, ill-health or separation from a spouse or partner. Rose spent some time homeless on the streets of Leeds:

I din't, well I din't really sleep because I was so frightened. Last time I were frightened I din't go to sleep I just...I used to go t' crypt, stay there 'till 'bout nine o'clock and just go and walk around the town and stuff like that. Go and sit in the bus station. I used to go and sit in the bus station watching the coach going out to Ireland and thought if I had money I jump on it.

[Rose, b. 1957, Co. Kildare]

At times these nostalgic memories of Ireland were contrasted with the harsh realities of life in Leeds often fuelling a desire to return. Others expressed a desire to end their days in the land of their birth. In 1964, Timothy emigrated to Brighouse, outside Huddersfield, where his brothers were doing cable work. Timothy, who is unwell since he had a stroke, recently returned to his native County Kerry for his brother's funeral and has since decided that he would like 'to finish up there':

I was a new man, the fresh air, the different air, it's lovely fresh air...I still like Ireland, I'd like to finish up there in Ireland like you know, I would yeah, 'cause I don't like here at all.

[Timothy, b. 1944, Co. Kerry]

The Pull to Ireland

For many emigrants Ireland still has a nostalgic appeal or an emotional tie. In 1963 Paschal, then aged sixteen, migrated from Mayo to Leeds; for him the landscape remains fresh in his mind. Positive feelings for Ireland often affect the decision of a person to return to Ireland:

I've never forgotten it. I still remember the dips in the field and everything, it goes through me mind once a month you know, an' the auld cow sheds, and the trees, an' drains an' the river, and when the floods used to come across the fields, I've never forgotten Ireland.

[Paschal, b. 1944, Co. Mayo]

However, some factors that influence return migration are less straightforward. Martin's brother migrated to Leeds in 1957, he married a Laois woman and together they had five children. Martin recalls that his brother was always keen to '*set up home-home at home*'; however, his wife wasn't so keen to return because they were doing well in Leeds but after much persuasion she agreed. Martin explains his brother's motive:

The brother is worse like he's very anti-English like ya know, an' because like when he went home to Ireland I said, "Jesus like we both have good jobs here like" and I said "like what is taking ya home like well we're doing well here like and everything". He said like I don't want no, no fucking George or Sid coming into my house [laughs]. He

didn't want the girls to be marrying English like George or Sid was English like. And that was it like. And he couldn't stand that like so that's why he went home.

[Martin, *b.* 1940, Co Mayo]

For him the pull was fuelled by an idealistic desire for his children to be reared in Ireland and for them to marry back home.

Why Stay in Leeds?

The Pull to Stay in Leeds

Broadly speaking, it is the finding of this study that the primary pull to stay in Leeds is for familial reasons; many of the respondents have children and grandchildren living in the city and throughout Britain and are reluctant to be apart from them. The following comments were typical of those interviewed who have family in Britain:

I would love to go, go back *but* as I said the family is here so.... I didn't appreciate Ireland when I was there and now I wish I had hung on to the farm. But my family's here now, my home is here so.

[Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo]

I told her [wife] give me half a chance and I'll move back but I've got a family now, all me family has grown up over here.

[Eamonn, *b.* 1952, Co. Mayo]

Marian and Martin, from Sligo and Mayo respectively, married in Leeds in 1964 and over the years have often discussed moving back to Ireland permanently but now that their children have married and had families of their own in England they are reluctant to move away from them.

Well we often did [consider moving home] but then when you have the family grown up and they've married here and settled sort of thing you want to be near your children sort of thing and that would be the one stumbling block. Even when we retire, sort of thing, we often think, you know, well it t'wud be nice to live in Ireland but then you wouldn't be able to see them as often, do you know like we're able to pop around to them, or they pop into us, as often as we want.

[Marian, *b.* 1942, Dublin]

In addition to parents not wanting to be separated from their children and grandchildren there is also pressure from children of Irish emigrants do not want their parents to move back to Ireland. Eileen first emigrated from Mayo in 1935 and has spent the vast majority of her life in Leeds; she decided on retirement that she wanted to move home permanently:

When I retired I was 61 an' I was saying to the girls here [daughters], they were all married then an' they were all had their own homes an' they were all doin' well, an' they were havin' babies, an' I said, "Well do you know girls, I think now I'll sell this house, an' I'll go to Ireland and I'll buy a little place over there 'cause you know I never did like England and I never will like it". They said "Well you're very selfish mam [laughs], you're very selfish to say things like that; wha' about us? You're only thinkin' of

yourself”, which was true. So they said “Forget about that, you cannot go to Ireland, your family is here and that’s it.”

[Eileen, b. 1918, Co. Mayo]

And indeed some would have returned to Ireland sooner but they did not wish to expose their children to the turmoil of emigration. In 1962, Theresa’s family migrated from Roscommon to Leeds, in a move made to keep the family together following the emigration of her two brothers there. Theresa, then aged twelve, found the experience overwhelming and greatly upsetting. Many years later, she and her husband talked about moving home to Ireland, they agreed that it would have been a great idea to move home before the children started school but *‘the money wasn’t in it’*. Theresa recalls that when her children did start school:

I realised how enormously I was upset by being moved out of my own environment at a young age, and I certainly didn’t want to do the same thing the opposite way around.

[Theresa, b. 1950, Co. Roscommon]

They decided to leave the decision until after their children had finished their schooling and in 2001, Theresa, her father and husband returned to live in Ireland. Two of their three children have also independently made their homes in Mayo.

The fact that Ireland was so close and accessible to the emigrant may have deluded many into thinking that the move home could be done at any time and with relative ease; this is a cruel illusion. The emigrant often believes that it surely must be easier to move home than it was to up and leave Ireland for Leeds. However, once the emigrant moved to Leeds, found work and housing, made friends and began to socialise, was possibly joined by family, friends and neighbours from Ireland, married and had families of their own, that Leeds often gradually became home. Margaret arrived in Leeds from Mayo in the 1960s, she already had a brother living in the city; she recalls:

I was over here one week and I hated it, every minute of it, I just got home sick [however, now] when I go home, I hate coming back here, which is strange, I love it back at home, but I love Leeds now, I class Leeds as my home now I do.

[Margaret, b. 195x, Co. Mayo]

In this context it can be seen that Margaret uses the word ‘home’ for both Leeds and Mayo. Many of the respondents substituted the word ‘home’ for both their adopted and native homes; Honora arrived in Leeds in 1939, months before the outbreak of World War II; explaining why she stayed in the city throughout the war she says:

I couldn’t go home, I was living in Leeds and I had to stand me ground in Leeds because our home was there; we had got a house. But I went home for our Jarleth to be born, but I came back again. And father [her husband] of course was in tailoring and then he was

taken into the army and then I couldn't [return to Ireland] because we had the children to think of to come back. That *was* our home; we had given up everything at home.

[Honora, b. 1914, Co. Galway]

Likewise Agnes, who arrived in pre-war Leeds from Roscommon, uses home to refer to both Roscommon and Leeds:

I came here in 1938 and I got the house in 1939. You know I've always had good friends. You know I liked going home but I've always called this my home here.

[Agnes, b. 1918, Co. Roscommon]

This transposition of the word 'home' and the ease with which it is done possibly indicates that over time the definite line between both homes gradually became less distinct for some emigrants.

Many of the respondents spoke of being content with their lives in Leeds and realise that the time for 'going home' had passed them by. Jeremiah used to go home on holidays twice a year and intended returning to Ireland permanently but as things didn't improve in Ireland until the late 1970s, when there was a lot of construction work in England, he remained on.

Well I did many times [think about moving home to Monaghan] an' I think I left it, well you leave it a bit late you see; I retired seven year ago and I thought I left it a wee bit too late to go back there, you know 'cause when you're away a long time you become a stranger as well you know, fellas you knew moved away or passed on or something an' of course me wife was born here and she wouldn't have the interest to go back as I would you know that was other reasons, so its always a bit of a problem.

[Jeremiah, b. 1932, Co. Monaghan]

It is not uncommon for emigrants to hold onto a nostalgic desire to be buried in their homeland. However, some respondents pointed out that they know many Irish in Leeds or who have returned to Ireland whose dying wish it is to be finally laid to rest with a loved one who had already passed away and been buried in the city. Often an emigrant buries a husband or wife in their adopted home, this in turn ensures that the emigrant will remain in the city in order to be near the grave and visit it regularly. And on occasion the emigrant may, for any number of reasons, return to Ireland at a later stage but nonetheless he/she will still wish to be eventually buried with their loved one.

The Push to Stay Away from Ireland

The push to stay away from Ireland can generally be attributed to economic motives; for much of the period under consideration here economic conditions in Ireland provided little incentive for permanent return. The 1930s was a period of worldwide

economic depression; however, Britain's insatiable appetite for Irish labour during the war and in the immediate post-war years coupled with the dearth of employment opportunities in Ireland ensured a constant outflow of Irish migrants. As the result of a number of factors, the 1950s witnessed the greatest mass exodus of Irish emigrants in the twentieth century; these factors included the mechanisation of rural farms, which reduced the demand for farm labour, the absence of indigenous industrial development and the continued demand for labour in Britain's main industrial centres.¹⁶ In 1958 the publication of the *Programme for Economic Expansion* heralded a new era in Irish economic policy; this report and two subsequent even more ambitious programmes advocated the abandonment of the hitherto ineffective policy of self-sufficiency in favour of policies founded on free-trade and an emphasis on exports and foreign investment.¹⁷ Emigration from Ireland fell throughout the 1960s and, as has been noted, a significant number who had left in the previous decades returned to the country. However, it wasn't until the 1970s that conditions were considered favourable enough to turn the tide of migration for the first time. The 1980s witnessed a 'fourth wave' of renewed emigration when the short-lived Irish economic boom ceased.

Other factors which contribute to the emigrant not returning include negative experiences in Ireland; these can be familial, educational, religious or personal experiences which have tarnished the emigrant's memory of Ireland. Conor, for example, says he never intends returning to Ireland permanently because of the bad memories he has of the Irish education system:

I can remember being beaten and beaten regularly with these straps...I was made to feel differently, or treated differently, because I couldn't speak the Irish, and I thought that that was criminal in a way, I was denied a decent education because they decided an eight-year-old boy should know his Irish and I never had a chance to learn the blessed thing.

[Conor, *b.* 1947, Dublin]

Conor feels that this childhood experience has put him off returning to live in Ireland; he has one daughter and feels it important that she keeps in touch with her Irish family more so than with Ireland.

As has been discussed in chapter five the death of a parent often symbolised, if not the cutting of ties with Ireland, certainly a weakening of them with the homeland. Margaret hasn't returned to Ireland since her father's funeral some thirteen years ago, explaining that for her: '*It wouldn't be the same without daddy*'. Similarly, Gráinne has been home just three times since her father passed away ten years ago, previous to

that she returned home twice annually to be with him. Likewise Nuala tells: '*I haven't been home now for years; 'cause when me mother and father are gone you see and that I don't think it's the same*'.

After many years away from Ireland emigrants often find that they know no-one and have in many ways become a stranger. Justin lives alone in Leeds and is house-bound yet doesn't feel compelled to return home. On the subject of returning permanently Justin says:

I've been over here too long, I wouldn't know anybody back home in Ireland...the only relations I have at home now maybe a couple of cousins here and there so what's the use in me [going home]...unless I had a couple of millon or something like that, I don't think I'd go move back home to live.

[Justin, b. 1929, Co. Limerick]

Gráinne witnessed this transformation from being local to being a relative stranger gradually when visiting relations:

I've noticed all the time, it's not like before and even before I could go into their houses I could go into their houses and I would go and put the kettle on myself and sit down and now you sit there waiting you know for them to do everything...Once a few years back I was at home, there was some of me cousins were throwing a party. Anyway there was a little kid there going round with sweets and somebody says you know "Give the lady from England a sweet" and I thought is that what I'm known as now the lady from England, you know, I'm not one of them anymore, it's things like that that sort of hurts me.

[Gráinne, b. 1945, Co. Mayo]

It has been noted that those who are out of Ireland the longest were least likely to settle; these are most likely to be older returnees.¹⁸ Delia articulates some of the problems of the prospective return migrant who has been away for many years. Delia left her native Mayo aged 17 more than half a century ago, although she visits home regularly she realises that for her, moving home isn't really an option:

Well I've settled here and I've lots of friends, I'm associated with the church here...and the people I went to school with at home are gone to America, in fact there's only one at home that has settled at home, all the others are in America or England in my class and I might meet them on holidays or that. And my parents are dead as well...I'd be a foreigner there now if I went home...because I'm 68 that generation has gone, and my mother's generation, they were lovely saintly people, and father's, but they're all dead and the younger generation then that are in their forties, I'd be an old woman amongst them...but I like it here 'cause I'm comfortable here, I love it when I'm home too of course.

[Delia, b. 1934, Co. Mayo]

Many like Delia, lost many neighbours and friends to emigration and when their parents passed away found that a permanent move to Ireland held less attraction for them.

The fact of the matter is that Ireland today is one of the most, if not *the* most, expensive countries in Europe to live in; property and house prices are at an all time

high and controversial restrictions on single dwelling constructions imposed by county councils mean that many emigrants could not afford the move home. Additionally for the returning emigrant there are the removals costs, travel expenses and exchange rates to be considered. For many the expense of returning permanently is the primary deterrent.

She [wife] loves Ireland, I mean we considered it, cost was the main thing because, as you know yourself, in recent years I mean, I'd say had we done it 10 to 15 years ago we could have afforded to do it in terms of the house prices in Ireland down the south west, certainly down around Clare. But since then, I mean the property market, as you know yourself, it's gone mad. At one time it used to be the bigger towns, certainly Dublin was a good example, Galway was a good example, maybe Limerick was, Cork certainly was, but now even farm properties and farm houses and building and buying plots of land and so on, I think are unaffordable for most young folks. So yeah, my wife would have loved to have gone there, I would have been very happy with my children to have gone to school there, I would have been very pleased with that...we probably would have, should have done it earlier on but the way life was going here, we were heavily involved in work, we were both in good jobs shall we say and your life was your work really.

[Ronan, b. 1951, Co. Clare]

I started going back home a lot, and I was goin' to move back then. I was going to move back say about five year ago, you know, and then she [ex-wife] says to me "Well all the lads are here" and that you know but when I looked around the property over there, the price of it put me off, I mean I had an auld auntie who live up there in William Street in Wexford town and the house next door was up, you know, and I'll tell you what, it was just like a back to back, 74,000 that's when before they went to euros, 74,000 they were looking for it. No way! You'd get a semi in Leeds for that. And this is about, I'd say about six, seven year ago.

[Liam, b. 1934, Co. Wexford]

Some emigrants retained the family land in Ireland to which they could return and build a home, others, however, lost their land to the Land Commission Courts as it was decided that they had made "*an economic decision in outward social mobility*".¹⁹ The work of the Land Commission was controversial; their job was to ascertain if a deserted holding should be taken over and many emigrants in Britain and the US lost their few acres of land and the shell of their paternal home regardless of intent to return. With no land to return to, many remained away. Honora moved to Leeds in 1938 to join her husband. When Honora's mother died, her younger siblings came to live with her in Leeds. Her brother spent so long visiting in Leeds without returning to the land that it was taken by the Land Commission and redistributed:

And there was jusht wan, Martin [her brother], that was shtaying on the place in the holding at home and of course he came over on holidays a few time and all us sisters spoiled him in Leeds, and didn't he come over and stay and he left the pace for so long. Well then that time in Ireland the council...if the smoke din't come out of your chimney within two years or eighteen months it was taken by the council and given it to somebody that hadn't much land, so our place was taken. And Martin, he ended up dying of cancer in Birmingham.

[Honora, b. 1914, Co. Galway]

Others, like Gráinne, made a conscious decision to give up the land:

Well the farm was sold; my brother and his wife went home to live on the farm. It 'twas given to me the day bef...on my wedding day, the day before I was 21 and I didn't want it, of course I was big headed thinking I'm in England now I don't need a farm over there and what have ya. And my brother was very poorly with asthma so I signed it all over to him and then after dad died he sold it, he sold that so it's strangers and it breaks my heart when I see strangers in our home, it really does. So I took my daughter and the twins home two years ago and we had to rent a cottage in Foxford so that hurt a lot.

[Gráinne, b. 1945, Co. Mayo]

Gráinne has since regretted the decision to sign away the land and, like many emigrants, wonders what life might have been like if she had waited:

BMcG: And when you're looking back on the move from home and your time in Leeds how do you view it? Did you enjoy your time; do you think it was the right move?

At the time I thought it was, now when I sit here and look back or if I go home on holidays and see people there, and I think well they have a great life now the ones that's there. Should I have stuck it out and waited there? What would be me...my life if I had waited there? You know so.... you jusht don't know what's left ahead of ya.

BMcG: And did you think when you came over first that this was going to be it for life that this was going to be a permanent move?

I don't think I did, I really don't think I did. It jusht went on and then with meeting Andy [ex-husband] an' settling down and getting a family and at the back of my mind when we sold up and went home I was hoping it would be, and then when I realised that it wasn't I says well "oh well I'll come back to England".

[Gráinne, b. 1945, Co. Mayo]

Having given up claim or having sold the family home or land, many emigrants find it difficult to raise the finances necessary to purchase property in Ireland. In recent years there has been official recognition of the fact that for many Irish emigrants in Britain a permanent move to Ireland is but a dream which cannot be realised without a degree of assistance. It was in response to this need that in January 2000 the 'Safe-Home' initiative was established with the aim of aiding those Irish emigrants who wish to return permanently to Ireland, but who lack the resources and know how to do so, to realise the move. The Safe-Home project co-ordinators acknowledged that:

The vast majority of our emigrants leaving our shores made a new life for themselves in their adopted country. They married, settled down and started a family. Some 40, 50 and 60 years later, they have a family network and close friendships in the country of immigration and look upon Ireland as the "Old Home" of nostalgic memories and have no desire to return home, other than for a holiday or short stay. However there are a small number, estimated at being in the low thousands, who do want to return to live in the land of their birth and who with limited assistance could realize their dream of ending their days back home in Ireland.²⁰

The programme recognises the contribution to the Irish economy made by Irish emigrants, or '*economic refugees*', in the post-war period by way of remittances and seeks '*with support of the booming Irish economy, to repay the just debt owed to*

those who, in their twilight years want to come home'.²¹ Although the programme is in part funded by charity, Dr. Seamus Caulfield has pointed out that since Ireland's economic conditions have vastly improved '*it is time to repay that debt, not in charity, but in justice*'.²² To qualify for the Safe-Home Programme applicants must be Irish-born emigrants (at least 60 years of age), be living abroad in either existing social housing (e.g. local authority, housing association, etc.) or in private rented accommodation, and their situation must be such that they would be unable to secure suitable accommodation for themselves by means of their own resources on returning to Ireland.²³ The programme is now being advertised in Irish newspapers throughout Britain and by organisations working on behalf of Irish emigrants.

LIHH support the initiative and a number of their tenants are looking to make the move home; two of the respondents, Seamus and Owen, are currently having their applications assessed. Both men hail from Mayo, emigrating in 1949 and 1960 respectively. Their life-stories are typical of many an emigrant: they both spent a period farm-labouring and in construction, following work all over England and for many years after leaving Ireland they sent part of their pay-packet home. They admit that they worked and drank hard; in recent years both men have suffered a number of health problems and are hoping to move back to Mayo with the aid of the Safe Home Programme.

Owen admits that the information letter sent to him by the Safe-Home Programme entitled 'Coming Home? – Are you sure?' [see Appendix D: 3] has made him think twice about returning to Ireland saying '*you won't get much encouragement I'll tell ya, if ya read this letter...there's not much encouragement in them letters*'. The letter opens: '*Read this carefully – It isn't designed to change your mind about returning home but it is intended to make you think very carefully about whether it is the right move for you*'.²⁴ The standard letter draws attention to some of the social changes that have taken place in Ireland over the past decades and the exorbitant costs of moving home. However, Owen's main quibble was with the wording of a part of the letter which reads: '*Gone are the days when there was a woman in every house and an old person propped up in a chair beside the range*'; he thought the wording was inappropriate and disrespectful:

See the way they said there, "there's no such thing as goin' into a house now and an auld woman propped up"; wun't you think, did you reads that, wun't you think they'd find some other word besides "propped".

[Owen, b. 1943, Co. Mayo]

Owen's subtle observation of the semantics in the letter may have confirmed for him how much Ireland had changed since his departure. Although Owen didn't always return home regularly, he now goes home twice a year to visit his 96-year-old mother saying:

I'd like to go back if I had plenty of money if I could settle back, you know, an' have plenty of money I'd love to go back.

[Owen, *b.* 1943, Co. Mayo]

For those like Owen who have been out of work as a result of poor health, without substantial savings and living in social housing, the Safe-Home Programme is the only chance of returning to Ireland permanently.

Seamus first left Ireland at age 13 to pick potatoes in Scotland, after four seasons there he went his own way and found work as a farm-labourer in Lincolnshire. Seamus eventually finished with the farm and worked all over Britain on Public Works, first arriving in Leeds in 1964. For many years Seamus lived the stereotypical life of the Irish labourer, he worked hard and drank heavy seven days a week and lived rough:

I used to work seven days a week until I retired, I'm retired two years now...I used to go into York, five or six of us, an' we used to be living rough in an auld shelter there at night an' we used to be getting £24 a day, we might drink that nearly every night an' if we didn't drink it some, some dosser might come in from Leeds or some other town an' give him a few pounds an' do this and that an' drink and enjoy ourselves... it was a rough life.

[Seamus, *b.* 1943, Co. Mayo]

In recent years he took ill and as a consequence was forced to give up drinking. In September 2002, Seamus made the trip home for the first time in 37 years, courtesy of LIHH; as part of a group of fourteen they stayed in Ballinrobe and spent an activity filled week in the west of Ireland. He enjoyed his visit and has applied to the Safe-Home Programme to move back to Ireland permanently, but is as yet undecided if it is the right move for him:

I'll be 52 years in this country nexst May altogether, you know, since I did shtart coming, you know what I mean, it's been a long time, it won't be easy. They put it in the letter more or less to me the people back there if I had a nice place an' I was happy here I'd be better off staying where I am, that phwen I go back there and I'm going to another place and I mightn't know many people that I'd be a good bit from me relatives that it would be very difficult for me to get things sorted out you know an' change your money and this and that, that it won't be easy. I said to meself, I said I often sat here a bit of music there and talking to meself, I saying wouldn't you think if I went back there I'd jusht get on in me home jusht as good as I'm getting on here. Wouldn't you think that I'd manage it there if I got a little place there and they'd furnish it for me and do everything that I'd live there and I' get me bit of pension there an' a few pound behind me that would keep me going. Wouldn't you think I'd manage?

[Seamus, *b.* 1936, Co. Mayo]

Seamus is caught between two minds: between a desire to return home to Mayo and knowing that he'll be giving up the life and friends he's made for himself in Leeds:

I know everybody, I go into Leeds and I go all over and I know everybody...I go up to Crossgates and, phwat do you call it, I meet men up there that I know and that's my little hobby now, I don't drink, I hadn't a drink now for twelve months, I was poorly with me legs here...an' I go up there and I see a Mayoman, he's from Kiltimagh, and we do have little flutters on horses and a craic and you know, I'd miss all that I suppose...I have a lot of people down the town, they're from Mayo, from Belmullet and Doohoma and all that, and they all have good time for me, and a laugh and a craic.

[Seamus, *b.* 1936, Co. Mayo]

Indeed it may be as much of a sacrifice and gamble for the emigrant to leave the life, friends and network that they have established over many decades in England as it was to first depart for that country. And the move home is often considered with more apprehension than was for the move to England.

Negative Experiences of Return Migrants

And lot of my friends that have gone over in the 70s and 80s, now they've settled but they'll tell you stories that at the beginning they weren't accepted straight away as like home grown, which they was, but had gone away. So there's that little bit, you know, things you know that niggles you at the back of your mind.

[Martin, *b.* 1940, Co. Mayo]

The Irish have on occasion been accused of being at best unwelcoming and at worst downright hostile towards return emigrants²⁵ and anecdotes of the bad experiences of return emigrants, some accurate others perhaps exaggerated, are perpetuated amongst the Irish community in England. Needless to say these negative experiences act as a powerful deterrent to those who would like to return. In a relatively small Irish community with strong and close networks, such as is the case with Leeds, these anecdotes dissuade those who wish to return but may be afraid to take the gamble of swapping a relatively comfortable and stable life in Leeds for the unknown. It is perhaps easier to come to terms with being a young transient migrant leaving Ireland and finding it difficult to settle in England, than being an aged emigrant encountering difficulty settling in one's home-place and being accepted amongst his own people. Some of these scare stories were relayed during the course of the life narratives; notably many were not first-hand accounts, indicating that these tales of bad experiences of return migrants are disseminated throughout Irish networks. Martin told the following tale of his brother's return to Ireland in the early 1980s:

Now, the brother when he moved back...and now I told you well earlier on how he was so much of a rebel and wanted to be...to have the rest of his days in Ireland. When he went home Knock airport was going on at the time and there was a friend of his that he

went to school with that had a lot of machinery on hire to the airport, you know, he had loads of dump-trucks and JCBs and things and when my brother bought this house at home he had promised my brother a job there, he says "I'll give you a job driving some dump-trucks or whatever you want like", but so fair play so that when me brother went home he gave him this job on this brand new dump truck that had come from Sweden, I think, you know, or Holland. And up there, you know he was jusht there three or four weeks when this evening he come to your mans...the subcontractors, that he went to school with, a life long friend and he said "I don't know how I'll tell you this Michael but I've been told by the authorities at the airport if I don't put a local man up in that machine" he says "I'll...they'll off hire all my other machines". So my brother was born in Kilkelly, which was a shtones throw from the airport and he wasn't classed as local because he had been in England all these years. And he had...there was seven of them he had in family and he had just gone home there just three weeks and he was out of a job and he says...I'll always remember my brother saying that "I wouldn't mind but they put a young pup of a lad of sixteen up on that machine that had no family at all and I had seven" and he was out of work for nearly a year and that was hardship and I really...he cried his eyes out, he told me that if he hadn't paid for the house outright, I think he paid about £25,000 for the house, that was in 1981, which was a lot of money in them days, he said he would have caught the next boat back to England. But he had sunk all the money that he had you know into the house and he thought he'd done everything right by he'd have no mortgage, nothing and then that was an awful galling to think that he wasn't accepted you know and him being more Irish than the locals there.

[Martin, b. 1940, Co. Mayo]

This is blatant discrimination which if it were directed at Black or Asian immigrants, Jews or Muslims, or women would receive media attention and be called racial, religious or gender discrimination. There is no such corresponding term for discriminating on account that a local emigrated and returned.

Often as the years pass emigrants feel that they are treated less like a local and more like a relative stranger in their homeplace. In many cases the respondents noted that whilst their treatment was not explicitly different they sensed a distance between themselves and locals. Gráinne noticed this difference:

Once a few years back I was at home, there was some of me cousins were throwing a party. Anyway there was a little kid there going round with sweets and somebody says, you know, "Give the lady from England a sweet!" And I thought is that what I'm known as now – the lady from England, you know, I'm not one of them anymore, it's things like that that sort of hurts me.

BMcG: Do you think that they do treat you a little bit different?

They do, they do, they do I've know it, you know I've noticed all the time, it's not like before, and even before I could go into their houses, I could go into their houses and I would go and put the kettle on myself and sit down and now you sit there waiting you know for them to do everything.

[Gráinne, b. 1945, Co. Mayo]

An anthropological study undertaken by George Gmelch's in the summers of 1977 and 1978 highlighted some of the difficulties faced by return migrants in Ireland; Gmelch's team interviewed a sample of 606 migrants in eight counties along the western seaboard of Ireland. The evidence collected suggested that readjustment can be difficult; during their first year back in Ireland 51% of the returnees were

dissatisfied with life and would have been happier had they not returned, at the end of the second year 21% still regretted the decision to return.²⁶ Among those who were more than five years returned 17% were dissatisfied or maladjusted; this figure does not include the estimated 5-10% who were so disillusioned that they had re-emigrated.²⁷ Although Martin admits that his brother eventually settled in, he adds that the initial difficulties his brother encountered would deter him from following in his elder sibling's footsteps:

So he's doing all right but there was hardship at the first. So that would always put me off, it put me off going you know when I heard how he. If I won the lottery, yes, it's a great place if you're not relying because after a couple of weeks you know they're saying "Well when are you going back?" They have a saying there that's it all right if you're given work or employing people but if you go there looking for work you're a little bit of an outcast really. It's only the people that have been and gone there, that can tell you this, you know.

[Martin, b. 1940, Co. Mayo]

And Martin's brother's troubles didn't end there, his memories of a rose-tinted rural Ireland, however sanitised, were soon shattered:

And then through the heels of that they were there only a month or two when the car broke down and it was English car they had brought home with them, it was a big Vauxhall Victor or something, I don't know, it was a huge big Vauxhall and anyways they had sent to England for a part and they said it would take a month to six weeks for this part to come, you know, so anyways he often told me how himself and the wife had to walk in and out to town, a mile and a half from Ballyhaunis out and carry for the whole family twelve pints of milk, all the groceries, you know a hundred and odd pounds of money of groceries, for you know for them and what he found mosht heartbreaking was he was remember[ing] the days when you know when he was a young lad there that every car would shtop and give you a lift you know what I mean an' I seen in the old Ford Popular that the boot then used to fold back down outwards that they often put a bicycle on that you know if somebody was on a bike they'd even give a pershon on a bike a ride put the bike on the back lid of the boot on the old Ford Popular car and give them a lift. And he, he had that image of Ireland you see, he had forgotten the 24 years that he'd been away how much that Ireland had changed you see, he only seen it while he was on holidays but never stayed long enough to see the big change that had happened and he said that really opened his eyes to the change to the Ireland that he thought it was to the Ireland that it had become you know so.

[Martin, b. 1940, Co. Mayo]

Often return migrants err in their expectations about their home-place and in many ways Martin's brother's difficulties are typical of those facing every return emigrant. They often expect Ireland to be the Ireland of their holidays, when people make time to greet you, a fuss is made and everyone is pleased to see you. Often emigrants don't take into account that vast changes have taken place in their absence; they all too often expect to return to '*the traditional, close-knit, folk society of memory*'.²⁸

Edward also recalls a story told to him by an Irish friend in England who had returned to Ireland with his wife because she suffered from asthma and a doctor had advised him to take her out of Leeds:

He was from the country but thought well I got a better chance of getting a job in Dublin 'an he went home and he got a place to live an' he went for a job and this fella said, "Have you got Oirish cards?" "Oh" he said, "No! I have been in England and I've got English ones so you know." He said, "Well when you get them come back here." Anyway it took him a couple of days and this bloke wasn't there, a bloke said he's not in today. So he went in the next day and he said "Look you told me to" and he said "Blow" he said, "we've enough trouble trying to get work for us own Oirish lads without yous comin' from England and expecting to get jobs". He said "I did'nt know who I belonged to then, you know, the Oirish didn't want me and I certainly wasn't English". So he come back to Leeds.

[Edward, *b.* 1933, Dublin]

These types of tales act a deterrent to those who are considering returning home, in the same way as information from England by way of letters, emigrants returned on holidays and word of mouth enticed many to leave Irish shores. Thomas is also very aware that Irish return migrants, their English-born wives and children are not always welcomed with open arms:

I've always been treated fine, you know, I'm not looked upon, you know, as a blow-in or a stranger or whatever you know, maybe its only because I'm a holiday-maker; you know I have heard stories of people goin' back to live in Ireland and they get a hard time sometimes, especially if they're non-Irish, yeah, it can be particularly in rural areas, small villages and so on it can be, I think it can be hard to be accepted, you know because your perceived as an outsider. I'm not saying you'll get hassle but you won't be quite as warmed to shall we say as if you were a local, you know. And maybe that's natural, that probably happens in every country in the world particularly in rural areas.

[Thomas, *b.* Dublin, 1941]

In consequence of these types of negative experiences, some are apprehensive about a return and this sentiment was transmitted during the course of the life narrative interviews. Although Conal, originally from Donegal, was the youngest person and most recent of the respondents to leave Ireland (1978), he feels that he has been away from home too long and isn't willing to take the chance of returning and not settling:

I'm not sure I'd cope I'm that long gone now, I mean this is my home now, this is. I'm too long gone, I've lived in this country man and boy and worked it. I'm afraid if I go back I won't settle down over there.

[Conal, *b.* 1962, Co. Donegal]

Owen's comment suggests that he too is aware that after spending many years away the returned emigrant is not always welcome home:

When you come over here you jusht, you don't lose track of Ireland but when you spend so many years here, you don't really want to go back, you know...A lot of them doesn't want you back anyway.

[Owen, *b.* 1943, Co. Mayo]

Again Martin recalls that not only was his brother not initially accepted as a local amongst the people had been reared amongst but his children's Irish identity was the source of ridicule by fellow schoolchildren. The irony was that Martin's brother had returned with his children to Ireland so that they would be brought up in an Irish environment and not marry into English blood:

He didn't want the girls to be marrying English like George or Sid was English like. And that was it like. And he couldn't stand that like so that's why he went home. And I had to laugh like ya know... Anyway they bought this house and went home and everything and they went to school there. There was one of them just like out of school age and there was four more going to school and they were called tan bastards at school [laughs]. And that was like a red rag to a bull to me brother because he went home to be Irish and he was more rebel than the local lads at home, do you know what I mean? One of them then like a few years later they come over here and then they stayed with me for a few months and got a job like and they had a brogue then you see, do you know, but they were called, somebody called them an Irish bastard. He said to me one day "I don't know what the fuck I am" he says "I was a tan bastard when I was at home and I'm a fucking Irish bastard here" he says [laughs]. There can be nothing more cruel than kids you know.

[Martin, b. 1940, Co Mayo]

As recently as March 2003, an article entitled 'Some families moving back to England again' appeared in the *Western People*; the article reported on a new reverse trend that had been observed by two Mayo-based removals businesses in which a number of families had moved back to England over the course of the previous 12 months:

"We moved two families from the North Mayo area back to Leeds in recent weeks. What happens in some cases is that these people come over here on holiday and think everything in rosy bit it's a different matter when you have to live here. Some of them can't settle, especially when members of their family are over in England".²⁹

Within a week of going to press in Ballina, Co. Mayo, this regional newspaper would have been available from the Leeds Irish Centre and the story would be disseminated amongst the Irish community, which as has been noted has a relatively high Mayo contingency. Undoubtedly, reports such as these do little to encourage migrants to return and heighten the fear of not settling amongst those who would like to return.

To add to these difficulties, it is all too often that only one spouse settles; this can be particularly the case when one spouse is non-Irish. For some the transition is a struggle; Martha's English-born daughter married an Irishman and they returned to live in Mayo:

I don't know whether she settled in or not, she's changed so much, she was a real outgoing young dancing full of fun, when I see her now she looks older than me, she's gone into that dredge of farming and sheep, wellingtons on them and the other women down there don't do it, its only her that does it. She thinks 'cause she's come from England, because she gets them remarks – "Oh, you come over from England" – so I suppose you get it over there the "blow-ins"...she feels that she has to prove that because she from the city that she can do these things 'cause they kept saying "you'll never settle

in here, you'll never settle" so she thinks that she has to do ten times more than the other do.

[Martha, *b.* 1946, Co. Longford]

And there are examples aplenty where an English-born wife (be they of Irish descent or not) returns with her Irish husband but having never experienced rural life or small-town life in Ireland cannot settle.

Gráinne was the only respondent to have returned to live in Ireland who has since re-emigrated; she married a Donegal man in Leeds and in 1976 they and their children moved to Donegal but for one reason or another only stuck it out for seven months:

I would love to go, go back but as I said the family is here so... We did thry it once, we sold up our home in 1976 to go back home to live in Donegal and we were only there about four days when we realised we weren't; it was so different, all me furniture had gone so I stuck it for seven months from September to June and I came back here again... At the time we were having a lot of problems and Andy says if we went to Ireland we'd sort out our problems but we didn't they went worse. I just knew then I couldn't settle. And it twas better for the kids because Deidre she had grumbling appendicitis and she used to be very bad at times and we were in Donegal one night and she got this terrible pain and when we got the doctor to her well I think she says they are ready now you know more or less but they says leave it a few more hours and I'll make Letterkenny aware. But if she gets any worse you've got to make Letterkenny yourself. But we were 17 mile from Letterkenny and all the while I'm thinking all the winding roads, if anything happens I'm taking her and don't get there on time, it'll be my fault if she dies. And I was thinking if we were in Leeds we were within 5 minutes of hospitals. And that was really one of the reasons I came back again. You've better facilities here. You really have. When my kids went to school over there, when they went back from here and went to school there, they were so far advanced in the school... the year they went into for their age and they thought they were brilliant. They actually now when I go home they still say we've got your Sinead's writing, we've still got your Sinead's essays there in the thing. It was more or less for the hospitals and stuff that I came back. And for to work, because obviously I couldn't work with the three of them at home whereas here you have every help for working in the thing. And unless you have transport in Ireland, I think if you're in the outlying places you're stuck, you really are. So it was buses and everything here, it's so good.

[Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo]

Perceptions of differences in health, housing, education and social welfare conditions can influence the prospective return migrant's decision not to move home. The following extracts highlight that there are differing perceptions amongst the Irish community in Leeds of benefits between Ireland and England.

But they seem to be better off over there [in Ireland] now, money wise and everything because this O'Leary... I was talking to him about it comparing pensions and all that and I have a good pension, don't get me wrong, I have about a hundred and seventy odd a week here... I think the only difference is that we have better medical care here.

[Liam, *b.* 1934, Co. Wexford]

I could go home [to Ireland] in the morning but I wouldn't get the same allowances as I'm getting here, I wouldn't get the same money. And then you'd be kinda out on a limb, there'd be no shops near ya, and I'm not a good walker now, and there'd be no hospitals

near ya and I'd have to go to the hospital fairly regular for check-up and you know this diabetes carry-on. So it's good as it is, d'ya know, I'm happy enough as it is. Yeah. I'm lonesome you know, I'd like to be at home if I had the same concessions as I have over here but you know I wouldn't get them.

[Owen, *b.* 1943, Co. Mayo]

Inasmuch as the improved changes in Ireland's economy can influence the decision to make the move home, changes in Irish society since the time of the emigrant's departure can also dissuade the prospective return migrant. During the course of the interviews most respondents recognised that Ireland is economically unrecognisable from the one they left behind; however, they were quick to make note of other less desirable changes in Irish society:

I think the friendliness isn't as good as when we were young. But then again you could trust everybody, you left your doors open you left everything opened, its like everywhere now, you can't. So you've got to be careful all the time.

[Gráinne, *b.* 1945, Co. Mayo]

I think I might have a job settling [in Ireland] now, I think it wouldn't be as easy now, I haven't tried it but you'd have to give it a try to see but I don't think it would be as easy, I mean people are not as friendly as they used to be in Ireland they say, that's what they say, especially in the city, I think there wouldn't be much difference from here.

[Jeremiah, *b.* 1932, Co. Monaghan]

The respondents are only too aware of changes in Irish society, arguably more so because they have left the country. Increased violence on Irish streets, high rates of suicide amongst Irish youths, the number of deaths on Irish roads, gangland killings and the drug culture in Ireland are all causes for concern amongst Irish emigrants. In consequence, emigrants may believe that Ireland is a less desirable destination to retire to.

Conclusion

The consensus of the respondents appeared to be that although they desire, or had at some point in their lives desired, to return home, they have come to accept that the move is unlikely ever to be realised. During the course of the life narratives they highlighted an array of diverse push and pull factors which have affected their final decisions with regards to permanent return. These include:

The push to return to Ireland

- Loneliness or deprivation in Leeds.
- Hardship or emotional difficulties whilst in Leeds.
- Negative feelings for England/Leeds.

- Never 'settled' in Leeds.
- Desire to end ones days in Ireland.

The pull to return to Ireland

- Economic improvement in Ireland.
- Positive feelings of Ireland.
- Nostalgic memories of Ireland.
- Family/friends/support network in Ireland.
- Perceptions of better health, housing, education and social welfare conditions in Ireland.

The pull to stay in Leeds

- 'Settled' in Leeds.
- Family in England.
- Perceptions of better health, housing, education and social welfare conditions in England.

The push to stay away from Ireland

- Sold family land/home in Ireland
- No family in Ireland.
- Negative memories of Ireland or negative experiences on visits home.
- Negative attitude towards Ireland.
- Negative attitudes of Irish towards returned emigrants.
- Anecdotal evidence of the above.
- Changes in Ireland since emigrant's departure.
- Cost of returning (land, housing, exchange rate, etc.).

Consequently it may be seen that the prospective return migrant must consider a range of complex factors which make the decision to remain in Leeds or to relocate to Ireland a difficult one. Since the vast majority of respondents interviewed during the course of this study are still resident in Leeds, the push factors to stay away from Ireland or the pull factors to stay in Leeds may be greater for the sample.

In the following transcript Thomas articulates his many reasons for not returning permanently to Ireland, providing present and past restraints:

I thought about it [returning home permanently] Brendan, but realistically I can't, not now, I'm too old to find a job, I don't have enough money to buy a house, you know, I don't have the resources really unless I won the national lottery or something stupid, it wouldn't be feasible and even then I'm not sure I would; I think if I was fortunate enough to have money I think what I'd do, because my daughter's here and my two brothers, and all my close friends, I would still live in England but I would have a holiday home in Ireland and I'd probably spend, you know, three or four months of the year in Ireland but have my home address here; you know so I'd flip between the two countries possibly, you know, because I love to go over, I love Ireland anyway and I also have got loads of relations an' I've always been on good terms with me cousins and so on you know so there's that, there's that connection as well, there's family connection as well, you know, so, but going to live permanently I suppose if I was goin' to do that Brendan I'd have done it years ago, you know. At the times when I could have done it there was other things keeping me back, such as me marriage, and me parents being here an' stuff like that, you know there's always a reason, you know, not to do it, you know, so in a way it's a kind of a, a kind of a dream that, that realistically I'll probably never fulfil.

[Thomas, b. Dublin, 1941]

Thomas' words ring true for many emigrants, for many there is, or has been, the desire to return to Ireland but familial commitments meant that the return was postponed. Although, in the 1970s Ireland economic climate was such that permanent return was a feasible option for migrants, the 1980s were characterised above all by high rates of unemployment and emigration. The phenomenal economic boom witnessed in Ireland from the mid-1990s has at the same time made the country both attractive and inaccessible for many would-be return migrants. Escalating property prices can mean that only those who were shrewd with their earnings could afford to return.

Due to the fact that many emigrants saw their move to England as being non-permanent they consequently never fully settled into English society. One could argue that many were working towards the provision of an ideal life back in Ireland. People are only too aware of the stories of those who returned to find themselves as 'blow-ins' in their own homeplace or those who for a variety of reasons couldn't settle. These personal or anecdotal accounts appear to have a significant effect on the prospective return migrant.

In truth many Irish emigrants wish to go home but in reality familial and economic circumstances are such that the majority are unlikely ever to return permanently; as one respondent noted astutely: '*there's always a reason not to do*

it',³⁰

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ Enda Delaney, *Demography, State & Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-71*, 2000, p. 160.
- ² Enda Delaney, 'Placing Postwar Irish Migration to Britain in a Comparative European Perspective, 1945-1981', in Andy Bielenberg (ed.), *The Irish Diaspora*, 2000, p. 344.
- ³ Enda Delaney, 'Placing Postwar Irish Migration to Britain in a Comparative European Perspective, 1945-1981', in Andy Bielenberg (ed.), *The Irish Diaspora*, 2000, p. 335.
- ⁴ Muhammad Anwar, *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain*, 1979, p. 21.
- ⁵ *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, para. 274, p. 128.
- ⁶ J. A. Jackson, *Report on the Skibbereen Social Survey*, p. 40.
- ⁷ Anthony Richmond, *Migration and race relation in an English city: a study of Bristol*, 1973, pp. 244-5 noted in Enda Delaney, *Demography, State & Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-71*, 2000, p. 271.
- ⁸ Enda Delaney, 'Placing Postwar Irish Migration to Britain in a Comparative European Perspective, 1945-1981', in Andy Bielenberg (ed.), *The Irish Diaspora*, 2000, p. 350.
- ⁹ P. J. Drudy, 'Migration between Ireland and Britain since Independence', in P. J. Drudy (ed.), *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain Since 1922*, 1986, p. 117.
- ¹⁰ Donal Garvey, 'The History of Migration Flows in the Republic of Ireland', *Population Trends*, no. 39, 1985, p. 25.
- ¹¹ Enda Delaney, 'Placing Postwar Irish Migration to Britain in a Comparative European Perspective, 1945-1981', in Andy Bielenberg (ed.), *The Irish Diaspora*, 2000, p. 344.
- ¹² Enda Delaney, 'Placing Postwar Irish Migration to Britain in a Comparative European Perspective, 1945-1981', in Andy Bielenberg (ed.), *The Irish Diaspora*, 2000, p. 344.
- ¹³ Roger Swift, 'The historiography of the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain', in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish Worldwide. Volume 2: The Irish in the New Communities*, 1992, p. 53; Liam Ryan, 'Irish Emigration to Britain Since World War II', in Richard Kearney (ed.), *Migrations: The Irish at Home and Abroad*, 1990, p. 49; P. J. Drudy, 'Migration between Ireland and Britain since Independence', in P. J. Drudy (ed.), *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain Since 1922*, 1986, pp. 116-7.
- ¹⁴ Enda Delaney, *Demography, State & Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-71*, 2000, pp. 8-9.
- ¹⁵ Joe Horgan, 'Irish I', *The Irish Post*, no date.
- ¹⁶ Seán Duffy (ed.), *Atlas of Irish History*, 2000, p.120.
- ¹⁷ Seán Duffy (ed.), *Atlas of Irish History*, 2000, p.124.
- ¹⁸ Nessa Winston, *The Return of Older Irish Emigrants: An assessment of needs and issues*, 2002, p. 3.
- ¹⁹ John Healy, *No-one Shouted Stop! (Formerly Death of an Irish Town)*, 1988, p. 71.
- ²⁰ Mission Statement of the Safe-Home Programme, (<http://www.safehomeireland.com>). Accessed 15/02/04.
- ²¹ Mission Statement of the Safe-Home Programme, (<http://www.safehomeireland.com>). Accessed 15/02/04.

²² Dr. Jerry Cowley, 'The 'Safe-Home' Programme: Programme Origins', (<http://www.saint-brendans.com>). Accessed 15/02/04.

²³ (<http://www.safehomeireland.com>) Accessed 15/02/04.

²⁴ Letter entitled 'Coming Home? – Are you sure?' sent to respondent from St. Brendan's Village Project, Mulranny, Co. Mayo. See Appendix D: 3.

²⁵ Arnold Schrier, *Ireland and the American Emigration, 1850-1950*, 1970, p. 143.

²⁶ George Gmelch, 'The readjustment of return migrants in western Ireland', in Russell King (ed.), *Return Migration and Regional Economic Problems*, 1986, p. 156.

²⁷ George Gmelch, 'The readjustment of return migrants in western Ireland', in Russell King (ed.), *Return Migration and Regional Economic Problems*, 1986, p. 163.

²⁸ George Gmelch, 'The readjustment of return migrants in western Ireland', in Russell King (ed.), *Return Migration and Regional Economic Problems*, 1986, p. 162.

²⁹ *Western People*, 12/03/2003.

³⁰ Thomas, *b.* Dublin, 1941.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONCLUSION

Taking a broad canvas like 'the Irish in Britain', one must be aware a) just how broad it is, and b) how many shades of light and darkness, how many brushstrokes one will encounter: for every view there is a counter-view, for every failure a success, for every heartbreak a triumph. All make up something of a mosaic. All are authentic. Individually, all of them can be misleading.¹

Tim Pat Coogan

Emigration in Ireland is always a deeply emotive subject, touching as it does, at one time or another, almost every family. And indeed Ireland occupies a remarkable place in world migration terms in that, in recent centuries, a considerable proportion of its people have emigrated. It is estimated that, of the 3 million or so Irish citizens abroad, almost 1.2 million were born in Ireland, the equivalent of approximately 30% of the present population.²

Although Irish emigration to Britain in the twentieth century has been significant, little is known about the actual experiences of those who took part in this exodus (apart, perhaps, from overall numbers and their geographical distribution). This study bears testament to this post-independence generation of Irish men and women who left Ireland for Britain and who have often been hidden in historical records.

It would appear that all too often the history of twentieth century emigration from Ireland is written in terms of government reports and census data and that a more obvious source, that of the emigrant's own experience, is often overlooked. In chapter two of this study, it was argued that oral evidence and personal testimony were the best possible sources to elicit social and cultural information about Irish emigrants in Britain. One of the key aims of this study was to look behind the statistics and examine the experience of the Irish in Britain. In examining the personal effects of emigration through the memories of Irish emigrants in Leeds this study has contributed to the understanding of an important theme in both Irish and British social history.

It was shown in chapter three that the Irish are the longest established ethnic community in Leeds. Nonetheless, a literature review highlighted that there is a scarcity of published material on the Irish in Leeds in either the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. Consequently, one of the primary aims of this thesis was to provide a brief overview of

the cultural, social, geographical and historical context of this community from its beginnings in the early 1800s to 1981. This synopsis was divided into pre and post 1931, the former relying on printed sources and the latter drawing on the first hand experiences and memories of emigrants. It was established that there has been a significant Irish community in Leeds since at least the 1820s, and that there has been a continuous influx (varying greatly in magnitude) of Irish immigrants into the city right up until the present. During this time the Irish have made significant contributions to the economic, social, cultural and religious growth of the city. Although the Irish could be found in all parts of Leeds throughout this period two areas in particular emerged as the traditional nuclei of the Irish community: The Bank pre-1931 and Harehills/Chapelton post-1931. These are *the* Irish areas of Leeds in popular memory. In the last century, the 1950s to the 1970s was the heyday of the Irish-born community in Leeds when a constant influx of Irish emigrants ensured a vibrant social and cultural scene.

This study has shown that Leeds is particularly associated with emigrants from the county of Mayo in the minds of the city's Irish population and further to this it is associated with particular areas within Mayo. It was also established in chapter three that although the Irish-born population of Leeds is in decline it would appear at present that in social and cultural terms it is an organised and cohesive community.

In the opening quote Tim Pat Coogan, author and former editor of the *Irish Press*, rightly observes of the Irish in Britain that individual experiences vary enormously; however, in this study a number of key common strands of the emigrant experience were identified from thirty-three life narrative interviews. These were, perhaps obviously, the decision to emigrate, the choice of destination, the initial arrival and adjustment period, post-emigration contact with home and the reasons for or against returning permanently to Ireland. These themes form the crux of the study and were dealt with chapter's four to six of the thesis.

Chapter four, entitled Explaining Emigration, examined the reasons why so many emigrants departed Irish shores in the 'second wave' of emigration (1930s-1970s). The process involved in deciding to emigrate was central to every life narrative because it was a defining moment in the individual's life, which undoubtedly was revisited and reviewed many times by the emigrant. Rarely was the reason for emigration as simple as a dearth

of employment opportunities in Ireland. The only constant in the life narratives was that they had all decided to leave home and emigrate; the narratives highlighted that there was no one reason for deciding to take the boat but that there was a complex variety of interplaying motives that brought about a situation where the person felt it was the least worse choice. Oral evidence attested to the fact that in general male and female emigrants were influenced by different factors: males by a desire to obtain regular employment or to earn better money and females more so by the desire to be self-reliant and independent. These findings are consistent with those of the *Reports of the Commission on Emigration, 1948-54*; this report uses official jargon and speaks in terms of the emigrant's '*natural desire for adventure or change, an eagerness to travel, to see the world and share the enjoyments of modern city life [and] to secure financial independence by having pocket money*'.³ However, the base realities of the period were revealed in the vernacular of the emigrant:

I seen them all comin' home with black fuckin' suits on them and lovely ties, and rakes of money, an' takin' all the women off the young bucks at home – all the lads that had no money – comin' home an' hiring cars out and all this, Jayz shure you'd definitely go.

[Owen, b. 1943, Co. Mayo]

Chapter four also sought to provide reasons why Irish emigrants chose Leeds as a destination. A number of key reasons were highlighted. It was shown that from the late 1930s Leeds was a relatively prosperous city with unemployment remaining significantly below that of other major urban centres in the north of England, notably so in the 1950s and 1960s. Due to this reason the Irish population of Leeds rose by almost 60% between 1951 and 1971. Another reason of some significance is that Leeds had a long-established tradition of Irish settlement which stretched back to at least the early nineteenth century. Moreover from the 1950s particularly, it would appear that the Leeds' Irish-born community, being strengthened in numbers, gradually established a cohesive network and a vibrant social scene. Consequently, the emigrant's transition could be made easier by accessing such a network. Having family, friends or neighbours in Leeds, who could provide practical support in terms of finding accommodation and securing employment, also facilitated the move across the Irish Sea. It is certainly true to say that to a certain extent emigration begot emigration.

Furthermore, chapter four revealed that for Irish emigrants in Leeds first impressions lasted. The dominant first memories of Leeds, some 30 to 60 years later, are of a smoggy, industrialised, filthy and malodorous city.

Not surprisingly, loneliness and homesickness were commonly cited by emigrants as initial problems in England. However, others were so excited by the prospect of urban life that these feelings were delayed, often surfacing on a return trip to England after a visit to Ireland. Another, initial difficulty commonly recalled was the communication barrier erected when two distinct dialects – Yorkshire and Irish – came into contact. Ironically, many of the respondents believed that in Yorkshire they '*weren't speaking English at all*'.⁴

It is significant that only one of those interviewed had experienced anti-Irish racism first hand in Leeds; perhaps because the city had not been a prime target of the IRA. In fact, some respondents made a point of stressing that they have always been treated well in Leeds.

Chapter five (Across the Irish Sea) was concerned with the various ways in which Irish emigrants in Leeds kept in touch with home and to what extent they either maintained or rejected family and community ties with Ireland following emigration. It was shown that the emigrant in England could remain closely connected to their home community whilst away and that significant contact was maintained between Irish emigrants in Leeds and their homeplace. It was shown that postal communication (letters and remittances) and return visits were the main forms of contact with home. Additionally, access to an Irish network (Irish pubs, clubs and the church) and contact with newly arrived emigrants in England were important ways of keeping in touch with home.

The primary finding of chapter five was that life-cycle stages had a profound effect on the emigrant's level of contact with home. In essence the young and single emigrant could better afford to regularly send remittances and return home at least once a year on holiday than those who had married and had started a family in England. Additionally, the death of parents and siblings greatly affected the emigrant's relationship with Ireland and in many cases often signaled a change in visitation patterns.

It was also noted that Ireland was and in most cases still is the primary holiday destination of emigrants and even after many decades living in England that the journey was still referred to as 'going home to Ireland'.

Earlier this year Deputy Pat Rabbitte highlighted to members of Dáil Éireann that Irish emigrants in Britain are '*believed to have remitted, between 1939 and 1969, the sum of £3.5 billion to this country in that period which played a crucial role in sustaining families and communities at a time of dire poverty*'.⁵ Chapter five of this study examined the practice of sending remittances at grass-roots level. It was shown that this practice was long established and widespread and as much a social obligation as an act of kindness; however, it appeared that sending money home was not begrudged by the sender. It was also seen that the sending of large and regular sums of money appeared to have a temporal and circumstantial limitation – if the emigrants reached the 'life-cycle stage' where they married and had children of their own financial priorities changed and the needs of the immediate family generally superceded that of family in Ireland.

Chapter six (Myth of Return) is an examination of this topical issue of return migration. Recently with the establishment of a Task Force on Emigration by Brian Cowen, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the subsequent Task Force Report (published in August 2002) the media spotlight has been turned on Irish emigrants in Britain. Mr. Cowen requested the Task Force to examine in particular three critical areas – pre-departure services for emigrants, services for emigrants abroad and services for those who wished to return to Ireland. Additionally, a *Prime Time* report into the condition of Irish emigrants in cities such as, for example, London and Manchester, which was aired late last year (2003), has highlighted the plight of a portion of the 'forgotten generation'. Although somewhat biased and sentimental, the report raised the awareness of a number of problematic social issues facing elderly Irish emigrants in England. One such issue is return migration; many elderly emigrants desire to return permanently to Ireland. The respondents invariably raised the issue of permanent return to Ireland during their life narratives and a number of common factors as to why they would or wouldn't consider returning to live in Ireland were highlighted. Each respondent provided a complex array of push and pull factors which have affected their final decisions with regards to permanent return. These factors were categorized using the push-pull model of migration,

more commonly used when discussing the initial emigration process. The primary push and pull factors are summarized at the close of chapter six; however, one pull and one push factor stood out as being more significant than the others. The pull to stay in England was most commonly family ties; having settled in England and postponed the return home many Irish emigrants are reluctant to be apart from their children and grandchildren. The push to stay away from Ireland was commonly a fear of not settling which was often fuelled by anecdotes of the bad experiences of other returned emigrants. It was noted that in a relatively small Irish community, such as in Leeds, negative reports of this kind can spread quickly.

However, the closing comment on this issue must be allowed to Thomas whose remark that there was always a reason not to return to Ireland (be they familial, financial or circumstantial) was a most astute observation.⁶

Oral evidence and personal testimony have shown that there was a predominance of emigrants from County Mayo in Leeds. Although, it is impossible to estimate a figure for the number of emigrants from Mayo from oral testimony it is nonetheless a significant finding because it shows that Irish emigrants perceived Leeds as a 'Mayo town'.

Further research:

This study has highlighted that emigrants from particular counties often had a preference for certain destinations. However, the effects which this situation could have upon these Irish communities is an area which it is felt deserves further scrutiny, especially with regards to inter-county rivalry and tension between fellow Irish emigrants.

It has been recognised that Irish emigrants retain a strong attachment to their native county.⁷ Dillon noted that in mid-nineteenth century Leeds there was tension between Irish emigrants from particular counties.⁸ Furthermore, Donall MacAmhlaigh in an autobiographical account of his time spent in Coventry in the 1950s detailed the conflict between the '*Connemara men and the people from Dublin. They've been fighting this many a day*'.⁹ This attachment accounts for the rise of the county association which have been described as the '*most important emigrant organisations*' in twentieth century Britain and America.¹⁰ Keeping with Mayo as the primary example, Mayo Associations were formed in New York and Philadelphia in the 1880s; today there are more than 20

Mayo Associations worldwide, in cities such as, for example, New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Toronto, Sydney, London, Manchester, Coventry and not forgetting Leeds.

The fact that Leeds had a strong Mayo contingency was beneficial for fellow Mayo emigrants in terms of securing employment and socializing; undoubtedly this encouraged further emigration from Mayo to Leeds and strengthened ties between the two communities. The flip side of course is that this domination could also pose problems for Irish emigrants who weren't from Mayo. Gráinne, from Mayo, recalls that:

There is a lot of people didn't like the Dubliners, they did not like Dublin. When I came over here first you'd hear people in the Shamrock at the dances saying the Dublin Jackeens they'd be calling them an' no they didn't like them...and if anyone ever dared to go into the Mayo's and Donegal's area, that was it, they were "this is our area, you get out of it".

[Gráinne, b. 1945, Co. Mayo]

And Thomas, being from Dublin, recalled feeling marginalized amongst the Irish in Leeds:

I mean the Irish community in Leeds was predominantly from Mayo, right? More than any other county so you know I must have known the name of every town in Mayo. And I did notice there was a kind of discrimination against you if you weren't from Mayo, yeah? That *did* exist.

BMcG: And what way do you think that manifested itself?

Oh, I don't mean in a nasty way particularly but you were kind of excluded, you know, to a certain degree. The Mayo people tended to be, or they were perceived to be kind of clannish, yeah? They were more interested in, you know, their own kind. And maybe I felt it because I was a Dubliner, as well you know. I remember there used to be an old Irish club in Leeds called the Irish National Club, and it closed down in about 1969 and they built the new Irish Centre and that opened in 1970 and this may have been partly imagination but I kinda got the impression that if you weren't from Mayo or the west of Ireland anyway you weren't quite as welcome in the Irish Centre. Nothing was ever said directly like that, but you did get a few kind of sneers or you know kind of implied that you weren't so welcome. Partly it could have been imagination but I don't think it was fully that, you know, you *did* get that kind of an impression. There wasn't that many Dublin people in this town, there still isn't, you know, its not a place where masses of Dublin people came to, you know, so there was kind of that, you were a Jackeen you know what I mean and that was it. It wasn't all that serious but there was a hint of that shall we say.

[Thomas, b. 1941, Dublin]

It is perhaps unsurprising to learn that such a strong identification with ones native county often resulted in inter-county conflict and rivalry. This could be manifested in a number of ways. Liam recalls that there was much inter-county discrimination in Leeds particularly in the workplace; he clearly remembers a situation in which a group of Mayomen would not employ a close acquaintance:

They wouldn't give him the start, they had the work but they wouldn't give him a job, oh they were very clickish was the Mayo...they had the upper hand all the way the Mayo lads, they definitely had...

[Liam, b. 1934, Co. Wexford]

One respondent Austin attributed the strong sense of homeplace amongst those emigrants from Mayo to their anthem – the song 'Boys from the County Mayo' – which was to be regularly heard in the public houses of Leeds. It was not uncommon to hear from male respondents that they secured employment in Leeds via a townie or a fellow countyman and also it was a common complaint that countymen tended to hire fellow countymen, particularly in the building trade.

Moreover in sport and romance tensions could run high between fellow emigrants. Martin recalls that Huddersfield tended to attract emigrants from the Gaeltacht regions of counties Kerry and Galway and that Gaelic football matches were regularly played between emigrants from Huddersfield and Leeds:

So I used to play football up at Halton Moor, you see, Gaelic football on a Sunday and we used to play Huddersfield and there used to be hard games between Huddersfield and Leeds 'cause there was an awful lot of needle like ya know. And none of the Huddersfield lads liked you taking a girl, a Leeds lad taking a girl from Huddersfield. Oh Jesus you was...oh they'd, they'd kill ya.

[Martin, b. 1940, Co. Mayo]

Another interesting point which came to light during the course of this study is that many of the male respondents remarked that they preferred to work for English rather than Irish construction companies in England because they were often more professional and treated their workers with more respect. It was not uncommon to hear remarks such as '*your own was the worst*' with regards to working in England.

Rivalry and conflict between fellow Irishmen in England or between those from one county and another in certain English cities has received little academic attention. This is an interesting theme and deserves further scrutiny but is beyond the scope of a study of this size.

The Irish-born population of Leeds is in gradual decline, falling from 7,563 persons in 1981 to just 5,685 in 2001. In the current Irish economic climate it is difficult to imagine an emigrant exodus of the scale of the 1950s. Consequently, it seems unlikely that the city will again witness an influx of Irish immigrants it seen in the mid-nineteenth or mid-twentieth centuries and thus a two hundred year tradition has been broken. It remains to be seen to what extent the sons and daughters of Irish emigrants in Leeds keep in contact with their ancestral homeland and the degree to which they celebrate their identity.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Tim Pat Coogan, *Wherever Green is Worn: The Story of the Irish Diaspora*, 2000, p. 135.

² Statement by Mr. Brian Cowen T.D., Minister for Foreign Affairs, 27/01/04.
<<http://foreignaffairs.gov.ie/information/display.asp?ID=1422>> Accessed 29/07/04.

³ *Reports of the Commission of Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-54*, para. 305, p. 138.

⁴ Thomas, *b.* 1941, Dublin.

⁵ <<http://debates.oireachtas.ie/DDebate.aspx?F=DAL20040128.xml&Ex=1441>> Accessed 29/07/04.

⁶ Thomas, *b.* Dublin, 1941.

⁷ Mary E. Daly, 'The County in Irish History', in Mary E. Daly (ed.), *County and Town: One Hundred Years of Local Government in Ireland*, winter 1999, p. 1.

⁸ T. Dillon, 'The Irish in Leeds, 1851-61', *The Thoresby Miscellany*, vol. 16, 1979, 15.

⁹ Donall Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navy: The diary of an exile*, 2003, p. 51.

¹⁰ Mary E. Daly, 'The County in Irish History', in Mary E. Daly (ed.), *County and Town: One Hundred Years of Local Government in Ireland*, winter 1999, p. 1.

APPENDIX A:

MAPS



Fig. 1: Ireland and the United Kingdom



Fig. 2: Counties of England. The former Metropolitan County of West Yorkshire is highlighted.



Fig. 3: West Yorkshire with Main Urban Centres.



Fig. 4: The former Metropolitan County of West Yorkshire incorporating the Metropolitan Districts of Leeds, Wakefield, Kirklees, Calderdale and Bradford.

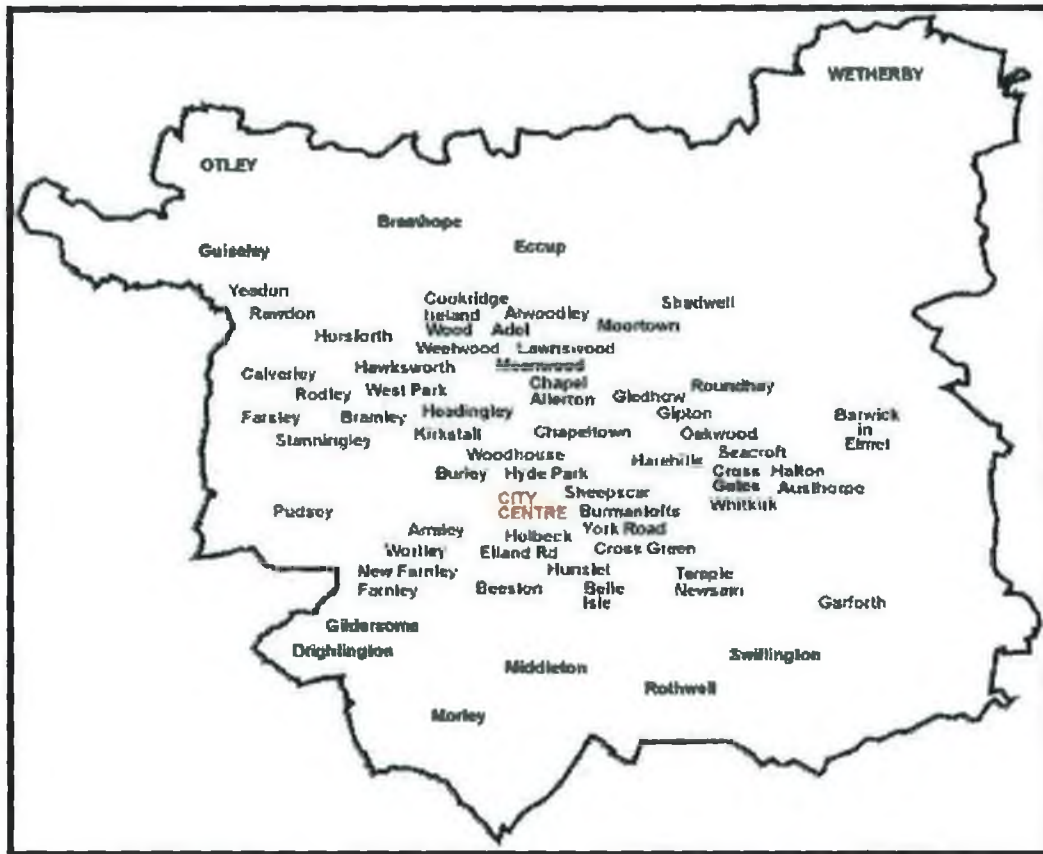


Fig. 5: Areas and Districts of Modern Leeds.



Fig. 6: Modern City Centre of Leeds with main streets marked.

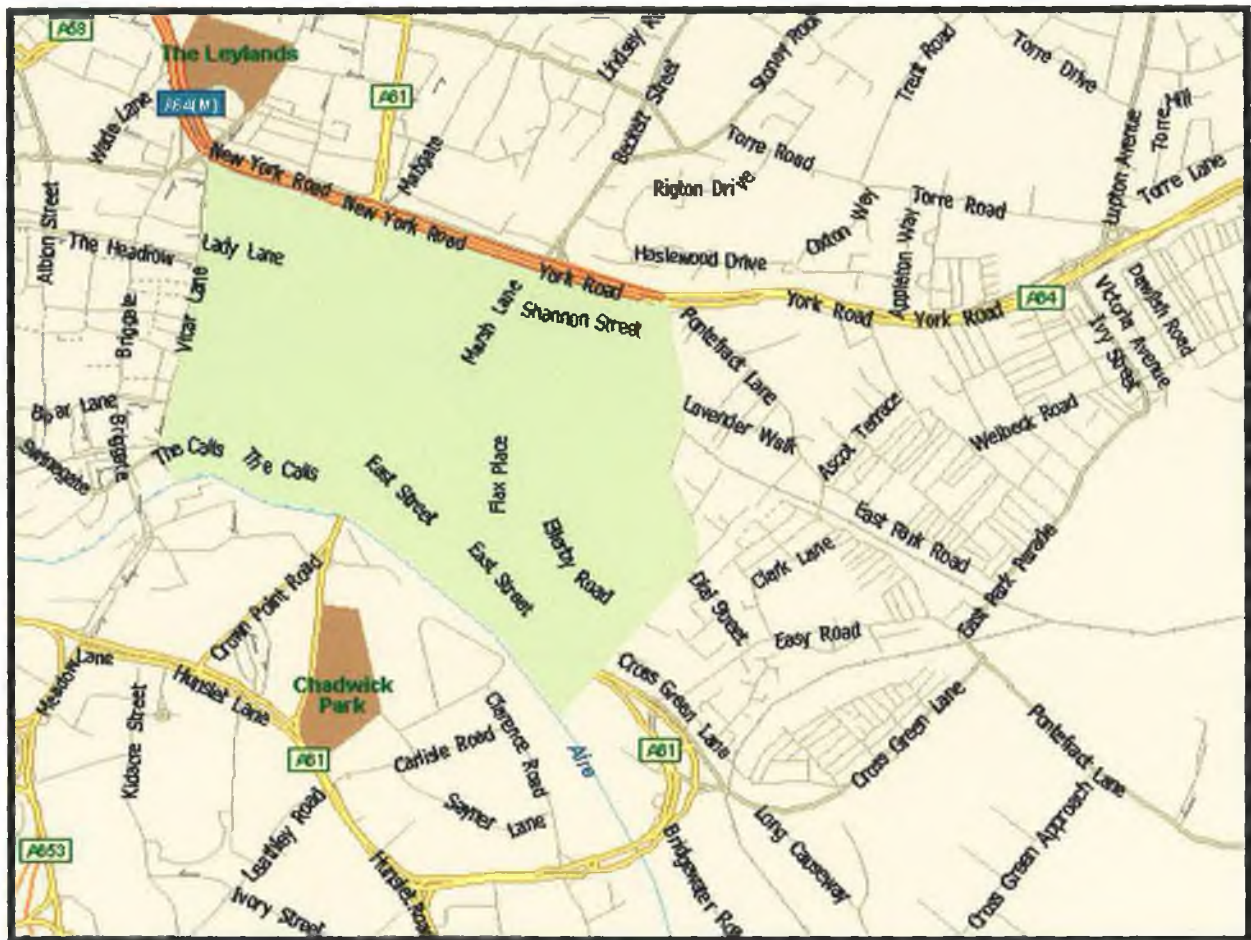


Fig. 7: Modern Map of Leeds. The Bank & Kirkgate [highlighted in green, to the east of and adjoining the city centre,] was the core of the Irish community from the 1840s to the 1930s. It consisted of an area roughly enclosed by York Road to the north, the River Aire to the south, Ellerby Lane to the east and Vicar Lane to the west. The Leylands [to the north west of the Bank] was synonymous with Jewish community at the turn of the twentieth century.

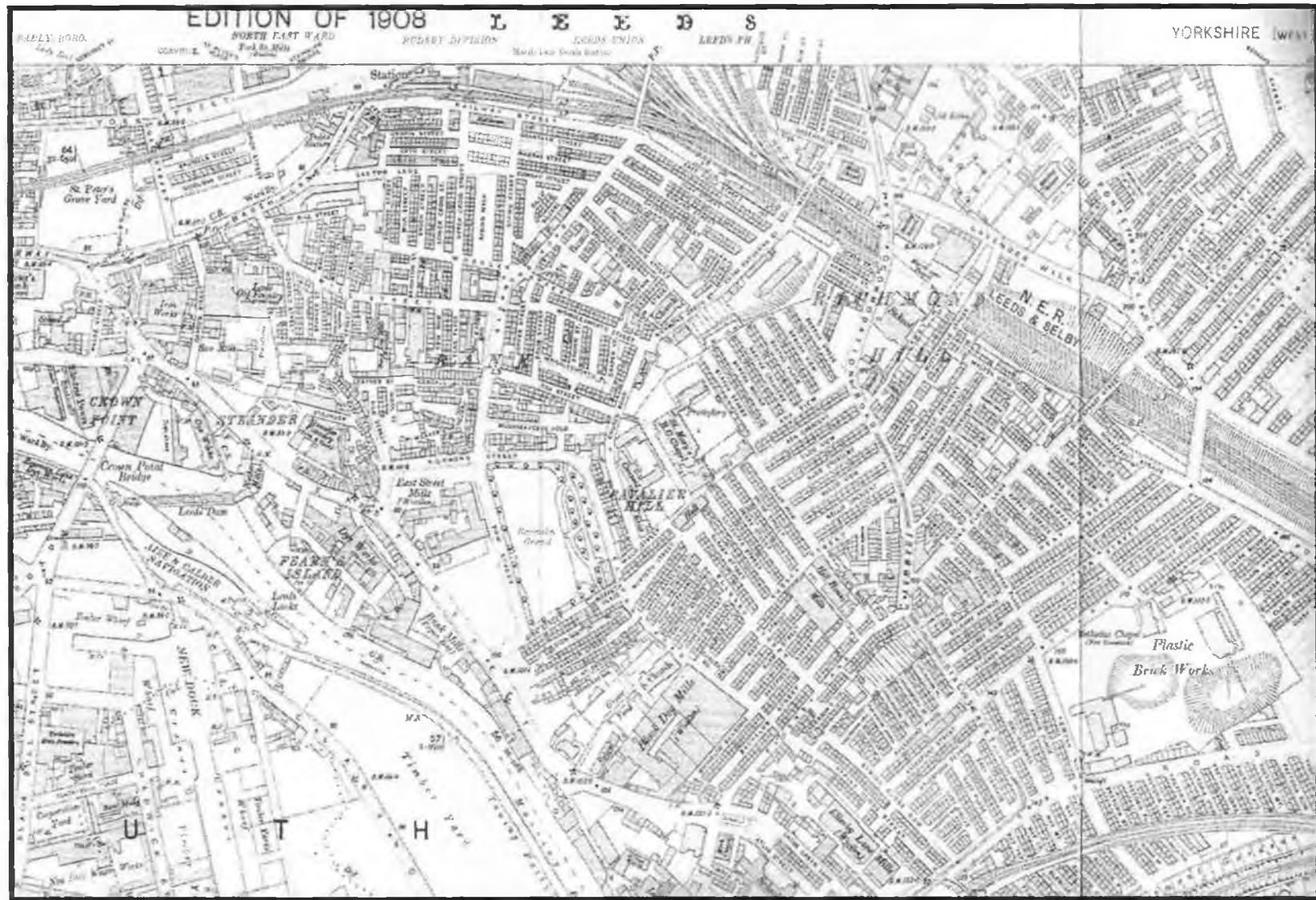


Fig. 8: Detailed Map of The Bank & Richmond Hill, Leeds, 1908. Mount Saint Mary's is located in the centre of the map. Note the numerous mills, foundries and works in the area. O.S. Map, South Leeds, Yorkshire Sheet 218.06. Consett: Alan Godfrey Maps, 2001.

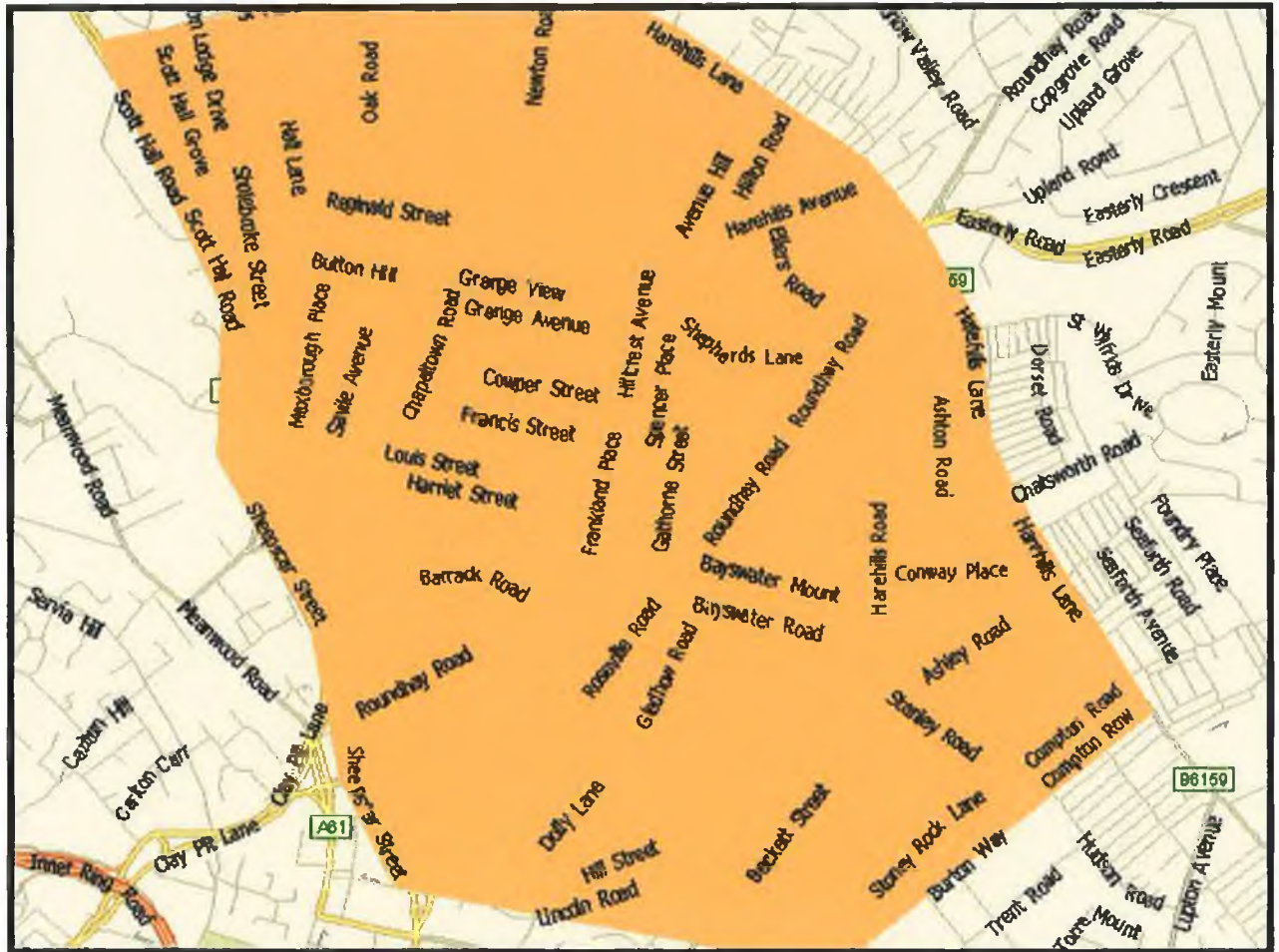


Fig. 9: Modern Map of Leeds. The core of the Irish community [highlighted in brown, to the north-east of and adjoining the city centre] from the 1940s to the 1970s consisted of an area roughly incorporating the districts of Harehills, Chapeltown, Burmantofts and Sheepscar.

APPENDIX B:
PHOTOGRAPHS & IMAGES

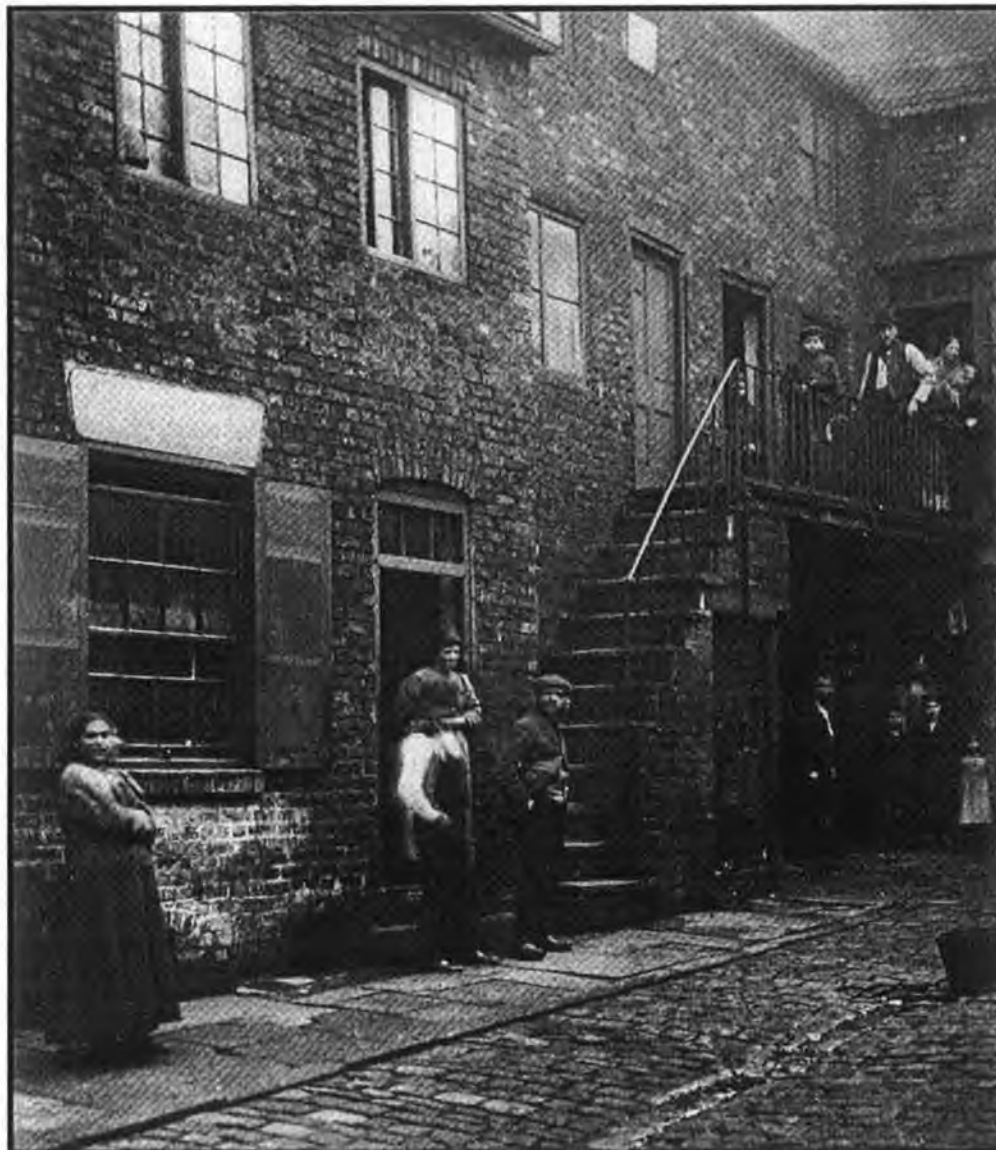


Plate 1: Baxter's Yard, Quarry Hill, late 1800s.

Baxter's Yard had a high density of Irish emigrants and was one of the most notorious streets in Victorian Leeds. In 1861, number 1-13 Baxter's Yard contained Irish inhabitants.

Leeds City Libraries, Dept. of Leisure Services



Plate 2: Dufton Yard, off Somerset Street, near Lady Beck, late 1800s.

Another street with a high Irish concentration in Victorian times which was frequently castigated by critics. In 1861, numbers 1-3, 5-11, 14-18 and 20-25 Dufton Yard contained Irish inhabitants.

Leeds City Libraries, Dept. of Leisure Services



Plates 3 & 4: No. 5 Copper Street, The Bank, 1898.

View of number 5 Copper Street, which was situated in the heart of the Bank. These working class houses were built in the early 1800s for those who worked in the nearby mills, foundries and factories. The house consists of two storeys with a cellar, the window of which can be seen at pavement level. There are wooden shutters to lower window. In an attempt to improve sanitation the adjoining property has been demolished and a block of outside has been built in its stead; the gable end has also been renovated.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



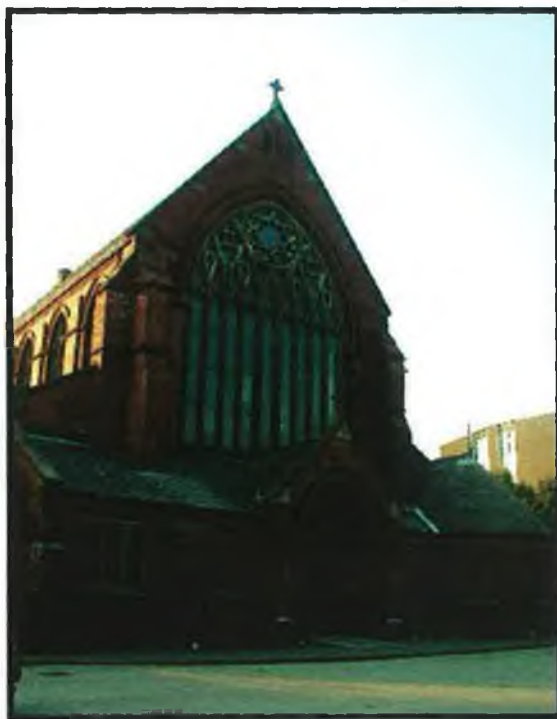
Plate 5: Copper Street, The Bank, 1898.

Copper Street was situated off Wheeler Street in the Bank area of York Road. Along with Brass, Foundry, Plaid, Leather, Wool, Silk, Flax, Weaver, Mill, etc. the street names reflected the industries of the area. These houses were erected in the 1840s. The area was densely populated, with a large number of Irish emigrants living in appalling conditions, over 1,000 people died of cholera in the epidemic of 1849. Visited by Frederick Engels, he later wrote in *The Conditions of the Working Class in England* that the Bank had '*drainless streets, mud a foot thick, cellars which were seldom dry*'; in this view the unmade roads can be seen.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



**Plate 6: York Road & St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, Burmantofts, 2003.
Brendan McGowan**



**Plate 7:
St. Patrick's Roman
Catholic Church,
Burmantofts, 2003.**

Brendan McGowan



Plate 8: Interior View, Mount Saint Mary's Church, The Bank, Leeds, 1936.

Built in the 1850s to serve the Irish community of the area. Closed in 1989.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



**Plate 9:
Interior, Mount Saint
Mary's Church, The Bank,
1905.**

Postcard View of Interior.

**Local Studies Department,
Leeds City Library**



Plate 10:
Mount Saint Mary's
Church, The Bank, 2003.
The school may be seen to
the left of the church and
the convent to the right.
Brendan McGowan

Plate 11:
Exterior View, Mount Saint
Mary's Church, The Bank,
2003.

The Church was closed in
1989, was stripped of its
artefacts and as may be seen
from this photograph is in need
of restoration for any
alternative use.

Brendan McGowan

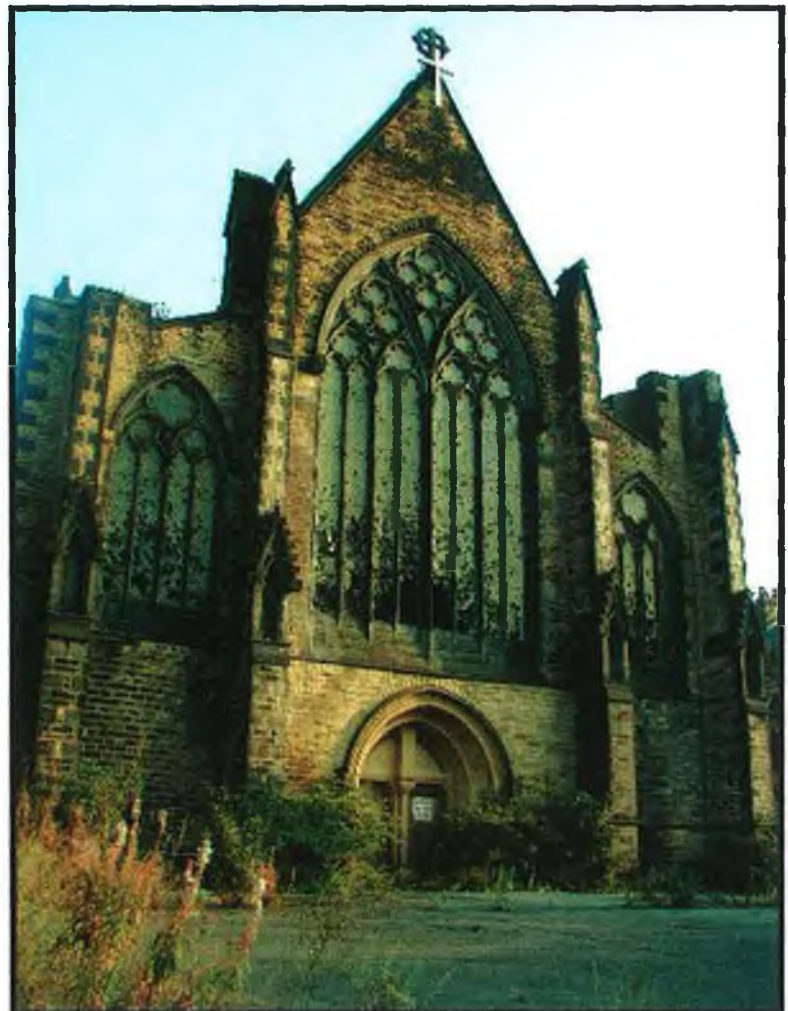




Plate 12:
Leeds Union
Workhouse, Beckett
Street, 1858.
Early Photograph
of the newly built
workhouse, which
later became part of
St. James Hospital.
Local Studies
Department,
Leeds City Library

Plate 13:
St. James Hospital, Beckett
Street, undated.

Exterior view of the main
entrance of St. James's
University Hospital. Built
in 1858-61 as Leeds Union
Workhouse, this became the
Ashley wing of the hospital
before being converted to its
present use as the Thackray
Medical Museum.

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Leeds City Library





Plate 14: Beth Hamedrash Hagodel Synagogue, Back Nile Street, The Leylands, 1908.

View looking towards a clothing factory on Brunswick Row, which fronted onto North Street. The Leylands area had a high concentration of Jewish immigrants. This synagogue was built to provide for the spiritual needs of this community and opened in 1908, shortly before the photograph was taken. It closed in 1936 on moving to Newton Park, Chapeltown. By the 1920s, the Jewish population were dispersing from the Leylands area, many moving to Chapeltown and Moortown.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 15: Bridge Street (between North Street and Regent Street), the Leylands, c. 1900.

The shop names, those of Cohen and Kelly, show that though this was predominantly a Jewish area, the Irish were also present.

Leeds City Libraries, Dept. of Leisure Services



Plate 16: Aerial View, Leeds City Centre, 1938.

The view looks in an easterly direction along The Headrow towards the Quarry Hill flats [middle background] where the main entrance block of Oastler House is under construction. The Quarry Hill flats were constructed on the site of the city's most notorious Victorian slums and were to house over 3,000 people. To the right of the flats is the new York Road with the Eastgate roundabout directly in front. The Municipal buildings and the Town Hall dominate the middle foreground. The Civic Hall and Leeds General Infirmary are visible in the left foreground of the photograph. Irish emigrants, particularly those who came directly from the Western Seaboard, were overwhelmed on arrival in this ultramodern city.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 17: Leeds Town Hall, The Headrow, 1932.

Junction with Cookridge Street and Park Row. Road widening in progress. Leeds Town Hall in centre, opened by Queen Victoria in 1858. To the right, Municipal buildings built to house Leeds municipal services. It now holds the Leeds Central Library and Art Gallery. In the left foreground on the junction with Park Row, a newspaper seller has flyers for the *Evening News* on the railings with the headline: 'Leeds bus crashes in fog, two persons injured'. Note the discolouring of the buildings from industrial pollution. Note the smoke blackened Town Hall.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 18: City Square, 1931.

A view of City Square showing buses, trams, cars and a horse & cart travelling along Wellington Street. The statue of the Black Prince and the Mill Street Chapel can also be clearly seen.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 19: Victoria Arcade, The Headrow, 1930.

On the left is number 75, Shipman's hosiery shop. In the centre, Victoria Arcade, designed in 1898 and named for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. It was L-shaped and connected the Headrow with Lands Lane. On the right, Schofield's store, opened in 1901.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 20: Lewis's Store, The Headrow, 1934.

The view looks across the junction with New Briggate. The Odeon Cinema is to the right. Lewis's store then one of the largest buildings to be built in the North of England. Work began in 1930, it was opened in 1932 but was not fully completed until 1939, when three more floors had been added. On the front of the store is an appeal for funds for Leeds General Infirmary. Leeds Town Hall can be seen on the far left.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 21: Burton Tailors, Briggate no's 42-44, 1938.

This photograph shows the various amenities which Leeds had to offer: clothes store, billiard hall, hotel and café. From the left: Burtons Arcade or previously known as the George and Dragon Yard. Numbers 42, 43 & 44 Burton's tailor. The factory which made clothes for Montague Burton shops was on Hudson Road, Harehills. Above the shop, The Imperial Hotel, with Nelson's Billiard Hall. Numbers 45& 46: J. Lyons café. In the middle of the road are tram stops, number three route tram can also be seen.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 22: Majestic Cinema & Ballroom, City Square, 1932.

Opened in 1922 it seated 2,500 people, the ballroom opening for afternoon tea dances and evening dances. The view shows the central entrance to the dancehall, the cinema entrances were to the left on Wellington Street and to the right on Quebec Street. Signs on the front advertise Buster Keaton and 'Talkies'.

This was that scene that greeted Irish emigrants arriving by train from Holyhead as they left Wellington Station.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 23: Boar Lane, City Centre, 1950s.

An inner-city street bustling with buses, cars, trucks, trams and human traffic.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 24: Easterly Road, Bomb Damage, 1940.

Image shows onlookers and officials inspecting houses on Easterly Road struck by a German Bomb. All the windows have been blown out and filers are inspecting the roof damage.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 25: Roof Bomb Damage, Town Hall, The Headrow, 1941.

View form the tower of the Town Hall onto a collapsed section of roof, the aftermath of the heaviest night bombing raid on the city [14th/15th March, 1941]. The air-raid sirens sounded at 9pm but it wasn't until midnight that the main thrust of the aerial assault arrived. The Infirmary, the City Museum, Kirkgate Market, St. Peter's School, Park Square and the Quarry Hill flats were also hit. The damage was comparatively light, with only the museum and St. Peter's School fairing badly.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 26: Aerial View, Quarry Hill Flats, 1946.

Built on 23 acres the Quarry Hill Complex was a revolutionary high density scheme, built on the former site of the city's most notorious Victorian slums. The blocks of flats ranged from 4 to 8 storeys high, in total 938 dwellings to house over 3,000 people. The state of the art complex incorporated lifts and an automatic waste disposal system which directed domestic refuse and sink waste directly from the flats to central incinerators.

The view looks from the south-west onto the Quarry Hill Flats. In the left foreground are the two roundabouts connected by Eastgate. The new York Road runs along the along the top edge of the flats past St. Mary's Church and St. Patrick's Church situated in the centre above the behind the flats. From the junction York Street runs to the right edge. St. Peter's Street runs across the foreground. The railway line is visible in the right foreground.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 27: Aerial View, Quarry Hill Flats, 1951.

This view looks south-east across the Quarry Hill Flats complex. The new York Road runs from the left centre to the right foreground via the roundabout in front of the Neilson Entrance to the flats. Mabgate and Regent Street also run from the left foreground to meet at the roundabout and Eastgate continues to the right.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 29: The Shamrock Dancehall, 1960s.

Note the black suits, soft drinks, pioneer pins and crucifix.

Brendan McGowan



Plate 29: Leeds Irish Centre, York Road, 2003.

View of Tara Suite from York Road. The Leeds Irish Centre was opened in 1970 to meet the needs of growing community.

Brendan McGowan



Plate 30: The (Golden) Eagle, North Street, Sheepscar, 1962.

View across to the corner for Benson Street and the Eagle Public house, one of the oldest pubs in Leeds. Robert Bussey turned this, his father's private house, into an ale house when he obtained a license in 1832. It was called the Builder's Inn, then the Ordnance Arms (it was near a barracks), then the Golden Eagle. It is now simply the Eagle.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



**Plate 31:
The Regent, Corner
of Regent Street &
Skinner Lane,
Sheepscar, 1960s.**

Was run by a couple from Mayo between 1968-78 and was a popular Irish music venue.



Plate 32: The Pointer, Sheepscar Street South, Sheepscar, 2003.

Front view of the Pointer pub at Sheepscar intersection. Opened in the 1930s by landlord Joseph Vessey as Pointer Inn The Irish Bar.

Brendan McGowan



**Plate 33:
The Victoria,
Corner of Roundhay Road
& Sheepscar Street South,
Sheepscar, 2003.**

Brendan McGowan



Plate 34: Ellers Road, Harehills, 1950.

View looking east at the corner of Hill Top Mount and Ellers Road. These terraced houses were home to many Irish families between the 1950s and 1970s.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 35: Ellers Road, Harehills, 1950.

View looks south-east down Ellers Road from the junction with Hill Top Mount. At the end of the street is Roundhay Road.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 36: Harehills Avenue, Harehills, 1951.

View shows a row of terraced houses on the junction of Harehills Avenue and Nassau Place.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 37: May Day, Hill Top Avenue, Harehills, c. 1960.

Two daughters of Mayo emigrants dressed up for the May Day Marian Procession.

Brendan McGowan



Plate 38: Spencer Place, Chapeltown, 1950.

The view looks along a brick wall on Gipton Street, at numbers 73 and 75 Spencer Place. The junction with Spencer Place can be seen on the right. Washing hags in the garden of number 75. The road is cobbled.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 39: No. 51 Reginald Terrace, Chapeltown, 1950s.

Image shows a large four storey terraced house on Reginald Terrace. One Irish emigrant recalled of this street in the 1950s: *'Then there was Reginald Terrace a hundred yards from the park [Potternewton]. Surely this should be called Patrick Street or Irish Town'*.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 40: No. 54 Spencer Place, Chapeltown, 1947.

View of the entrance to Newton House, a bed and breakfast boarding house and transport café located at number 54 Spencer Place. The café's sign is prominent and notes that it is T.G.W.U. registered and that the proprietor is an A. Ramsden. The building itself is just visible in the background.

Local Studies Department, Leeds City Library



Plate 41: At home in Harehills, Leeds, late 1960s.

Brendan McGowan



Plates 42 & 43: On holidays in Co. Mayo, late 1960s.

Brendan McGowan

APPENDIX C:

TABLES

Table 1: Population of Ireland, 1841-1981 (Thousands)

Year	Southern (26)	Northern (6)	Ireland (32)
1841	6,529	1,646	8,175
1851	5,112	1,440	6,552
1861	4,402	1,397	5,799
1871	4,053	1,359	5,412
1881	3,870	1,305	5,175
1891	3,469	1,236	4,705
1901	3,222	1,237	4,459
1911	3,140	1,250	4,390
1926	2,972	1,257	4,229
1936	2,968	1,280 (a)	4,248
1951	2,961	1,371	4,332
1961	2,818	1,425	4,243
1971	2,978	1,536	4,514
1981	3,443		

Note: (a) 1937

Source: J. A. Jackson, *The Irish in Britain*, London, 1963 & W. E. Vaughan, & A. J. Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Irish Historical Statistics: Population 1821-1971*, Dublin, 1978 & CSO, Dublin.

Table 2: Population of the Republic of Ireland, 1926-81

Year	Males	Females	Total	% Change
1926	1,506,889	1,465,103	2,971,992	- 5.34
1936	1,520,454	1,447,966	2,968,420	- 0.12
1946	1,494,877	1,460,230	2,955,107	- 0.45
1951	1,506,597	1,453,996	2,960,593	- 0.19
1956	1,462,928	1,435,336	2,898,264	- 2.11
1961	1,416,549	1,401,792	2,818,341	- 2.76
1966	1,449,032	1,434,970	2,884,002	+ 2.33
1971	1,495,760	1,482,448	2,978,248	+ 3.27
1981	-----	-----	3,443,405	+ 15.62

Source: W. E. Vaughan & A. J. Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Irish Historical Statistics: Population, 1821-1971*, 1978, p. 4 and C.S.O.

Table 3: Irish-born Residents in Britain, 1931-81

Year	Born in Irish Republic	Born in Northern Ireland	Total
1931	367,424	137,961	505,385
1951	537,709	178,961	716,028
1961	726,121	224,857	950,970
1971	709,830	248,595	957,830
1981	607,428	242,969	850,397

Source: *Census of Population, Britain, 1931-81*.

Table 4: Population of Leeds, 1821-1931

Year	Population	Year	Population
1821	83,943	1881	309,119
1831	123,548	1891	367,505
1841	152,054	1901	428,968
1851	172,270	1911	445,550
1861	207,165	1921	458,320
1871	259,212	1931	482,900

Source: C.J. Morgan, 'Demographic Change', in Fraser, Derek (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds*, 1980.

Table 5: Population of Leeds, 1931-1981

Year	Borough	Metropolitan District
1931	482,900	-----
1939	497,000	-----
1951	502,700	-----
1961	511,600	-----
1971	469,009	738,931
1981	-----	697,000

Source: S. Burt & K. Grady, *The Illustrated History of Leeds*, 2002.

Table 6: Birthplace of Respondents

Irish county of birth	Total born in that county
Clare	1
Donegal	1
Dublin	5
Galway	2
Kerry	2
Kildare	1
Leitrim	1
Limerick	1
Longford	1
Mayo	11
Monaghan	1
Roscommon	3
Sligo (a)	1
Wexford	2
TOTAL	33



Notes: Connaught & Donegal figure: 19. Other Western Seaboard Counties: 4.

(a) Denotes that although from Sligo, Marian was born in a Dublin hospital because of lack of facilities in Sligo

Table 7: Migration Pattern of Respondents

Name	Places lived from birth to present
Agnes	Roscommon; Liverpool; Leeds.
Austin	Roscommon; Chester; Leeds; Roscommon; Leeds; Mayo.
Bridget	Mayo; Rochester; Mayo; Dublin; Mayo; Darwin (near Manchester); Leeds; Mayo.
Clare	Leitrim; Dublin; Liverpool; Bradford; Skipton; Halifax; Leeds; Sheffield; Doncaster; Leeds.
Conal	Donegal; Wales; Scotland; Southampton; London; Brighton; Luton; Hastings; Leeds.
Conor	Dublin; Fermanagh; Dublin [Northern Ireland, Antarctic &

	Hong Kong with Royal Navy]; Leeds.
<i>Delia</i>	Mayo; London; Mayo; Leeds.
<i>Dominic</i>	Kerry; Dublin; Luton; Dublin; Rotherham; Leeds.
<i>Edward</i>	Dublin; Leicester; Derby; London; Watford; Leeds.
<i>Eamonn</i>	Mayo; Leeds.
<i>Eileen</i>	Mayo; Leeds; Mayo; Dublin; Belfast; London; Normington; Leeds.
<i>Eithne</i>	Mayo; Leeds.
<i>Gráinne</i>	Mayo; Leeds; Bolton; Leeds; Donegal; Leeds.
<i>Hannah</i>	Dublin; Somerset; Bedfordshire; Dublin; Birmingham; Leeds.
<i>Honora</i>	Galway; Leeds.
<i>Jeremiah</i>	Monaghan; Sheffield [travelled all over England with tarmacking firm]; Leeds.
<i>Joseph</i>	Dublin; Bolton; Manchester; Salford [travelled all over England with tarmacking firm]; Leeds.
<i>Justin</i>	Limerick; Kent [then conscripted into army Royal Army Service Corps RASC]; Nottingham; Leeds.
<i>Liam</i>	Wexford; Leeds [Japan, Korea & Hong Kong with army]; Leeds.
<i>Margaret</i>	Mayo; Leeds.
<i>Marian</i>	Sligo; Kerry; Huddersfield; Leeds.

Name	Places lived from birth to present
<i>Martha</i>	Longford; Australia; Newcastle; Longford; Leeds.
<i>Martin</i>	Mayo; Leeds.
<i>Nuala</i>	Wexford; Wales; Liverpool; Leeds.
<i>Owen</i>	Mayo; Leeds; Manchester; Doncaster; Newcastle; Peterborough; Preston; Manchester; London; Leeds.
<i>Paschal</i>	Mayo; Peterborough; Mayo; Leeds.
<i>Ronan</i>	Clare; London; Leeds.
<i>Rose</i>	Kildare; Leeds.
<i>Seamus</i>	Mayo; Scotland; Lincolnshire; Peterborough; Leeds; York;

	Leeds.
<i>Theresa</i>	Roscommon; Leeds; Mayo.
<i>Thomas</i>	Dublin; Leeds.
<i>Timothy</i>	Kerry; Brighouse; Leeds.
<i>Vincent</i>	Galway; Sheffield [then worked all over Yorkshire, Lancashire & Wales]; Leeds.

Notes: Irish places of residence are given at county level. For the most-part English places of residence are given at town/city level, however, on occasion the respondent did not specify and in those cases the county name is provided. Any place outside of Ireland and England is recorded by the name of the country.

APPENDIX D:
DOCUMENTS

1. Example of letter to the Western People which solicited oral testimony

Dear Editor,

I understand that your paper has a significant readership across the foam, particularly in Leeds where there is a strong concentration of peoples from the western counties. I would be obliged to you if you would direct this letter to their attention,

Is mise le meas,

Brendan McGowan.

**WERE YOU BORN IN IRELAND AND EMIGRATED TO LEEDS
BETWEEN 1921 & 1981?**

- **Were you born in Ireland?**
- **Did you emigrate from Ireland to Leeds, either directly or indirectly, between 1921 & 1981?**
- **Would you be interested in talking to me about your life experiences for the purpose of research into Irish emigration?**

I am carrying out research at the Galway/Mayo Institute of Technology and will be paying a number of visits to Leeds over the course of the next six months. If you can answer **YES** to the above questions I would be interested in meeting with you.

Everyone has a story to tell!

Letters were also sent to the: *Clare Champion, Donegal Democrat, Examiner, Galway Advertiser, Irish Independent, Ireland's Own, Irish Post, Irish Times, Leeds Weekly, Roscommon Champion, Roscommon Herald, Sligo Champion, Yorkshire Post.*

2. Leeds Irish Health & Homes Magazine

Issue 6

March 2003

FREE

IRISH IN LEEDS

PUBLISHED BY LEEDS IRISH HEALTH AND HOMES



Hello everyone,

We hope you enjoyed the November edition. Doesn't time fly as we gear up for another fun-packed St Patrick's Day. More details about the parade and events on the day are on the back page.

This newsletter is edited by Leeds Irish Health and Homes. While it is a vehicle for us to let you know about the services we offer, we hope that it is becoming a well-established community newsletter.

So if you have any suggestions, questions or articles that you would like to see printed please drop us a line at:

335 Roundhay Road
Leeds
LS8 4HT
Email:
anna@lihh.org

Hope you enjoy reading!

Anna Dunne
Communications Officer

Could your life story hold the key to an Irish based MA study?



Brendan McGowan was born in Leeds in 1976. At the age of three his family moved back to Mayo where his maternal grandparents come from; his father hails from Donegal. (His grandparents held 'The Regent' on Regent Street in the 70s).

Now Brendan is back in Leeds using this city and its Irish population as a base for his MA study.

The study is about Irish emigrants to Leeds between 1921-1981 and their differing experiences. Brendan has already been in contact with the various Irish organisations in Leeds such as the Irish Centre, Mount St Mary's Historical Group and Leeds Irish Health and Homes.

Now Brendan needs your help. Brendan is looking for volunteers to be part of his study. He would like to come along and talk to you about your experiences of emigration and settlement in Leeds. He is looking for a wide range of people to participate and he is hoping in turn to get a variety of recordings about the good and bad sides of emigration.

Brendan highlighted at our last meeting, "All too often the history of 20th century Irish emigration to Britain has been written in terms of government reports, census data and newspaper articles. It would seem that the most obvious and reliable source of the emigrant's own experience is often overlooked. I hope to address this imbalance."

If you do decide you would like to part in this study Brendan assures people that no names will be used in the final document. The only details that will remain the same will be your year of birth and the county that you hail from in Ireland. So if you are interested in telling your life story to Brendan you can contact him either by

Phone: +00353874106393
Post: 47 Churchfields, Lower Salthill, Galway, Ireland.
Email: nadnerbmc@hotmail.com

Brendan will be back in Leeds from April 2nd-April 10th so why not give up some of your time to talk to Brendan to give him the material his thesis needs. Do not underestimate your story. Everyone's life history is important so take this opportunity to get it recorded.

231

3. Safe Home Ireland letter to intending return emigrants

Coming Home? – Are you sure?

Read this carefully – It isn't designed to change your mind about returning home but it is intended to make you think very carefully about whether it is the right move for you.

The most important message is that the Ireland of today is a very different country to the one you left. If you have not been home for ten or twenty years you will notice a very big difference. If you have been coming home for holidays regularly you will be much more aware of the extent of the changes that have taken place, particularly in the towns and cities. Of-course some rural places will, on the surface, appear not to have changed at all but do not be fooled. Gone are the days where there was a woman in every house and an old person propped up in a chair beside the range. It is more likely nowadays that houses are locked up all day while the husband and wife go out to work and the old person is in a nursing home. A major drive by government and backed up by changes to the tax laws saw thousands of women leaving the home to join the workforce. Family members in Ireland probably take holidays while you visit but when you move to Ireland permanently it will be very different. You may be one of the fortunate people whose family in Ireland are not all working outside the home but for many the situation described above will be the situation so you need to be aware of it. Whatever your family circumstances it is important to say that holidaying in a country and living in a country are two different things.

Looking around you:

If you have children and grandchildren close to where you live at present and if you enjoy frequent contact with them this will change when to move permanently to Ireland. Your children and grandchildren may be excited about visiting you in Ireland but you have to be realistic. Once they reach 'that age' the Costa del Sol with their friends will be far more attractive than rainy old Ireland to visit granny and granddad. What about neighbours? If you have good neighbours and have lived beside them for a long time you will miss them, possibly more than you realise. If you are currently living in the USA, Canada, Australia or some other far off place the cost of visiting you in Ireland may be

more than friends and close family living near to you now can afford. Look around you are the area you live in, the shops you frequent, the café where you go for your lunch and the waitress who always gives you a generous helping, the pub where the bar staff have your drink on the bar almost before you have sat down because they know you so well. How do you socialise at the moment and who with? How will you manage without these places and these people? Do you love visiting the Irish centre to watch the Irish dancing and listen to the Irish music? If you want to see the best Irish dancing maybe you should go to Manchester or Chicago and if you want to listen to the best Irish music make your way to Luton or New York. These are just examples. No doubt the Irish dancing and music is wonderful in all centres of Irish emigration in the world. The point being made is that both of these are more enthusiastically indulged in and followed outside of Ireland than they are in Ireland.

Rural Ireland:

With all the changes that have taken place in Ireland over the last number of years one thing which has not changed and which can cause great frustration is the level of public transport in rural areas. Increased wealth means that more cars are on the road and this means that few people rely on public transport. Maybe this is why a good service is a bus to the local town means a bus going one way in the morning and the other way in the evening. Some areas have a weekly service and some no service at all. It is argued that giving a travel pass to older people is all well and good but if there is no bus or train serving where they live it is of little use to them. Arguments about why the travel pass should be extended to cover taxi fares in areas ill served by public transport are well made but there is little evidence of them being listened to.

The cost of moving:

Moving home is always expensive even if you are only going down the road. Where you are travelling to a different country the problems and the costs quickly mount up. If you do not have family or friends who will help you will be relying on removal firms. Shipping furniture is very expensive and it might be worth your while at the 'thinking stage' to make some enquiries from specialist firms who do this kind of work. If you are

moving through the Safe-Home programme the property you will be coming to will probably be a great deal smaller than your current home (see the leaflet 'Housing in Ireland') so you will have to dispose of much of your furniture.

Can you bear to do this? If your furniture is not relatively new, worth a lot of money or have sentimental value you may decide to dispose of it all and buy new furniture when you arrive in Ireland. Have you considered the cost? The cost may, in the end, be less than shipping furniture to Ireland.

For Safe-Home Applicants:

Criteria - To qualify for the Safe-Home Programme you will be near to or over 60 years of age, living in rented accommodation and wanting to return to your county of origin or the county where you spend a substantial part of your life and can show clear links to.

Once we have accepted an older emigrant onto our waiting list we will seek sheltered housing/housing for older people as close to their home place as possible. Applicants have to be realistic because as close to their home place as possible may mean anything up to ten or twenty miles away. We cannot find housing for them in areas where there is no housing but we do try to bring people home to as close as possible to where they come from. At the same time we will be going through details such as what part/s of their current income will transfer and what won't, whether they will receive a medical card or not and what this will mean to them etc. We will also be asking that they seriously question their decision to return home. When accommodation is coming up in an area close to their home place we ask them if they wish to be considered. Frequently, and particularly in cities such as Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway etc, there will be a number of applicants being put forward for the property that is being offered. If the property is offered to an applicant who then, at the last minute, turns it down because they can't bear to leave family and friends or their lovely home behind it will not go to another Safe-Home applicant. It will go to someone locally and, thus, another emigrant who would have jumped at the opportunity has to remain on the waiting list when they could have been on their way home if only the person turning down the property had done as asked and thought through their reasons for wanting to return home.

For everyone:

For those making their own way home and, perhaps building in Ireland, the decision may not be so stark and they might choose to hold onto their home abroad for a period to ensure that coming home was the right decision. But if you are leaving a rented home particularly if it is Council or Housing Association property returning home is a one-way trip. If you change your mind and return to the country you left you may well find yourself on the bottom rung of the housing ladder. If you left Council or Housing Association property they will not re-house you because you will have made yourself intentionally homeless by leaving the accommodation you had when you moved to Ireland. If you sold your house to move home, particularly in cities like London, you may not be able to afford to move back there.

All of this is meant to make you think very seriously about whether you really want to move home or not. In terms of Safe-Home we find that anyone with children and grandchildren are a 'high-risk' group unless they have discussed their plans with close relatives in the country where they currently live. We find many women who have lavished care and attention on their home over many years often find that, in the end, they won't be able to leave it all behind. Having said that there are a great many grandparents happily settled back in Ireland while their sons and daughters and their families remain abroad. There are also many older women settled happily back in Ireland who lavished love and attention on their homes for years abroad. There is no easily distinguishable group of those who won't come – if there were we wouldn't accept them.

All we can advise anybody wanting to return home to do is to give very careful consideration to this desire. For most people who think of returning home it is a dream – a lovely dream but a dream all the same. You need to make sure, before you go any further, that returning home is not just a dream for you too.

Make a list of what you will miss, make a list of the benefits and drawbacks of moving back home and a list of the benefits and drawbacks of staying where you are, make a list of all the reasons you have for wanting to return home then try to demolish each of them. If you come through this exercise still determined to come back then you are probably doing the right thing for you and we wish you all the luck in the world.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

To ensure confidentiality the following measures have been put in place:

- Respondents are identified solely by first name pseudonyms.
- Respondent's places of birth are given at large town or county level.
- Their year of birth and not the particular date are provided.

Agnes, b. 1918, Co. Roscommon [Interviewed: 02/02/03, Leeds]

Born in 1918 on a 92-acre farm in Roscommon; two brothers and one sister (one brother and sister emigrated to America); emigrated to Liverpool in 1938; joined cousin in Leeds later same year; Donegal boyfriend followed in 1939; married in Leeds in 1940; husband joined the British Army in 1942; Agnes remained in Leeds throughout the war-years; two daughters.

Austin, b. 1916, Co. Roscommon [Interviewed: 07/12/02, Co. Mayo]

Born the eldest of 12 children on a 30-acre farm in Roscommon in 1916; emigrated to Chester in 1937 to brother; worked as a farm labourer; followed Roscommon sweetheart to Leeds in 1938; married in Leeds that same year; first child born in Leeds; returned to Ireland jobless and homeless following the outbreak of war in 1939; three more sons and a daughter in Ireland; in 1961 whole family moved to Leeds; returned to live in County Mayo with his daughter and son-in-law in 2001.

Bridget, b. 1918, Co. Mayo [Interviewed: 07/12/02, Leeds]

Born in North Mayo in 1918; five brothers and two sisters (all spent time working in England); first emigrated to Rochester with sister in 1939; returned later that year following the outbreak of war; worked initially in Mayo and then in Dublin for a number of years; returned to England in 1945; worked in Darwin, near Manchester initially, then moved to Leeds; married in 1945 to a Mayo man; returned to live in Mayo in 1978.

Clare, b. 1913, Co. Leitrim [Interviewed: 30/01/03, Leeds]

Born one of eleven children (five boys and six girls) in County Leitrim in 1913; moved to Dublin in 1930; worked in a children's home for orphans, then worked for a year as a domestic in a doctor's house; emigrated with sister to Liverpool in 1936; found work catering with British Railway; based in Bradford until 1945; promoted to the position of manageress and transferred to Skipton, and subsequently Halifax, Leeds, Sheffield and finally to Doncaster; retired in 1973; never married; lives in a retirement home for the elderly Irish in Leeds; only Protestant respondent.

Conal, b. 1962, Co. Donegal [Interviewed: 09/04/03, Leeds]

Born one of nine children in County Donegal; left school aged twelve; left for Wales in 1978 and from there *'tramped all over the country then, London, Scotland, everywhere'*; didn't return home for four or five years afterwards; married in Luton; never told the family he was getting married; left wife in early 1980s; served three-and-a-half years of a seven-year sentence in Lewis' prison for GBH; worked all over Scotland and Wales as well as in Southampton, London, Brighton, Luton, Hastings, Leeds; had a stroke in Leeds in 2000; semi-disabled and lives in an inner-city tower block.

Conor, b. 1947, Dublin [Interviewed: 07/04/03, Leeds]

Born in Dublin City in 1947, the second of eight children (five boys and three girls); joined Royal Navy in 1963; briefly served in Northern Ireland in early 1969; travelled worldwide spending two years in the Antarctic; met wife (a Catholic of Irish descent who was also in the services) in Hong Kong; left the Navy in 1974; decided to settle in Leeds; joined the West Yorkshire Police Service and later the Prison Service; eventually joined the Civil Service as a clerical assistant; attended night school for eight years; promoted to executive officer; one daughter.

Delia, b. 1934, Co. Mayo [Interviewed: 05/04/03, Leeds]

Born in West Mayo in 1934, one of nine children (two boys and seven girls); father a farmer and stonemason; attended the local national school and later a technical school until the age of seventeen; left Ireland in 1951 to go nursing in St. Andrew's hospital in

London; stayed in London for three years until qualified and then returned home; moved to Leeds in 1956 to do midwifery at St. Mary's hospital; met her husband, a Mayo-man (who had emigrated to Leeds in 1953) at The Majestic Dancehall; married 18-months later; two children.

Fr. Dominic, b. 1947/8, Co. Kerry [Interviewed: 06/04/03, Leeds]

Born one of five children (three boys and two girls) in a Kerry town in the late 1940s; attended the local convent school and then the Christian Brothers School; graduated aged eighteen; continued education at UCD & All Hallows; decided to go to England to follow the Irish flock as part of priest training; ended up in Rotherham in South Yorkshire; lived in Rome for a period in the 1970s; moved to Leeds in 1979; currently teaching.

Eamonn, b. 1952, Co. Mayo [Interviewed: 31/01/03, Leeds]

Born in county Mayo in 1952; father in the Irish Army; family emigrated to Leeds in 1961; thirteen children in family (five born in Leeds and eight in Mayo); two children.

Edward, b. 1933, Dublin [Interviewed: 08/04/03, Leeds]

Born one of five children in a Dublin city cellar in 1933; father worked a variety of jobs in England; left at the age of twelve after confirmation; is dyslexic; father died of tuberculosis in Dublin in the 1930s; family left the tenement for a council house in 1943; emigrated to Leicester in February 1954; moved to Derby and worked on Castle Donnington Power Station; subsequently worked in London and Watford; moved to Leeds in 1957 and met Cavan-born wife; married later that year in St. Anne's Cathedral; initially moved to the Harehills area of the city; later lived in a back-to-back off York Road; wife worked for Crown wallpaper; three children and nine grandchildren; haven't been back to Ireland since 1968; Edward has diabetes and has had a by-pass.

Eileen, b. 1918, Co. Mayo [Interviewed: 09/04/03, Leeds]

Born in North Mayo in 1918 one of sixteen in the family; raised on a farm in a three bed-roomed thatched cottage; persuaded to leave school early, aged thirteen, to work as a childminder and housemaid in the local village; took a number of short-lived domestic

positions; emigrated to England aged seventeen to her sister; returned to Ireland in 1939 to look after father; father died of cancer; stayed to help her mother for a while and later moved to Dublin to work as a maid; met an American-born Irish Republican who had returned to live in Mayo, moved to Belfast and married in 1942 on the Falls Road; first child born in Belfast; moved to London; was evacuated out of London to the village of Normington, near Leeds; eventually moved into Leeds; six children; husband died of gangrene in 1953; worked on the buses worked as a bus conductor for nine and a half years.

Eithne, b. 1911, Co. Mayo [Interviewed: 30/01/03, Leeds]

Born on a small farm in north Mayo in 1911; twelve in the family; four older brothers and sisters emigrated to America; left school was aged eleven and worked on the farm; left for Leeds in 1953 with a cousin who was home on holidays; stayed in Leeds throughout the Second World War and worked as an auxiliary nurse; met her late husband (also from Mayo) in Leeds at the Irish dances and married in 1940; worked mostly in hospitals; lives in a retirement home for the elderly Irish in Leeds.

Gráinne, b. 1945, Co. Mayo [Interviewed: 02/02/03, Leeds]

Born in County Mayo in 1945; three older brothers; attended the local convent school; left school at thirteen to look after grandmother; worked in local woollen mills from fifteen years of age; brothers emigrated to England and Scotland; left job at seventeen and emigrated to brothers in Bolton; spent time in Bolton, Manchester and Leeds; worked in the bar business for seventeen years; later employed as an ambulance driver-attendant for the West Yorkshire Ambulance Service for eleven years; married a Donegal man in Leeds; returned to live in Donegal in 1976; returned to Leeds after seven months; split from husband but remain friends; three children.

Hannah, b. 1923, Dublin [Interviewed: 05/02/03, Leeds]

Born in Dublin City in 1923 one of 5 children; father served in the British Army during WWI and subsequently joined the Irish Free State Army; worked in a number of factory jobs after leaving school; worked in a tailoring factory making Irish soldiers uniforms

and men's wear in 1943; volunteered to go to England to work in the munitions factories; left Ireland for Somerset on the 28th December 1943; moved to Bedfordshire following the war and found work painting in a ship-engineering factory; met late-husband in Dublin in 1942 (on leave from the British Army); left the army in 1947; married in Birmingham; moved to Leeds in 1948, lived in Beeston; worked in tailoring, in the laundries and mills; husband worked on the buses; fifteen grandchildren.

Honora, b. 1914, Co. Galway [Interviewed: 07/04/03, Leeds]

Born into a farming environment in the County Galway in 1914; two brothers and four sisters; sent by mother to serve time in a shop in Tuam; met her late husband, a tailor, in Tuam; husband emigrated to Leeds because of the demand for tailors in the city; Honora followed in 1939; decided not to return to Ireland during war; husband joined the Liverpool Irish; evacuated children to Ireland during the war years; worked in the munitions for two-and-a-half years; worked as a receptionist after the war, and later ran a boarding house in the family home; younger siblings came to live in Leeds following death of their mother; three children.

Jeremiah, b. 1932, Co. Monaghan [Interviewed: 06/04/03, Leeds]

Born in Monaghan town in 1932; parents had a small farm outside the town; left school early, aged thirteen, to work on their own farm and with other local farmers; set up a small and relatively successful car dealing business in the 1950s; emigrated to brother (watchmaker) in Sheffield in 1957; found digs through the local church; initially found work, through a Monaghan contact, with a Galway building contractor named Gleason; spent a year carrying a hod and wheeling concrete; later found employment with a tarmacking company and travelled all over England; set up a plant hire business in early 1960s; business, which took many years to build up on account of the high expense of the equipment, became a company in 1964; married an Otley-born girl of Irish parentage in 1966; one adopted daughter; sold his company as a going business and retired to the outskirts of Leeds.

Joseph, b. 1950, Dublin [Interviewed: 04/04/03, Leeds]

Born in Dublin City in 1950, the youngest of fourteen children; mother was a street-vendor on Thomas Street; father worked away in England for much of childhood; skipped school regularly and as a result cannot read or write; '*went on the drink*' and spent his weekends in the Bridewell; forced to emigrate to England by family in 1970; went to cousins in Bolton; worked as labourer; sacked repeatedly over drink; served time, was released, repeat offended and served time again; moved to Salford and found work with the Irish travelling community tarmacking/concreting driveways all over England; moved to Leeds in 1991; never married.

Justin, b. 1929, Co. Limerick [Interviewed: 09/04/03, Leeds]

Born in rural Limerick in 1929; worked '*from daylight till dusk at night, winter and summer*' as a farmhand on a big Limerick farm after leaving school; father sent for him from England in 1945; initially on a number of large farms; moved to the south of the country, met with an Irish gang and began working in the construction industry; he was called for service with the British Army in 1948; served time in the RASC (Royal Army Service Corps) as a conscript and later joined voluntarily; awarded three-stars whilst in the army and finished as a dog handler guarding munitions dumps near Nottingham; married a Scottish girl; twin daughters; parted from wife after 18-months; bad with arthritis for about two years, lives alone and is house bound.

Liam, b. 1934, Co. Wexford [Interviewed: 29/01/03, Leeds]

Born in Wexford town in 1934; one of six children (two boys and four girls); father worked on the railroads initially, later joined the RAF; following father's release from service the family to Leeds; educated by the Christian Brothers in Wexford until the age of 13 and had to complete a years schooling at St Joseph's in Hunslett, Leeds; worked as a joiner for a period after leaving school; called to do National Service in early 1950s, panicked and attempted to return to Ireland, caught at Holyhead with two others; served and opted to sign up for full service; spent time in Japan, Korea and Hong Kong; worked in building trade after release; became discontented, took a painting and decorating course and spent the remainder of working days in the painting trade; married an English-

girl (whose grandfather was from Mayo); seven sons.

Margaret, b. Co. Mayo, 195x [Interviewed: 04/04/03, Leeds]

Born in North Mayo; three brothers and three sisters; father a farmer and carpenter; worked for a while in the hospital in Ballina after leaving school; ran away to Leeds at the age of seventeen; had a brother living in Leeds; initially hated Leeds; initially found factory work in the Armley area of the city and subsequently worked in a clothing factory and as a waitress; ran an electrical appliance shop in the city for many years; father died thirteen years ago; hasn't been back to Ireland since the funeral; temporarily homeless and living with a friend; has two sisters also living in Leeds.

Marian, b. 1942, Dublin [Interviewed: 05/04/03, Leeds]

Born in 1942 in a Dublin hospital, although parents were living in the County Sligo, because mother '*had lost about four or five*' and they did not have the facilities to care for her in the west; an only child; parents met and married in Boston; in 1955 the family moved to Kerry; worked as a nurse in Merlin Park T.B. Hospital, Galway after leaving school; moved to Huddersfield with cousins who were home on holiday; left with the intention of being away six-months and has been away since; met her husband Martin (See Below), a Mayo-man, at a dance in Leeds; married in Leeds in 1964; three children; worked with British Telecom in the main telephone exchange in Leeds; currently run an Irish nursing home in Leeds; she also works on the main switchboard for the Leeds City Council.

Martha, b. 1946, Co. Longford [Interviewed: 08/04/03, Leeds]

Born in rural County Longford in 1946; five children in the family, one boy dying in infancy; father, after a stint working in Newcastle, England, took work with Wimpey's on a uranium mine in Australia's Northern Territory; mother ran the family farm; in 1957 the family sold up the farm in Longford and moved to Australia; father tragically killed when electrocuted later that same year whilst investigating the cause of another fatal accident on the site; family left Australia for England in the December of 1958; subsequently moved back to Longford with mother; moved to Leeds in 1961 with elder

sister and brother following mothers death; initially worked in Jewish clothes factories, and subsequently in Lipton's shop, an Irish bar and in a bakery shop; met her husband, a Birmingham carpenter of Irish stock, in The Shamrock Irish Dance Hall in Leeds; moved to the Bramley area of the city and had three children; suffered greatly as a result of anti-Irish racism in the area.

Martin, b. 1940, Co. Mayo [Interviewed: 31/01/03, Leeds]

Born in rural County Mayo in 1940, the youngest of three children (two boys and a girl); father spent many seasons in North Yorkshire working the hay and the harvest; mother got pneumonia, spent two years in hospital and died in 1942; consequently raised in a convent in Tuam until the age of five; then moved to live with an aunt; emigrated to Leeds in 1949 with aunt's eldest daughter and husband; started an apprenticeship in a mechanics shop after finishing school; brother emigrated to Leeds in 1957; swapped his apprenticeship in mechanics for a life long career in construction; met wife (See Above: Marian) at The Shamrock Irish Dance Hall in Leeds; married in 1964; three children; currently running a nursing home for elderly Irish in Leeds.

Nuala, b. 1931, Co. Wexford [Interviewed: 31/01/03, Leeds]

Born in County Wexford in 1931; one sister; emigrated to Wales with friends in 1959; found work in a convent-hospital; moved to Leeds with friends in 1963 after a spell in Liverpool working in a college run by priests; worked in Killingbeck hospital for 28 years; forced to retire from the hospital in 1991 having reached the age of 60; subsequently found employment cleaning at Leeds University; never married; lives in a retirement home for the elderly Irish in Leeds; only sister also made her home in Leeds.

Owen, b. 1943, Co. Mayo [Interviewed: 03/04/03, Leeds]

Born onto a 25-acre farm of good land in County Mayo in 1943, the second eldest of nine children (five girls and four boys); father worked in America and in England in later years; left school at twelve; worked on the land for a while after leaving school; found employment on the lorries at sixteen; found work with the Mayo County Council and subsequently with the Moy Drainage Scheme; left Ireland for Leeds with his elder

brother in 1960; initially found digs in the Hyde Park area of the city worked with Wimpey's; sent half his wages home every week for the first seven or eight years; subsequently worked in Manchester with Murphy's and other different 'subbies', then with a firm in Doncaster and Newcastle; worked for a while picking potatoes in the early 1980s with some other Mayo-men on a farm near Peterborough; married a former English landlady, subsequently separated; two daughters; took ill with diabetes in the early 1990s.

Paschal, b. 1944, Co. Mayo [Interviewed: 08/04/03, Leeds]

Born in North Mayo in 1944, one of eleven children (seven brothers and four sisters); older siblings went to America, others went to Scotland picking potatoes; father was the local postman for 44 years; mother and her brother shared a small farm; worked picking potatoes in Peterborough with some friends for a few weeks in the early 1960s but subsequently returned to Ireland; emigrated to Leeds in 1963; met his wife (Leeds born girl of Sligo/Galway parents) in The Shamrock Irish Dancehall that same year; nearly always worked in the construction industry since emigrating; two sons.

Ronan, b. 1951, Co. Clare [Interviewed: 06/04/03, Leeds]

Born, one of five children, in rural Clare in 1951; father was in the army and work for the Limerick Corporation after retiring; attended secondary school, obtained his leaving cert, and his father organised an interview with *Aer Lingus* in London; moved to the outskirts of the English capital in 1970; promoted from operations to marketing and sales in head office in the centre of London in the mid-1970s; accepted a transfer to the city of Leeds in the late-1970s and within six-months purchased a house for £6,000; offered a transfer to London but having settled in Leeds declined the offer and quit the airline; subsequently became involved in the travel business doing conference and incentive planning and organising overseas trips; met his Derbyshire-born wife through the airline business; married in the late 1980s (wife converted to Catholicism); two children.

Rose, b. 1957, Co. Kildare [Interviewed: 04/04/03, Leeds]

Born in County Kildare in 1957, the youngest of a family of nine (seven boys and two girls); emigrated to Skipton with grandparents following death of parent's; grandparents subsequently passed away leaving Rose in a home in Headingley, Leeds; spent a time living rough in Leeds; became involved with the Leeds Irish Health & Homes (an organisation founded to help the Leeds Irish community with their housing and healthcare issues as well as their general well being) and has since found accommodation; presently living in a tower block in one of Leeds most notorious districts; works every year at a festival in Skipton looking after the washrooms earning enough in wages and tips for an annual visit to Kildare.

Seamus, b. 1936, Co. Mayo [Interviewed: 02/04/03, Leeds]

Born in West Mayo in 1936; one brother and two sisters; parents met in Ayrshire, Scotland picking potatoes; father went to England annually from the end of April to the end of November to work; first left Ireland with his father and mother when he was thirteen years of age to pick potatoes in Scotland; went to England from seventeen years of age; worked in Lincolnshire hoeing beet, mowing dykes, picking potatoes and harvesting wheat; lived with brother and four cousins on the one farm, the six of them sharing two beds in a hut; eventually finished with the farm-work and worked all over Britain on public work schemes; first went to Leeds in 1964; moved to Leeds in the late 1970s; lived the stereotypical life of the Irish labourer for many years - working hard and drinking harder seven days a week; took ill in recent years and as a result has given up drinking; paid a trip home in 2002, for the first time in 37 years; wishes to move back to Ireland permanently; never married.

Theresa, b. 1950, Co. Roscommon [Interviewed: 21/11/02, Co. Mayo]

Born in rural County Roscommon in 1950, the youngest and only girl of five children; daughter of Austin (See Above); parents married in England but returned to Ireland in 1939 following the outbreak of war; father, as grandfather, was the local rural postman; attended the local national school until the age of twelve; in 1962 the family moved to Leeds, a move designed to keep the whole family together following the emigration of

two brothers to the city; worked in several administration positions after leaving school; met her husband (Leeds-born of Mayo parents) in *The Roscoe* Irish pub at traditional sessions; both became heavily involved in the Leeds branch of *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* from 1969, and taught Irish music classes for many years; three children; in 2001, Theresa, her father and husband returned to live in Ireland; two of their children have also made their homes in Mayo.

Thomas, b. 1941, Dublin [Interviewed: 03/02/03, Leeds]

Born in Dublin City in 1941; father an insurance broker; the family moved to Tullamore, County Offaly in 1945 but returned to the capital in the early 1950s; the family emigrated to Leeds in 1955 after father became unemployed; father had a brother living in Leeds who worked as a waiter on British Rail; did one years schooling in England; worked on the buildings and in factory work after leaving school; married an English-girl in 1978, subsequently separated; one daughter; finished a three-year degree course in English Literature & Comparative Religion at the Leeds Metropolitan University (LMU) in recent years; also passed an Irish Studies certificate course at LMU; has again taken up learning the Irish language and began writing poetry; worked as a housing association caretaker for the past eleven years; returns home thrice annually.

Timothy, b. 1944, Co. Kerry [Interviewed: 02/04/03, Leeds]

Born in County Kerry in 1944, one of nine children in the family; parents were farmers on a small holding; left school at thirteen and worked on his parent's farm; emigrated to Brighouse, outside Huddersfield in 1964 to brothers; spent time doing building and cable work and occasionally hoeing beet and picking potatoes; first arrived in Leeds in 1974 saying '*there was better work here*'; three children with former partner of 27 years; of ill health since having a stroke; wishes to return permanently to Ireland.

Vincent, b. 1939, Co. Galway [Interviewed: 04/04/03, Leeds]

Born in a home in County Galway in 1939; was adopted aged five to an elderly widow on a farm of 20-acres; started working at the age of 16 for a landlord-farmer, who possessed in the region of 3,000 acres of land; the widow died of gangrene and the farm went to her

grandson; emigrated at the age of seventeen with a school-friend to Sheffield; hasn't returned to County Galway since leaving in September 1956; sole return visits to Ireland since have been a couple of trips to Dublin to see All-Ireland Finals in the 1960s; initially found employment in steelworks but back trouble forced a change of direction; worked as a bus conductor; trained for a position as a bus driver but years earlier he had damaged his vision playing club hurling in Galway, and consequently was refused the position; found employment with Grey Murphy's in Sheffield and worked all over Britain; went picking potatoes in 1969 with a farmer; off work for three or four years with a slipped disc, working life was dogged for 30 years with back problems; almost married in the 1970s (a birth certificate could not be found in Ireland so the wedding did not take place).

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- 2. Autobiographies & Published Oral Histories**
- 3. Oral History**
- 4. Correspondence from Respondents**

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Recorded interviews and transcripts of 33 life-biographies of Southern Irish emigrants [including contributions from their family members].

Recorded interviews and transcripts of two life-biographies of Northern Irish emigrants.

Recorded interview and transcript of a conversation with a Leeds born second-generation Irish respondent who was a prominent member of the Irish community and also served in the West Yorkshire Police Force.

4. Correspondence from respondents

A number of letters and emails received from Irish in Leeds.

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