THE IRISH IN NINETEENTH CENTURY

COVENTRY

Two Volumes

Volume 1

Thomas Joseph Prendergast

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## Contents

### Volume 1

Introduction: Aims and Coventry rationale P. 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Irish settlement: perspectives, population and evidence</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Character of Coventry</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Circumstances of the Irish in Coventry</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Irish household structure, Irish community attributes and spatial</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>expression in years of heightened arrival 1841-1861</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Irish household structure, Irish community attributes and spatial</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>expression in years of adjustment and settlement 1871-1901</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bibliography P. 299
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tables

**Chapter 1 Vol. 2:**

Table 1.1 The ‘Top Twenty’ Irish towns in Britain in 1851 P. 209
Table 1.2 City and Irish-born population in Census and Study Area 1841-1911 P. 210

**Chapter 2 Vol. 2:**

Table 2.1 Type of Looms 1838 P. 211
Table 2.2 Number of Looms and Employees in Six Principal Firms in 1857 P. 211
Table 2.3 Steam factories approved for construction 1852-1857 P. 211

**Chapter 3 Vol. 2:**

Table 3.1 A classic stereotype: Movement and settlement of Burke family P. 212
Table 3.2 The Malone Family transition over three generations P. 214
Table 3.3 Influence of a spouse on settlement decision. Thomas Black and Family P. 216
Table 3.4 An Irish-born in an English Household. William Widlake, Irish-Born son, of retired soldier Thomas Widlake, H3C9 Little Park St. 1881 P. 217
Table 3.5 Chelsea Pensioners 1851 with Irish Connection P. 218
Table 3.6 Warwickshire Registration Districts 1851, Irish-born as % of population P. 218
Table 3.7 Strength of Galegin and Burn Households in Much Park Street, 1851 P. 219
Table 3.8 Chain Migration as shown by four Households in 1851 Census P. 220
Table 3.9 Pathways of Silk Workers to Coventry P. 221
Table 3.10 Occupations with the Predominant Silk Industry differentiated, 1841 P. 222
Table 3.11 Diarrhoeal Mortality in selected parts of Coventry 1858 P. 223
Table 3.12 Population of Palmer Lane 1841-1901 P. 223
Table 3.13 Irishcom Residents 1861: Court 17 Much Park P. 228
Table 3.14 Irishcom Residents 1861: Court 13 St. Johns Street P. 229
Table 3.15 Court 8 Well Street: Irishcom Residents of its 27 houses 1861-91 P. 230

**Chapter 4 Vol. 2:**

Table 4.1 Marriage Register Parish of St. Osburg’s 1850 and until 30th March 1851 with details of married couples matched where possible to Census of 1851 P. 232
Table 4.2 Hopkins Household 1851-1871 showing Catholic identity & census ‘Deterioration’ of household in twenty years P. 234
Table 4.3 Benedictine Monks serving Coventry from Hill Street Priory P. 235
Table 4.4 Baptisms administered Chapel of St. Mary & St. Laurence 1835-1841 P. 236
Table 4.5 Social and occupational progress: John Kelly, City Councillor and his son Walter Kelly Abbot President of the English Benedictines P. 238

**Chapter 5 Vol. 2:**

Table 5.1 Irish-born and Irishcom numbers residing in Irish Households and also residing in English Households containing Irish in Study Area, 1841-61 P. 240
Table 5.2 Irish-born male change in Coventry 1841-1901 P. 241
Table 5.3 Marital status of solo Heads, of Heads with spouses and whether Irishcom or Irish-born in Irish Households 1841-1901 P. 242
**Table 5.4** Percentage distribution of family size in *Irish Households* Coventry 1841-1901 and for Coventry Households in 1851 and 1881 P. 243

**Table 5.5** Size of *Irish Households*, size of Coventry Households in 1851 and 1881 P. 244

**Table 5.6** Percentage of *Irish Households* and Coventry Households in each Household unit size according to the frequency of Heads Family sizes for 1851 P. 245

**Table 5.7** Number, birthplace and condition of yet to marry children in *Irish Household* head families 1841-1901 P. 246

**Table 5.8** Age of the yet to marry child first in the family to be born 1841-1901 P. 247

**Table 5.9** Status of *Irish Household* Heads’ Grown-up co-residing children who were ever married or if unmarried had offspring and the nature and occurrence of their families 1851-1901 P. 248

**Table 5.10** *Irish Households*: Arrangement and occasions occurring of co-resident types according to the size of the Heads Family 1861 P. 249

**Table 5.11** The percentage holding at each Lodger and Kin size according to the heads marital status for *Irish Households* 1851-61 P. 250

**Table 5.12** Marital status of solo Lodgers, Kin, and Visitors and whether they were Irishcom or Irish-born in *Irish Households* and *English Households* containing Irish 1841-61 P. 251

**Table 5.13** The number of *English Households containing Irish* in Coventry 1841-1901 and the number of Irish-born and Irishcom therein P. 252

**Table 5.14** Heads of *English Households containing Irish* with size of household, number of Irish co-residing and their relationship to the Head 1861 P. 253

**Table 5.15** An adjunct Table to Table 5.14. The Irish-born children of heads of *English Households containing Irish* 1861 P. 255

**Table 5.16** Irish county of birth. Number who supplied ‘Ireland’ only 1851-1901 P. 256

**Table 5.17** Birthplace of Irishcom whose relationship to a Head was that of an unmarried Son or Daughter 1851-1901 P. 257

**Table 5.18** Social classification of Irish-born and Irishcom 1841-1861 P. 258

**Table 5.19** Male-to-female ratios for Irish-born, Irishcom and Host 1841-1901 P. 259

**Table 5.20** Marital condition by age of Irishcom 1851-61 and from the Census abstracts for Coventry the condition of the Host population 1851-61 P. 260

**Table 5.21** Marital condition and age of *Irish Household Heads* 1841-61 and similar for Coventry Host Household Heads 1851 P. 261

**Table 5.22** Social classification of Irish-born and Irishcom 1841-1861 P. 262

**Table 5.23** Irish-Born, and British-born ‘Irish’ weavers in the ribbon trade 1841-1891 P. 263

**Table 5.24** Irish-born male & female heads of *Irish Households* assigned to Classes 1 & 2 on the basis of occupation or employment of extra staff in 1851-71 P. 264

**Table 5.25** Social classification of Irish-born heads of *Irish Households* 1841-1861 and similar for Coventry Host Household Heads 1851 P. 265

**Table 5.26** Collated occupations of male Irish-born married Heads of *Irish Households* in Class 3 for 1841-1861 P. 266

**Table 5.27** St. Michael & St. John/Holy Trinity 1841 P. 268

**Table 5.28** St. Michael & St. John/Holy Trinity 1861 P. 270

**Chapter 6 Vol. 2:**

**Table 6.1** Irishcom and Irish-born numbers residing in *Irish Households* and also residing in *English Households containing Irish* in Study Area, 1871-1901 P. 276

**Table 6.2** Later century transition in Coventry P. 276
Table 6.3 Percentage of *Irish Households* and Coventry Households in each Household unit size according to the frequency of Heads Family sizes for 1881 P. 277

Table 6.4 Marital status of solo Lodgers, Kin, and Visitors and whether they were Irishcom or Irish-born 1871-1901 P. 278

Table 6.5 Heads of *English Households containing Irish* with size of household, number of Irish co-residing and their relationship to the Head 1881 P. 279

Table 6.6 An adjunct Table to Table 6.5. The Irish-born children of heads of *English Households containing Irish* 1861 P. 281

Table 6.7 Age and Sex structure of Irishcom and also Coventry Host Population expressed in percentage form 1871-1901 P. 282

Table 6.8 Marital condition by age of Irishcom 1871-1901 and from the Census abstracts for Coventry the condition of the Host population 1871-1901 P. 283

Table 6.9 Marital condition and age of Irish Household Heads 1871-1901 and Marital condition and age of Coventry Host Household Heads 1881 P. 284

Table 6.10 Social classification of Irish-born and Irishcom 1871-1901 P. 285

Table 6.11 Social classification of *Irish Household* Heads 1871-1901 according to marital condition P. 286

Table 6.12 The Irish-born male & female heads of *Irish Households* assigned to Classes 1 & 2 on the basis of occupation or employment of extra staff 1881-1891 P. 287

Table 6.13 Collated occupations of male Irish-born married Heads of *Irish Households* in Class 3 for 1881-1901 P. 288

Table 6.14 Allocation of occupations of Irish-born and Irishcom males according to Booth’s principles 1841-1901 P. 290

Table 6.15 Allocation of occupations of Irish-born and Irishcom females according to Booth’s principles 1841-1901 P. 292

Table 6.16 St. Michael & St. John/Holy Trinity 1881 P. 294

Table 6.17 St. Michael & St. John/Holy Trinity 1901 P. 296

Appendix 1 Vol. 2:

Table A.1.1 Irish-born Males involved in Weaving in Coventry 1841-1851 P. 3

Appendix 2 Vol. 2:

Table A.2.1 Profile of Thomas Hennessey P. 17

Table A.2.2 Household Profile of Thomas McLean and of George McLean 1851 P. 26

Appendix 3 Vol. 2:

Table A.3.1 Irishcom Residents of Hill Street 1841-1871 showing their movements P. 40

Appendix 6 Vol. 2:

Table A.6.1 Members of Catholic Young Men’s Society March 1859 P. 86

Table A.6.2 St. Osburg’s and St. Mary’s: School Attendance Figures 1882 P. 95

Appendix 7 Vol. 2:

Table A.7.1 Coventry Workhouse 1841 P. 98

Table A.7.2 Coventry Workhouse 1851 P. 98

Table A.7.3 Coventry Workhouse 1861 P. 99

Table A.7.4 Coventry Workhouse 1871 P. 99

Table A.7.5 Coventry Workhouse 1881 P. 100

Table A.7.6 Coventry Workhouse 1891 P. 100

Table A.7.7 Coventry Workhouse 1901 P. 101

Table A.7.8 Irish presence in Barracks, Smithford Street, 1841-1901 P. 105
Appendix 11 Vol. 2:
**Table A.11.1** Relevant Occupants of the Convent of St. Mary, 1871-1901 P. 134

Appendix 12 Vol. 2:
**Table A.12.1** Timothy Murphy Household, H3C16 Well Street 1861 P. 146
**Table A.12.2** Stephen Murphy Household, 1871 and 1881 P. 146
**Table A.12.3** Thomas Murphy Household, H17C8 Well Street 1911 P. 146

Appendix 13 Vol. 2:
**Table A.13.1** Occupation of Household Heads Hertford Terrace 1881 P. 150
**Table A.13.2** Occupation of Household Heads Hertford Square 1881 P. 150

Appendix 17 Vol. 2:
**Table A.17.1** Michael Monehan appearing under a variety of spellings 1861-1901. Also showing the census ‘degrade’ of his family P. 174

Appendix 20 Vol. 2:
**Table A.20.1** St. John/Holy Trinity 1911 P. 298
**Table A.20.2** *Irish Households* 1911 P. 203
**Table A.20.3** Length of time that marriages of *Irish Household* heads had been in existence in 1911 P. 204
**Table A.20.4** Male Irish-born in notable occupational groupings 1911 P. 206
**Table A.20.5** Details on Irish-born in 1911, Enumeration Area 34 - ‘Matlock Road’ P. 207
Figures

Chapter 2 Vol. 2:
Figure 2.1 Hillfields P. 304
Figure 2.2 Thomas Street P. 304
Figure 2.3 Looking west from St. Michael’s c 1930 P. 305
Figure 2.4 Craner’s Road P. 306
Figure 2.5 Northumberland Road P. 306

Chapter 3 Vol. 1:
Figure 3.1 Part of Leicester Street P. 119
Figure 3.2 Palmer Lane P. 124
Figure 3.3 New Buildings P. 128
Figure 3.4 Gosford Street P. 133
Figure 3.5 Court 17 Much Park Street P.138
Figure 3.6 Court 13 St. Johns Street P. 139
Figure 3.7 Plan of Court 13 St. Johns Street 1851 P. 139
Figure 3.8 Well Street P. 144

Chapter 3 Vol. 2:
Figure 3.9 Soup Kitchen in St. Mary’s 1861 P. 307
Figure 3.10 Corn Exchange Coventry, designed by Irish-born James Murray P. 307

Chapter 4 Vol. 2:
Figure 4.1 Entrance of Mr O’Connell into St. Mary’s Hall, Coventry 1844 P. 308
Figure 4.2 Bravo! Coventry, 16th July 1887 P. 309
Figure 4.3 Home Rule Victory in Coventry, July 1887 P. 310
Figure 4.4 Parnell National Tribute, Coventry Subscribers, 1883 P. 310
Figure 4.5 Statement of Rev. T. Cockshead, Coventry Herald 15th December 1837 P. 311
Figure 4.6 St. Osburg’s 1910 with Priory to the right and schools to the left P. 312
Figure 4.7 St. Mary & St. Benedict, Raglan Street as seen from Hood Street P. 312
Figure 4.8 Lenten Retreat Programme St. Osburg’s 1875 P. 313
Figure 4.9 Denis McVeagh 1824-1913, Dispensary Medical Officer, 1853-1909 P. 314
Figure 4.10 Bishop William Bernard Ullathorne 1806-1889 P. 315
Figure 4.11 Father Ralph Ephrem Pratt 1802-1875 P. 315
Figure 4.12 Father Henry Edmund Moore. 1824-1899 P. 316
Figure 4.13 Father Antonio Francisco Pereira 1839-1923 P. 316
Figure 4.14 Father Placid Rea 1851-1915 P. 317
Figure 4.15 Father Henry Norbert Birt 1861-1919 P. 317
Figure 4.16 Dom Michael Placid Sinnott 1803-1896 P. 318

Chapter 5 Vol. 2:
Figure 5.1 Age and Sex structure of Irishcom, proportion of Irish-born 1841-1861 P. 272
Figure 5.2 Age and Sex structure of the Host and that of Irishcom 1841-1861 P. 274
Figure 5.3 James Hart P. 319

Chapter 6 Vol. 2:
Figure 6.1 Age and Sex structure of Irishcom, proportion of Irish-born 1871-1901 P. 300
Figure 6.2 Age and Sex structure of the Host, and that of Irishcom 1871-1901 P. 302

Appendix 2 Vol.2:
Figure A.2.1 The work of John Rogers P. 320

Appendix 11 Vol. 2:
Figure A.11.1 Seeking students from Ireland, 1869 P. 321
Appendix 12 Vol. 2:
Figure A.12.1 Abridged Four Generation Tree of the Doran Family P. 143
Figure A.12.2 Junction of Albert Street and Adelaide Street P. 322

Appendix 13 Vol. 2:
Figure A.13.1 Hertford Terrace 2016 P. 148
Figure A.13.2 Hertford Square looking north 1919 P. 149
Figure A.13.3 Hertford Square looking south 1954 P. 149

Appendix 20 Vol. 2:
Figure A.20.1 13 and 15 Carmelite Road P. 323
Maps

Chapter 1 Vol. 2:
Map 1.1 Coventry Registration District 1841-81 P. 324
Map 1.2 Coventry Registration District 1891 P. 325
Map 1.3 Coventry Registration District 1901 P. 326

Chapter 2 Vol. 2:
Map 2.1 Coventry based upon the Ordnance Survey of 1851 P. 327
Map 2.2 Coventry 1851 P. 328
Map 2.3 Taunton’s Map of the City of Coventry 1869 P. 329
Map 2.4 Goads Fire Insurance Plan of Coventry 1897 P. 330

Chapter 3 Vol. 1:
Map 3.1 Locations of vicinity Maps P. 118
Map 3.2 Leicester Street showing back to back housing and Irishcom in 1871 P. 119
Map 3.3 Palmer Lane showing location of Irishcom in 1861 and 1881 P. 125
Map 3.4 New Buildings showing Irishcom in 1861 and 1881 P. 127
Map 3.5 Irishcom in West Orchard in 1861 and 1881 P. 131
Map 3.6 Gosford Street near bridge showing Irishcom in 1861 P. 134
Map 3.7 Irishcom in Lower Much Park Street area in 1861 and 1881 P. 136
Map 3.8 Irishcom in Greyfriars Lane in 1861 and 1881 P. 141
Map 3.9 Irishcom in Well Street and Bond Street in 1861 and 1881 P. 145

Chapter 4 Vol. 1:
Map 4.1 Location Quotient of Irishcom in Coventry Enumeration Areas 1841 P. 334
Map 4.2 Distribution Irish households heads & their spouse’s by birthplace 1841 P. 335
Map 4.3 Coventry Enumeration Areas 1861 P. 336
Map 4.4 Irishcom in Enumeration areas as a percentage of Irishcom 1861 P. 337
Map 4.5 Location Quotient of Irishcom in Coventry Enumeration Areas 1861 P. 338

Chapter 5 Vol. 2:
Map 5.1 Coventry Enumeration Areas 1841 P. 331
Map 5.2 Irish-born in Coventry Enumeration Areas 1841 P. 332
Map 5.3 Irishcom in Enumeration areas as a percentage of Irishcom 1841 P. 333
Map 5.4 Location Quotient of Irishcom in Coventry Enumeration Areas 1841 P. 334
Map 5.5 Distribution Irish households heads & their spouse’s by birthplace 1841 P. 335
Map 5.6 Coventry Enumeration Areas 1861 P. 336
Map 5.7 Irishcom in Enumeration areas as a percentage of Irishcom 1861 P. 337
Map 5.8 Location Quotient of Irishcom in Coventry Enumeration Areas 1861 P. 338

Chapter 6 Vol. 2:
Map 6.1 Coventry Enumeration Areas 1881 P. 339
Map 6.2 Irishcom in Enumeration areas as a percentage of Irishcom 1881 P. 340
Map 6.3 Location Quotient of Irishcom in Coventry Enumeration Areas 1881 P. 341
Map 6.4 Distribution Irish households heads & their spouse’s by birthplace 1881 P. 342
Map 6.5 Coventry Enumeration Areas 1901 P. 343
Map 6.6 Irishcom in Enumeration areas as a percentage of Irishcom 1901 P. 344
Map 6.7 Location Quotient of Irishcom in Coventry Enumeration Areas 1901 P. 345
Map 6.8 ‘East’ Coventry industrial intrusion 1906 P. 346

Appendix 13 Vol. 2:
Map A.13.1 Hertford Square P. 148

Appendix 20 Vol. 2:
Map A.20.1 Coventry Enumeration Areas 1901 P. 347
Map A.20.2 Irish-born in Coventry Enumeration Areas 1911 P. 348
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I would like to express my thanks to the School of Arts and Humanities at Ulster University, in particular its Research Director - History, Professor Ian Thatcher, who provided the opportunity for me to engage in this research and who offered me encouragement.

Also I want to acknowledge my appreciation of the migrants who are the subject of this study, in what they have shown to me about the nature of resilience. These family oriented people were to be found across the social spectrum. Some became pillars of society but many were located towards its severe social exclusionary end. In a harsh, judgemental condescending century marked by oppressive social division, many Irish endured poverty and marginalisation. They faced brusque dislike, suspicion and lurking prejudice. They coped remarkably in spite of their initial distance from the cultural mainstream, their lack of formal education, skills and social graces, and their own behavioural flaws. In this statistical casting and theoretical emplacement of the Coventry Irish I hope I was mindful that I was writing about a complex people whose response while they resided in an ancient city, with an especially tolerant character and variability of fortune, was more than the sum of their demographic aggregations. Also that I have called attention to their personal experiences which were more individual, and their decisions less predictable than standard migrant accounts of the Irish in Britain may infer. That said, perhaps my reaction might have been similar to that of Dr. Alison Light who when researching her own ancestors for her book Common People remarked that she would not have liked some of them much if she had met them.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of librarians or archivists in London, Coventry, Birmingham and Dublin.

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Abstract

This study sets out to investigate the impact and implication of a discreet quantum of Irish, responding to nineteenth century urban life, in a small sized city, which had not been inundated by a disproportionate influx of Irish-born from the later 1840s. It seeks to understand if the response in such circumstances might vary from the historical migrant narrative developed around large post-Famine volumes in substantial municipalities. It is centred on Coventry which it is suggested represented the ‘ordinary’ small city and the quintessential ‘county’ type town. Its compact physical size and attainable censal continuity of coverage for a determinate area over many decades provides ideal investigative conditions. There is scrutiny of all eight censuses that enumerated the Irish; which permits the nature of generational transition to be revealed. It furnishes data for both Irish-born and for all those it deems to have an Irish association within a household framework; the latter in an attempt to embody a ‘community’. The provision of dual data sets permits the relationship between these two denotations of Irish to be assessed. These findings are compared with household information attained for every household in the entire city for 1851 and 1881. The opportunity provided by this smaller canvas is taken to examine the characteristics of selected families or individuals, not necessarily part of the dominant ‘Celtic Catholic’ grouping.

Findings contribute to the view that the experience of migrants varied in different cities. For Coventry an especial response was prompted by its benign municipal character and fluctuating prosperity, volume of Irish migrants and their heterogeneous background. An interplay of factors influenced migrant adjustment and shaped settlement pattern. Migrants were neither seriously segregated, nor placed in a defensive stance. Subsequent generations, while conscious of their heritage, were found on the path towards integration by end of century.
**Introduction**

This introduction shall consist of three sections. First, it will introduce Coventry as the urban setting and the Irish who chose it as their place of residence. It will employ the expedient of outlining the likely perspective of a visitor traversing the city in 1841 in order to ground the study in the lived experience of the century. The second section will proffer the aim of the study, and will assert the benefits to be gained from the completion of this investigation. It will justify the usefulness of Coventry as a case study of the Irish in a smaller urban area during the nineteenth century. It will recommend the examination in that sized setting, of a relatively small scale Irish settlement that did not continue in the long term, mainly through, initially low and thereafter restricted volume of arrivals, as a culturally distinct community. It will lay out the value of surveying Irish migrants over a century, enabling capture of the bloom and fade of successive generations. The objectives involved in accomplishing the aim will be distinguished, and the approach outlined that will be adopted, e.g. framing the analysis in a household setting, to fulfil these goals. Finally, it will set out how the remainder of the thesis is organised so that the aim and objectives are dealt with in an ordered fashion.

**Introduction**

The frame through which the past is observed is not assisted by the fabric of Coventry city centre today. The layout, width and direction of historic core streets can still be distinguished where not reshaped as pedestrianised routes and plazas. However the houses, shops and buildings that once lined them, many of medieval appearance that rivalled York have been tragically lost.¹ This occurred through the thoughtless, if well meaning ‘improvement’ of pre-World War II clearance, demolition by aerial bombing and post-World War II reconstruction. The once appropriately scaled residential and retail function of these streets has been lost to office blocks and commercial buildings, if not equally bland in appearance then clashing in style, or lost to stark impersonal albeit landscaped open space. From last mid-century, planning was future orientated - modernity for modernity’s sake.² Searby remarked in the forward looking spirit of 1972 ‘the city is now totally dominated by structures in the modern idiom…they break utterly with the past: concrete celebrations of civic panache, modern urban planning, and the

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pride of giant enterprise. Now, however, in the city centre, the once conceptually stylish pedestrianised shopping precinct presents as a tired architectural project from the 1950s and it currently incorporates over-styled architecture from the 1990s. Walters remarked ‘its pioneering Festival of Britain architecture, so widely admired in the post-war years, has managed to overshadow Coventry’s remaining heritage in wood and stone and somehow erase the collective memories of the place’. Environmental evidence of domestic and industrial production around the silk, and watch staple trades which gave in their heydays economic strength, employment, and an especial character to the Victorian city has largely disappeared. Activity in these trades which Harper said brought a ‘fugitive prosperity’ was in turn eclipsed by a later 19th and 20th century industrial renaissance based on bicycle and automobile assembly. Together with post-World War II rebuilding and residential development this attracted its own substantial Irish migrant influx in the prosperous ‘golden age’ of the 1950s and 60s. Since then the economic pendulum has swung towards decline and again towards recovery. Urban redevelopment has included the ubiquitous Inner Ring Road, commenced in 1958, brutalist in design, with a pervading bleakness beneath its stilts, which has both defined and isolated the central area. Hill Street is an example of a street that it has severed. It previously had purpose as a radial artery extending from the city centre to the outskirts, and along which city Catholics could travel to reach St. Osburg’s church. Many Irish lived in streets just off the city centre; parts of these streets, e.g. Greyfriars Lane, due to their convenient access to the centre, now serve as car parks. Following much municipal boundary extension since 1890, the mid-nineteenth century city area which is the focus of this study appears as a nucleus that is hugely diminished in the setting of today’s urban society.

2 Peter Walters, *The Story of Coventry*, (Brimscumbe, Stroud 2013) p. 1
6 Adrian Smith, *City of Coventry: A Twentieth Century Icon* (London 2006) pp. 9-13, 107-110. These particular pages written by Coventrian Smith, whose mother was born in Galway provide a powerful synopsis of the causes of the disillusion that have followed the triumphalist vision of politicians and urban planners in the latter half of the twentieth century. These pages are valuable in that his critical observation on Coventry modernity is set in the contrasting, and to this study revealing, light of the lost ‘surprisingly close-knit city’ that found its roots in Victorian endeavours and skills, of which his parents and earlier generations were proud. For the non-Coventrian asking what exactly has happened in the city – to its community and fabric, these pages succinctly spell it out.
expansive city area. The dimensions of the former were curtailed by the reach of a walker, the latter by administrative aggrandisement. The A45 road, by-passing this larger modern city to the south, and the M6 major motorway to the north, hide from the modern traveller, the past nodality of Coventry and have collapsed any sensation of the physical and mental distances that separated it from other cities. These routes have superseded the now lost arterially important Birmingham to London route through the city centre. This route was on the direct road line from London to Chester and Liverpool, and again on the London to Holyhead run. This coach ‘highway’ was used by Irish travellers, who by definition were wealthy, of ‘first respectability’, if using that travel mode. Activity on it must have left Coventrians forming a more sophisticated impression of Irish people than might be anticipated.

In the 1820s Irish travellers on the coach run may have chatted while refreshing in the Rose and Crown Inn or the Craven Arms Hotel in High Street, or in the King’s Head Inn or the White Lion Hotel in Smithford Street about Telford’s recent improvement from 1815, both of the road surface and the route alignment from Shrewsbury across Wales. His remarkable Menai bridge opened in 1824 had reduced the journey by several hours. Indeed Telford would have ‘by-passed’ Coventry but the local merchants resisted and he made do with opening a new road line off Spon Street that avoided the Allesley Road. The convenience of the new steam packets crossing the Irish Sea compared to the old sloops that could take up to a week to complete a voyage to Liverpool might have been mentioned. Equally there may have been complaints about how poor, or seasonal travellers, crowded the open-decks on Liverpool to Dublin voyages (they comprised 91.0% of the passengers between 1824 and 1830). The busy traffic through Coventry to Dublin must surely have been acknowledged in Coventry as a consequence of the Union bringing the London power structure closer to Ireland, but there may have been inn gossip that the Union had failed, except in Ulster, to bring calm, or prosperity as indicated by the deteriorating state of Dublin silk production. The travellers might have complained that when trade was bad in Britain, surplus stock was dumped in Dublin, glutting the market and on sale at a price too low for Dublin weavers to match. This

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10 The extent of the municipal area from 1842-1890 on which data for this study is centered, can be substantially distinguished on the ground today. The Birmingham-London railway line marks its southern extent, the Coundon railway loop indicates roughly its extent to the west. Chapelfields beyond the loop to be included. Coventry Canal from Foleshill Road bridge to the A444 roundabout at Stoke Heath marks its northern limit. The A444 south of the roundabout or more precisely the line just to its east marked by the B4110 (Swan Lane and later known as Humber Road) to the bridge over the Birmingham-London railway line completes.


explained the arrival in Coventry after 1820 of some of those hand loom weavers from Dublin who could no longer survive free trade.

Daniel O’Connell’s name may also have been introduced because his campaigns were well reported in the Coventry Herald where the issue of emancipation was seen raising the deepest historical distrust. Colley tells of the avalanche of around 3,000 anti-Catholic petitions from every part of the Britain on the House of Commons in 1828 and 1829. Coventry was no exception: the Archdeaconry of Coventry petitioned against, while the entire corporation supported another hostile petition. Daniel O’Connell’s name may also have been introduced because his campaigns were well reported in the Coventry Herald where the issue of emancipation was seen raising the deepest historical distrust. Colley tells of the avalanche of around 3,000 anti-Catholic petitions from every part of the Britain on the House of Commons in 1828 and 1829. Coventry was no exception: the Archdeaconry of Coventry petitioned against, while the entire corporation supported another hostile petition. Daniel O’Connell’s name may also have been introduced because his campaigns were well reported in the Coventry Herald where the issue of emancipation was seen raising the deepest historical distrust. Colley tells of the avalanche of around 3,000 anti-Catholic petitions from every part of the Britain on the House of Commons in 1828 and 1829. Coventry was no exception: the Archdeaconry of Coventry petitioned against, while the entire corporation supported another hostile petition. Daniel O’Connell’s name may also have been introduced because his campaigns were well reported in the Coventry Herald where the issue of emancipation was seen raising the deepest historical distrust. Colley tells of the avalanche of around 3,000 anti-Catholic petitions from every part of the Britain on the House of Commons in 1828 and 1829. Coventry was no exception: the Archdeaconry of Coventry petitioned against, while the entire corporation supported another hostile petition. Daniel O’Connell’s name may also have been introduced because his campaigns were well reported in the Coventry Herald where the issue of emancipation was seen raising the deepest historical distrust. Colley tells of the avalanche of around 3,000 anti-Catholic petitions from every part of the Britain on the House of Commons in 1828 and 1829. Coventry was no exception: the Archdeaconry of Coventry petitioned against, while the entire corporation supported another hostile petition. Daniel O’Connell’s name may also have been introduced because his campaigns were well reported in the Coventry Herald where the issue of emancipation was seen raising the deepest historical distrust. Colley tells of the avalanche of around 3,000 anti-Catholic petitions from every part of the Britain on the House of Commons in 1828 and 1829. Coventry was no exception: the Archdeaconry of Coventry petitioned against, while the entire corporation supported another hostile petition.

Fiery letters were published in the Herald. A long letter prominent on the front page of 14th November 1828 complained, that in spite of the ‘great concession’ provided in the Acts of 1778 and 1791 the Catholic leaders of Ireland remained ‘far from thankful for the benefits they now enjoy’ and were exerting pressure for repeal of all laws which ‘protect the Protestant Church, and the Protestant Ascendancy’. O’Connell’s campaigns were raising the issues among Coventrians of the treatment Ireland had received and the nature of the Irish character. The Herald editorial on 4th July 1828 was perplexed that O’Connell was standing in Clare against Vesey Fitzgerald who was in favour of Catholic Emancipation and remarked to its readers ‘the affairs of unhappy Ireland peculiarly engross the attention of the public’. It continued that errors, such as O’Connell was making now, could be excused because ‘He is a native of a conquered country, the soil of which has been confiscated to the victors, who now tell the people that their religion is repugnant to the Constitution’. The Irish have strong feelings and affections; their hearts are better than their heads; and it is no wonder that their conduct should be characterised by a deficiency of prudential calculation.”

O’Connell passed through Coventry on 9th February 1829 where he changed horses on his way to London from Birmingham. Most likely he would have stopped over in the Craven Arms which was Coventry’s premier inn, with a stable block at the rear capable of accommodating forty horses. He would have preferred the Craven Arms

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13 Linda Colley, Britons, Forging the Nation 1707-1837 (London 1992) pp. 348-351. Local MP’s Thomas Fyler voted against Emancipation while Richard Heathcote voted in favour. Both were Tories who had come into representing the city at this time due to local political sensitivities. However Coventry was normally represented by Whig Edward Ellice until he died in 1863 and by a second MP usually a Whig or Liberal.

14 The following offers a flavour of the passion aroused in the writer of the letter to the Coventry Herald 14th November 1828: ‘Where is there a solitary instance of the Roman Catholic Church ever granting toleration to religious worship, in opposition to their vain, superstitious, arrogant, idolatrous, and bigoted form of worship, the glaring and pompous performance of which, instead of instilling into the mind, the mild and conciliatory principles of the Christian Religion, is only to create a false idea of the splendour of Popery, and the power of its priesthood, who in their intolerable vain egotism and ostentatious pride, ascribe every benignant feeling as emanating from themselves and not from God.’

15 Coventry Herald 4th July 1828

16 Inverness Courier 18th February 1829 p. 2. His coach was a four inside and six outside model.
to the Tory favoured King’s Head Inn, as it was the headquarters of the Whigs who for long influenced Coventry opinion. It may have been obvious to some conversing in those inns, that once Emancipation had been achieved, O’Connell would turn to openly seek the Union’s repeal. In pursuit of this in 1844 he would address a meeting in St. Mary’s Hall to much local acclaim.

The coach traveller taking from his pocket a watch made in Coventry, which had a reputation for crafted timepieces, to ascertain if it was time to depart, would in that casual gesture have given, the clearest signal of his status, as few workmen could afford one. Victorian society was full of, not only open, but also coded practices that silently indicated respectability and notions of superior class position. Humbler Irish migrants were unaware of all the means which could be used to keep them at a social distance.

If the coach route was taken by anyone journeying in 1841 from a London direction towards Birmingham they would, at the edge of the town, see the ‘House of Industry’ known to all as the Workhouse. On the margin of many towns, austere red-bricked institutions had recently appeared since the Poor Law Act of 1834. In Coventry the ancient Whitefriar’s monastery had been used as the workhouse since 1801 and had a benevolent reputation. Its somnolent outward appearance in 1841 belied what was occurring within, where a more austere regime, to make it an unattractive destination, was being insisted on by Poor Law Commissioners. There was a pauper population of 228 of whom 14 had Irish association. The Irish comprised 6.6% of the inmates and even after the Famine years this proportion would not increase. Of these, 30 year old Irish-born Mary Hassett seems to have been vulnerable, as with her resided therein five children ranging from 5 years to 5 months all born in Derbyshire.

The traveller would cover a route from the edge of the town, in the descriptive words of Harper ‘with many twists and turns and narrow passes through picturesque slums’ that could be called ‘the maze of Much Park Street, Earl Street and High Street’ (see Maps 2.2). If the traveller rested at the King’s Head Inn, at the corner of Hertford Street and Smithford Street he may not have realised that residing with his father Francis, in Hertford Street was a young James Hart born in County Down in 1829.

17 HO107.1152.14. Only her 3 year old daughter Mary can be located a decade later. She was then a 13 year old ‘servant of all work’ for Irish-born John Lamb. He was a hand loom silk weaver who newly appears in the 1851 census with his Irish-born family in Hertford Square. The continued presence of Mary’s daughter shows that some link with Coventry remained and prompts the question was John Lamb’s hiring of 13 year old Mary a charitable action (HO107.2067.31.630.17). The Coventry Standard 20th October 1843 reported that Mary Hassett, an Inmate of the Workhouse was committed to the House of Correction, and to be kept to hard labour for 20 days, for obstinately refusing to do such work as she was able to do.

18 Harper, Holyhead Road, pp. 266, 268
Commonly referred to later as ‘Paddy’, he was to become one of the major (and most trenchant) ribbon manufacturers in the city (Appendix 2). A short distance along Smithford Street was the arched entrance to the Barracks where 84 Irish-born resided. Therein a young Irish-born John King was second in command of 6th Dragoons Regiment, with 143 (78%) of the 184 barrack residents having an Irish connection. The Barrack Master who lived in Bull Yard was Irish-born (as were subsequent ones into the 1890s), namely John Kelly with his wife and four children all of whom were Irish-born. The Irish cavaliers smartly dressed in the king’s uniform must have left in the Coventry air a reassurance that order, loyalty and neatness could be just much an Irish trait as the one more commonly projected by the bedraggled appearance of some other Irish. The journeyer could not have realised as he exited the city via the Holyhead Road to the west, that the small nearby Catholic chapel fallen into disrepair in Hill Street, would in November of the same year see the arrival of Fr William Ullathorne (Appendix 2). He had visited Ireland earlier in the year, and before that in 1837, and had been impressed by Fr Theobald Matthew’s temperance movement. He was keen to organise the Coventry mission in Hill Street, which Champ said was in a ‘very dispirited condition’. He had left Coventry by 1846 but the city’s Irish Catholics - even if the mission remained ‘English’ in character - had the benefit of his evangelical energy, his strong sermonising (particularly against alcohol), and his efforts to raise funds for a new church.

Like so many, the traveller had exited quickly and had seen Coventry not as regionally dominant like Birmingham or socially desirable like Leamington, but more a drab pass-through town on a journey to elsewhere. His journey traversing the city from south-east to west was through a narrow road corridor and on having encountering few Irish, may not have realised that in 1841 the Irish were located in every one of the 56 non-institutional enumerations areas that covered the city.

20 Apart from a militia headquarters Leicester had no barracks in the town. The South Wigston Barracks was opened in 1881 on the southern edge of the city. The cavalry barracks in Birmingham was at Great Brook Street, Aston on the then eastern periphery of the city.
21 The chapel in Hill Street was almost certainly visible across an open field, from the closely parallel running Holyhead Road.
23 Irish were not found in four rural enumerations areas at the edge: East side London Road/Pinley HO 107/1152.5.2 ED 9; Harnall Lane HO107/1153.6.6 ED 20; Paines Lane HO107/1153.7.21 ED 22; Radford HO107/1154.9.1 ED 25; The Irish were to be found in 59 of the 61 non-institutional enumeration districts of the city in 1851. They were not found in two enumeration districts on the northeastern edge of the city in 1851. The first with 83 persons was a thinly populated largely agricultural: Red Lane & Caludon (HO107/2067.708 ED 37). The second with 500 persons was in Hillfields: King William
In fact by 1841 our hypothetical traveller would no longer have taken a coach direct from London. Such means of lengthy travel had become obsolete since the fast, double track, inter-city London and Birmingham Railway line, crossing east to west, had opened three years earlier, just beyond the southern edge of the built-up city. This served as an advantage, in that people could easily access (or indeed vacate) the city, but in another way it caused the city to lose its position - relevant to the horse drawn era - as a normal journey stage-point in the movement of national traffic. The appearance of being marooned symbolised the wider issue that the new powered forces in transport and manufacturing were outflanking old Coventry certainties.

The almost invisible Sherbourne River now flows forgotten for most of its cross-city course in an underground concrete conduit. In the nineteenth century the building of houses and works right up to its water’s edge around Trafalgar Street and again in Well Street/West Orchard was an indicator of the congested state of the city. Its channel, which gave rise to unhealthy environs, then could be openly seen passing through the vicinity of West Orchard, Well Street, New Buildings and Palmer Lane where many of the Irish described in this study resided. An authentic link with this Irish yesteryear is nonetheless visible in the townscape. Coventry is known as the city of the three spires, which belong to the old Cathedral of St. Michael, Holy Trinity Church and Christ Church. To the nineteenth century observer, these marked the central city area and their visibility defined the ambit of a compact city. Although customarily thought of as a set of three, there is a prominent fourth spire; that of St. Osburg’s Church commenced by Ullathorne in 1843 and opened in 1845. Such a church, Gilley would regard as ‘the very embodiment of the Catholic imagination in stone’. There over Sunday, 31st March 1851 Fr Ralph Pratt estimated 2,200 Catholics attended Divine Service. Many in the congregation were Irish, who must have felt heartened at the existence of a new, proudly spired gothic church building. Elsewhere in society a

24 Except for a brief appearance in Palmer Lane. The lane is accessed through an archway in Burges. The writer visited Palmer Lane on 9th October 2015 and to his surprise noticed a distinct odour emitting from the river. It brought recall of unhealthy conditions in the river environs less than two centuries earlier when Irish located in its immediate vicinity. This impression was reinforced subsequently on reading a BBC News Report ‘Tracing the hidden River Sherbourne under Coventry’ which referred to the ‘hidden river: contained, covered and contaminated’. It continued ‘The River Sherbourne makes a brief reappearance in the city centre, among the bins and back doors of shops behind Cross Cheaping, where its rotten smell, like damp decomposing cabbages, unmistakably rises from its murky flow’.
25 Sheridan Gilley, Roman Catholicism and the Irish in England, in Donald M. MacRaid (ed.), The Great Famine and Beyond: Irish Migrants in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, (Dublin 2000) p. 148
26 National Archives HO129/400 p. 4. The OS Town Map of Coventry 1888 states the church could seat 580.
number of Irish may have attracted disapproval or suspicion due to their branding by the faith they bore; here in the pews possession of faith was validated and normalised, the need for approval satisfied, and confirmation to the indigent that poverty was a blessed state. Today these four spires collectively stand as the most eminent manifestation of former times, with the still less common acknowledgement of the existence of the fourth ‘Catholic’ one providing its own metaphorical significance. It marks in Hill Street the only place that now speaks to Coventry’s history as a residency of the mid-nineteenth century Irish; where, as Clem Richardson would describe, the ‘cultural imprint takes tangible form’. Its irregular rough finished stone wall exterior and its plain unassuming interior could have been more to the humbler taste of migrants than the medieval romanticism of Pugin’s red brick St Chad’s Cathedral, Birmingham, with its tall, thin pillared arches and gilded detail. Churches - no doubt in Coventry - were consciously built with the intention that the solidity and impressiveness of the edifice would make a statement about permanence. Catholic churches often built with the pennies of the poor enduringly remind of the sacrifices and hardships made by forebears. Age old ceremony recurring within, provided continuity with the past as new generations experienced liturgies formalised by generations of ago. Over the years, aided by becoming repositories of memorials, churches functioned to commemorate the past as much as to serve the present. Some have survived into twenty-first century Coventry as a reminder of yesterday’s urban fabric. Beyond these centrepieces, the close landscape of the nineteenth century city - shops, houses, workshops and factories, yards, lanes and courts, through repeated urban makeovers has vanished in the blur of time just like the lost municipal society, with its mores and moods, that lived on it.

A person journeying that route through the city might not have realised, that they had passed so closely by many with Irish association, due to the fact the Irish resided in side streets and courts just off Smithford Street and Much Park Street. Seventy five such, resided in the latter, at a time more than four years before the Famine inrush to Britain began (See Appendix 1). It would not have crossed the mind of the archetypal traveller of 1841 to stop and look behind the presentable street façade that hid the impoverished living conditions in the yards behind. He might have asked himself why he ever should, since the environment appeared as normal for his time. In such a state of reasoning, any deprivation in the yards was the fault of the occupants themselves, and


28 Some gems such as the medieval Old College of Bablake with Bonds Hospital in Hill Street, Medieval St. Marys Hall in Bailey Lane, or Georgian Kirby House, 16 Little Park Street, or 7 Little Park Street have survived and are still in use.
not an issue that involved him. Towns such as Nottingham and Birmingham had a preponderance of working people, many of whom were court dwellers and Coventry was no different. Again Coventry suffered a recent cholera outbreak in 1839, tuberculosis was a grave problem, and the depression of 1837 had not yet ended, so a risk existed of catching disease or being approached by those in hardship seeking alms in such confined quarters.

However if he did stop, he may not have been able to readily identify the Irish. In 1841 their surnames did not always provide reliable ethnic identification. Nor were their occupations always of an unskilled labourer type, since many were involved in the weaving activity of the city. The length of time some were resident in Coventry meant that their accent and appearance could have been audibly and visibly ‘local’. Neither was there pronounced residential clustering of the Irish which was a reputed feature of Irish behaviour in other cities.

The Irish weavers would have worked long hours, in their own domestic world, in a patient pattern of life akin to the weavers in the population at large. Some may have been former soldiers and so were conditioned to order and discipline. Weavers from the east of Ireland were spoken of as industrious and since they would have sought stock and provided finished work to the manufacturers a reputation for reliability was essential. Weavers had different income levels but those in the city centre were spoken of as poor; their income further restricted by the trade depression in 1841. The need to feed their children meant earning money was a priority. The tightening up, following the Poor Law Act of 1834 on the provision of outdoor relief, which through particular Coventrian circumstances only began to impact from 1840 onwards meant the feared Workhouse was in prospect for those in difficulty. The accommodation in Much Park Street was known to be dilapidated and unhealthy and its affordability must have been the priority attraction to them. A breakdown in health due to these unsanitary surroundings could prove disastrous.

In some Irish related studies the native population often presents as a homogenous backdrop, sharing the prejudices of the age and wishing to increase their own sense of self-importance by regarding Irish people as simply inferior Other. However there is a generality about such statements. Much is unclear about the Irish in pre-Famine


30 Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, Appendix G Part II, PP 1836 XXXIV p. 89

31 Second Report of Commissioners of Inquiry into the state of large towns and populous districts, Appendix, PP 1845 XVIII [602] [610] p. 259
Coventry, thus it can only be speculated what welcome they received from native families living in courthouses alongside them, and whether the Irish considered it wise, where they were outnumbered, to play down their background. There may have been native families in 1841, before the arrival of a more uncouth element of Irish after the Famine, who were in similar circumstances to the Irish and tolerated the Irish even if it was on the basis that Irish presence kept rents low. The transience of court residents must have meant that new residents were not regarded as intruders, which might have arisen if there was a tradition of long-term settlement in these yards. There was a nuclear family structure that underpinned the Irish presence and evidence of exogamy that suggested local acceptance. Their commitment to Coventry was mainly based on opportunity in the silk trade, and if not available, small sized households would if necessary move elsewhere to find it. Irish association with other Irish centred on consanguineal bonds, relationships between families created through marriage and on common provenance in Ireland, but the existence of a cohesive Irish community at the time seems doubtful.

In 1841 the ‘high noon’ of Victorianism, as identified by Kitson Clarke, was some years in the offing, as it was for the staple silk industry in Coventry.32 Much was going to change in relation to the Irish presence in Coventry over the short and medium term. Indeed some dubious Irish characters would come to reside in Much Park Street. Coventry people were aware of the build up of dreadful conditions in Ireland wherein lay the potential for calamity. The Herald would editorialise in 1844 about ‘galling injustice from which Ireland has so long suffered’ and that ‘In spirit and in practice - in all but actual blood-shedding, the Government are now broadly at war with the Catholic population Of Ireland’.33

It is hoped this introductory reflection reveals an approach that is sensitive to historic place, past occasion and transience that will help recreate the setting, and disposition of a typical British midland town chosen by the Irish as their destination. It is trusted that likewise sensitivity will be seen to exist in this appraisal of the Irish, and the quality of their interaction with the city, and each other, given they were not a homogenous group. It is hoped that particular regard will be taken of Irish in Coventry who were similar to those that Davis instanced when reviewing Lees’ study on the

33 Coventry Herald 19th January 1844
London Irish. These were Irish who unlike the Irish of the slums ‘lived quietly in equal numbers in lower concentration in mixed centres of population [and] went unnoticed’.  

**The Aim and Objectives of this study**

The aim of this study will be to examine the standing of a small Irish community settling in a compact, ‘county’ type midland town. It sets out to ascertain how the response might have differed from the experience recorded in more popular study locales; experience which has provided the general ‘script’ for the mainland. Previous research on Irish migrants, considered in Chapter 1, has often been drawn to the problematic majority experience of migrants settling in the largest urban areas. Such places attracted a large migrant population and through sheer numbers of those arriving, often in circumstance of crisis, extreme demand was placed on an inadequate and insufficient housing stock, leading with other factors, to residential overcrowding and clustering. In such surroundings the presence of a large number of migrants, of itself could bolster self-confidence in their culture and social behaviour (about which the native population may have been suspicious or antagonistic) and so could prolong migrant isolation. The sight of what appeared to be a never ending stream of migrants, at a level that was not easily quantified, could exaggerate fears among the native population of increased threat to the social order and to native employment opportunity. In 1851 there were 83,813 Irish-born residing in Liverpool, and in Manchester & Salford were 52,504 Irish-born. These figures represented 22.3% and 13.1% respectively of municipal populations and are figures that merely refer to those born in Ireland. If their British born children and spouses are added then the size and impact of this ‘Irish community’ is even more consequential. These percentages relate to city totals, but within cities the Irish comprised higher percentages of the population in certain wards where they were concentrated. In relation to Liverpool’s 14 wards in 1851, 47% of the population in each of the two wards - Vauxhall and Exchange was Irish-born. Much of the long lasting negative stereotype that discredited migrants nationally and could tar all Irish with the same brush, was based on depictions - if overblown and inaccurate - of ‘Little Ireland’ type settlement in such large areas. Liverpool and Manchester & Salford are often cited but York, Birmingham and Wolverhampton are also exemplars. Interest which there has been in the experience of larger-city migrant volumes has not been as keenly taken in that of smaller volumes of

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35 Coventry was not actually a county town. Its role as a county town disappeared on the abolition of the County of Coventry in 1842. It is referred to on most occasions by its historic title ‘city’.

Irish in more secondary locations. Pooley remarked that what was required was an ‘examination of the full range of Irish migrants in a variety of communities of different sizes and economic structures to ascertain the diversity of migrants and of their experience’. This he felt should counteract the homogenous view taken of the migrants by nineteenth century commentators largely based on the reports of the Irish destitute massed in slum areas of larger towns and cities. He stated there was a ‘need to assess more precisely the social and demographic impact of Irish migrants on British towns’. O’Leary was of the view that an emphasis upon the social and cultural diversity of the Irish would show that ‘their experience varied not only in towns but also between towns and cities of different sizes and economic structures’. Herson in promoting his study of Stafford, which he promulgated as representative of small town Britain, decried the neglect of historians in examining the Irish in the minor municipality.

This study takes up this challenge as it pertains to Coventry. The degree of community change and integration of the Irish in a small city as exemplified by Coventry warrants exploration; the relative size of the city is shown in Table 1.1. Coventry is justifiable as a setting for a study, of low volume influx into the smaller town. It had a total population of 36,812 in 1851, of which 698 or 1.9% were Irish-born. It is suggested that Coventry represented a quintessential ‘county’ type town. It symbolized the ‘ordinary’ smaller nineteenth century city, possessing a cathedral sized parish church, cavalry barracks, workhouse, and its own staple, signature industries of silk ribbon making and watchmaking. The city was an ancient one and with certain dispositions to its freemen and munificent charities imbued its residents with a sense of its special character. It had a distinctive, existence from Birmingham, which was a city 17 miles to the west with thirteen times its population in 1851. A distance of 23 miles

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40 If the 130 Irish-born who comprised the majority of the 4th Dragoon Guards cavalry troop who resided, largely self contained, in the centre city barracks in 1851, and who were subject to biennial rotation, are excluded from household analysis, then the Irish ‘community’ figure is even more compact.
separated it from Leicester to the north east where Danaher found an unwelcoming ‘powerfully’ anti-Irish Protestant ambience. Coventry might be seen, beneath the silk weaving and watch making activity, as essentially a drab market town, not too far beyond its medieval shape and character. It endured poor social conditions in the early century and a late, difficult transition from the dominance of domestic production to that of factory production. Following a catastrophic collapse of its silk industry in 1860 the city recovered later in the century by reinventing itself as bicycle manufacturing city. Most cities have aspects of discredit, none more so than Coventry in the nineteenth century. It was a densely crowded city, with dreadful living conditions for the urban poor up to mid-century. It had courts and back-to-backs whose filth or proximity to the polluted river led to outbreaks of cholera in 1832 and 1849. It had a high mortality rate above national average beyond mid-century which meant that it was the first of ten cities on a list for investigation by the medical officer who reported to the Privy Council in 1858. Sickness or unemployment brought destitution while the Poor Law turned the screw on relief for the poor. It endured the shock of its staple silk industry collapsing in 1860 which traumatised the city for a decade. Watchmaking, its other industry was also fading in importance as the century progressed, again slowly asphyxiated by mass production and competition. Bicycle making brought golden years of hope in the final quarter of the century but the slump of 1896 showed that while it would provide a skill pool for twentieth century motor manufacture, it had reached its crest through overproduction and competition from Birmingham. It was not a city of saintly people; there were weekly reports of locals charged before magistrates for stealing, pickpocketing, breaching the peace, drunk and disorderly behaviour, etc. Miscreants could be placed in stocks as late as 1837 and a boy of 10 years was whipped in 1840.41 From mid-century, municipal infrastructure improved, and through the provision of utilities and regulation for a healthier environment the harshness and danger so prevalent earlier was lessened. Coventry presents aspects of a typical midland Victorian city, and while its populace had their own internal issues which were capable of creating anger, it also displayed a peculiar placidity that provided a benign setting for the Irish.42

The study will seek out the key factors that may explain the level of Irish presence in the city. The role played by Coventrian determinants such its industrial reputation, location and accessibility will be reviewed. More generalised influences will also be

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41 Coventry Standard 6th January 1837; Coventry Standard 6th October 1837; Coventry Herald 27th March 1840 - The boy received a whipping and a day’s imprisonment for stealing a pair of boots from a shop in Jordan Well.
42 The nature of this peculiar placidity is considered in Chapter 2.3.
noted for instance the increase in migrants settling in Britain from the 1820s with a crescendo post-Famine, place of origin links, kin invitation and chain migration. The Irish experience following arrival will be described and assessed. They inserted themselves, en masse after the Famine into an urban milieu, which was undergoing painful, industrial adaptation to powered manufacture and whose inadequate infrastructure and housing stock was already under pressure from rapid population growth. The approach of this study will be to focus largely on households and in doing so will consider how the household structure underpinned the Irish community. It was a structure that was seen by Lees in London as maintaining a framework of order in the chaos of the mid-century inrush. The Irish will be seen throughout as residing either in Irish Households or in English Households containing Irish. Irish settlement over the century will be examined, and will be based primarily on the censuses of 1841-1901 which cover the entirety of those in the nineteenth century that show Ireland as a place of birth.

The term ‘Irish’ has been regularly employed by writers with the casual assumption that these people shared a common culture and identity. In fact they were not homogeneous and included persons of different social background, provenance and religion. Children born in Britain to Irish migrants have also been regarded as Irish. The term ‘community’ that can suggest a sharing of characteristics and interests, or cohesion is often applied to a collection of these people without proper clarification of what is implied. There is awareness in this study on the implication of reliance on raw Irish-born totals, aggregating details of a disparate group under the term Irish, the complexity around the notion of community, and issues involved in deciding whose detail should be extracted from the census manuscripts in order that size of a community might be found.

All those recognised by the criteria set out in Chapter 1 as having an Irish connection in a particular census will be included in the analysis as the ‘Irishcom’ of that census. Thus use of the word specifically indicates this study’s database Irish are being referred to while in itself an Irishcom total will provide a more satisfactory impression of the extent of the ‘community’. Irish-born totals will be a subset of an

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44 These categories represent specific persons selected by the norms of this study, and to ensure their exclusivity they are italicised and labelled as such throughout these chapters.
45 As will be explained later those with an Irish association e.g. local-born children of Irish-born parentage cannot be readily recognised once they grow up and leave the parent headed household.
Irishcom total; the dual display of Irish-born and Irishcom figures in a number of Tables should assist appreciation of the scale of the Irish ‘community’ and the number of Irish-born at its core.\textsuperscript{46} While committed to a quantitative reveal the study will be equally sensitive to the nature of the mean short lives of many. Carefully chosen but restricted examples of circumstances will be introduced such as that, of Irish-born Martin Malone 42 years, who in 1891 lived with Charlotte 41 years, born in Cradley Heath and their young family at 16 St Agnes Lane. Neither adult could be located in the 1901 census as Martin had died in 1892 aged 43 and Charlotte had died in 1899 aged 49 years.\textsuperscript{47}

Awareness will be maintained of the demographic dynamic whereby over the century a significant group of migrants were in a youthful age cohort when commencing residence in Coventry and over the years as they moved up throughout the age population pyramid their behaviour was influenced by the outlook consistent with their age-cohort. There were three streams of inward settlement, the first which began arriving in 1820s, the second post-Famine, and the third from the 1880s. Each of the latter two streams, when newly arrived engaged in a repeat of behaviour appropriate to an age band e.g. getting married, or being rowdy that had been practiced by the stream that preceded it. The prevalence of particular age related anti-social behaviour in the 1850s and 1860s will be observed in the study.

Often nineteenth century studies confine themselves to a searching analysis of a particular census, especially those taken following the Famine inrush. This study identifies a pre-Famine Irish community who had already established the spatial pattern that was later swollen in post-Famine years. It anchors the Irish presence in Coventry in 1841, using the census of that year which if rudimentary, was the first census to show Ireland as birthplace. The intention is to provide a continuum therefrom, through coverage of all remaining censuses for the century, assisted by the good fortune that the Coventry area covered can be held constant throughout. With this wider temporal embrace, settlement and adjustment of a whole generation, before its heaping in old age, and its inevitable decay and replacement by a second generation, can be explored. It will allow for an assessment in the small urban area of the rapidity of ‘ethnic fade’, which according to MacRaild is the belief of most historians to have occurred once the Famine influx years had passed.\textsuperscript{48} The envelopment of weaver James McGowran’s son William

\textsuperscript{46} The use of this term ‘Irishcom’ avoids in as far as possible clumsy phrases such as ‘Non-Irish-born Irish’ or ‘other Irish’ as found in Lowe’s work. (W. J. Lowe, \textit{The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire: The Shaping of a Working-Class Community}, (New York 1989) p. 49) 
\textsuperscript{47} RG12/2452.101.22 ED 4 
\textsuperscript{48} Donald M. MacRaild, \textit{Culture, Conflict and Migration: Irish in Victorian Cumbria}, (Liverpool 1998) p. xiv
in Coventry society as shown by his becoming a city councillor indicates what was possible in the turn of a generation.\textsuperscript{49}

Hickman was critical of the nature of migrant analysis, since it appeared to her that ‘The prime activity becomes the dissection of the minority group itself.’\textsuperscript{50} This study counters that accusation by having collected data on every household head in the city for 1851 and again for 1881 thereby allowing for comparison of the Irish to be made within a city-wide framework. It will examine scholarly analyses on Irish migration and assess the availability and quality of primary sources such as the census, and local newspapers. From the latter an indication may be gleaned of the warmth of the local reception the Irish received bearing in mind Gilley’s observation that prejudice of a local type is difficult to ascertain.\textsuperscript{51} Surveyed also, in the way it directly pertained to the local Irish is the treatment of Ireland by the British establishment during the nineteenth century. The entwining of Irish and Catholic identity and the Catholic Church’s capacity to act as an integrative/differentiating force will be referenced.

This research will concentrate not only the experience of the majority but will keep under review the response of the remaining less discernible minority. Other such studies noticed clustering within large urban areas and this understandably arouses the curiosity of a researcher, but it may lead to an overlooking of the smaller diffuse numbers of Irish city dwellers settled away from Irish quarters. Davis referred to two residential patterns: the isolated concentration in the dilapidated parts of a city and ‘the rather more predominant but rather less highlighted’ Irish living alongside the English.\textsuperscript{52} Residential dispersal may indicate individuals with greater mobility and integration. With local study analyses of a type that centre around conditions in the ‘top ten’ most Irish streets, and normally with these core Irish streets acting as reception areas for migrants, it is not surprising that what is conveyed is a dominant picture of transience, boarding, and unskilled migrant youth with an undiluted rural culture. However on the cluster fringe, or scattered in streets farther apart from clusters, where the isolationist drag of clustering is lessened, a more established, integrated Irish may be found by virtue of intermarriage, a desire to put down roots, a movement closer to a fixed place of

\textsuperscript{49} However his case may have been exceptional and could have been facilitated by his Irish and weaving background, together with his Liberal credentials that were popular among the Irish, in attracting votes.


\textsuperscript{52} Graham Davis, Little Irelands, in R. Swift & S. Gilley (eds.), The Irish in Britain 1815-1939, (London 1989) p. 112
work, increasing length of residence permitting citywide familiarity and growth in contact with locals. The recording and analysis of the spatial expression of the migrant is a feature of this study. Others studies appear largely content with city summations, or the display of results at ward or parish level, and perhaps a micro-analysis of a popular ‘Irish’ street. It is the intention of this study to pinpoint the location by house of those recognised as Irishcom in 1861 and 1881 in a number of vicinities of interest, and to comment on the contrast. For reasons centred around the Greenhow Report of 1860 considered later, the census of 1861 is given spatial expression. It is felt that the 1881 census provides the most appropriate one of contrast to it since thereafter the ‘original’ Irish-born were in numerical decline and their grown children difficult to isolate in the census. Furthermore citywide spatial distribution, and location quotients of the Irishcom will be mapped for different censuses. The latter maps will quantify how concentrated the Irishcom were in each enumeration area as compared to the Coventry population in the same area. The degree of clustering or scatter that maps display, and the reservations in interpreting information gleaned from an enumeration area reticulation will be aired.

It will be an intention to contribute to the discourse on methodological approach to Irish migrant urban settlement. From examining the complications that arise in handling relevant census material, strategies may emerge to assist in redressing the regrettable lack of commonality of approach found in many studies. Studies based on authors’ individually constructed databases do not offer consistency when inter-city comparison is sought, in a manner that studies commenced on the basis of an integrated platform might bring. These isolated studies, though well-rounded in themselves, lack an attachment to an overarching field of study consistency in whether Irish-born or ‘de facto’ Irish are being measured; in the range or interval of years researched; the drawing of appropriate areal boundary; or the presentation of statistics at a common level of aggregation. Without promoting the need to have introduced some objective criteria and a widely recognised protocol supporting integration of studies, the outcome that will continue to occur will be of a type Pooley referred to when he stated, ‘depending on the spatial units used and the definition of segregation adopted, almost any town could be shown to have either a highly clustered or a widely dispersed distribution of Irish migrants.’

Organisation of the remainder of the thesis

It is fortunate that this study has now available to inform it the distillation of approximately forty years of the finest scholarship. Chapter 1 will seek to contextualise

53 Pooley, Segregation or integration? p. 73
the study through outlining the development, change of interpretation and present state of investigation which has recognised the diversity of experience of the Irish in Britain. The chapter will then set out the demographic size of the Irish-born population and relate it proportionally to the city and volumes in other cities, particularly similar sized cities. The migrants themselves left little sense of how they experienced their adjustment to British cities and especially to Coventry. To overcome their silence, recourse is made to the census and contemporary reports. It is hoped that the standardised information in the former with the colour of the latter will round out the position of the Irish; but each origin has its limitations. The primary nature of the census, its comprehensive coverage and the substantive ordered information it contains, that permits a systematic approach, is of great value. The absence of quality census information for earlier in the century is regrettable. Although the 1841 census provides information of a sort, it is the 1851 census and those following with their more sophisticated format that provide the matrix of migrant analysis for the century.\textsuperscript{54} Further, because the 1851 census is the first suitably workable census, together with the fact that its coverage coincides with interest in settlement of the Famine years, it has meant that the mid-century was for long the most intensely researched age. The content of contemporary official reports, and Coventry comment on the Irish, Catholic Church, and affairs in Ireland will be introduced with heed to the objectivity of such material. Chapter 2 will first seek to establish the character of Coventry which is the setting for the study. Its history as an ancient city, with its then medieval regional importance, symbolised by town walls - credentials not shared by Birmingham or Leicester, on a par with York or Norwich, will be placed aside to avoid the chapter slipping into an historical account of the municipality. It will focus on those aspects of city experience that have relevance to the Irish onwards from the end of ‘big purl time’. This was prosperous period that ended in 1815, which was subsequently fondly envied as the golden age of weaving in the city.\textsuperscript{55} The developments in silk ribbon weaving, so intrinsic to the sentience of the city are outlined, with watchmaking and cycle manufacture referred to. These activities with their changing fortunes were the attractors of Irish and were the social and economic drivers of the city. An understanding is sought of the built environment that led to courtyard living and topshop housing. The

\textsuperscript{54}See Appendix 19

\textsuperscript{55}‘The City of Coventry: Crafts and industries, Modern industry and trade’, in W.B. Stephens (ed.), A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 8, the City of Coventry and Borough of Warwick, (London 1969) pp. 162-189. http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol8/pp. 162-189 Accessed 8th November 2015. The ‘big purl’ time during the years of the Napoleonic Wars was regarded as a halcyon period when there was a high demand for ribbons. This epithet referred to an unprecedented demand at the time for ribbons with loops at the edges.
residential arrangement of those in different social groups and those in different occupations will be discerned. The stark environmental and social conditions endured by poor in the city and the beneficial effect of municipal improvement as century progressed will be explored.

The study proceeds by way of Chapter 3 where the factors that influenced Irish to settle in Coventry will be reviewed, the locations where they resided identified, and contemporary remarks on the character of those locations scrutinised. The pattern of their settlement will be studied, and if clustering appears obvious, what it may convey about segregation. Irish behaviour in the city until 1875 will be disclosed; a number of families that gave the Irish repute will be identified as will the reasons why the Irish came into contact with the police.

Chapter 4 will explore how nationalism expressed forcefully or through political discourse may have affected cultural identity. In the Catholic Church’s marking out with ritual the serious stages in their passage through life, it was inextricably linked to the majority of migrants. It offered another collective identity which could, as Smith observed, overlap ethnic identity and reinforce each other. How these identities fared in Coventry and whether the Catholic Church attempted to mould ethnic identity in terms of religious identity will be considered. It will outline the Catholic Church’s infrastructural presence, its standing in the city, and will outline the degree to which it acknowledged, involved and supported its Irish members. Chapters 5 and 6 are substantive chapters that will outline Irish household structure, Irish community attributes and locate areas of Irish concentration; the former in years of heightened arrival 1841-1861. Chapter 6 addressing the years 1871-1901 captures an ageing Irish-born cohort who came to Britain from the 1820s, together with a generation of Irish who were born in Coventry, and a collection of newly arriving Irish-born seeking employment in an expanding municipality. Both this and the previous chapter will seek to draw out the nature and influence of those Irish-born who did not fit the ‘Celtic poor’ paradigm that featured in Chapter 3. The study concludes with Chapter 7 evaluating the complex of local and national factors that determined the nature of Irish settlement in Coventry and relates its experience to the wider context. The fixed word limit permitted on submission of this study does not leave room in its body for comprehensive reflection on notions of identity and community, nor for sufficient elaboration on some important national societal stands and changes occurring over the century, that affected

the Irish. The reader is invited to read these considerations in Appendices 18 and 19 and reflections on the census of 1911 in the Appendix 20.
Chapter 1

Irish settlement: perspectives, population and evidence

There is now an expansive body of findings pertaining to Irish residence in nineteenth-century Britain. In order to find the most appropriate interrogative approach and comparative evidence for this study the chapter opens with a consideration of the range and development of investigation in this field. Enquiry reached its zenith at the turn of the twenty-first century with insights having matured over the previous thirty years. The earliest students of migration were generally content with a static exploration of a census or two in the wake of the Famine years. The scholarly excitement that then derived from analysis of the predicament surrounding the Famine influx appears satiated. Though immensely contributive to understanding, such enquiries appear from the vantage of now, as scoping, descriptive exercises that have lost some of their freshness.

Over time, the record has been re-interpreted, with the universal application of an ‘outcast’ narrative that held sway in early studies almost discarded. This had been founded on accounts where only the most egregious anti-social behaviour and desperate living conditions were cited and without allowance for the biased penning of contemporary officialdom. So also has the custom of visualising the Irish migrant community as if it was comprised of only a ‘Celtic Catholic’ unsophisticated population under stress. O’Day remarked that along with the very poorest, many of the best-educated in Ireland had migrated to Britain.

The significance of scale has been recognised. There is a realisation endorsed in this study’s aims that large volumes of Irish-born in metropolitan areas could create their own sustainable dynamic, and findings therefrom may not offer appropriate explanation for Irish experience in smaller cities with lesser volume. The sheer amount of Irish in lower social classes, found in larger cities may have drawn attention from, and unduly obscure a smaller but influential group of non-mainstream Irish. The prosperity of the larger city could also be to its relative advantage, by assisting in early consolidation and subsequent embedding of its migrants. Interest in the issue of whether the Irish were socially or residentially segregated seems to have lost much of its initial force. This has been an engrossing topic in relation to municipalities with high volumes of Irish where self-evident clusters raised questions as to their occurrence and implication. The issue seems a less pressing matter to resolve, perhaps because of the

57 See Appendix 19 where research in a modern setting can offer new explanations for historical conduct.
difficulty in so doing, in urbanities where fewer Irish, by their low numbers, though feasibly inclined to cluster, could not manifest themselves in significant sized cumulations.

Questioning of method has become more acute. To purport a study location as having typicality, or its Irish content as having wider representativeness, may quickly attract disputation. Hickman has bemoaned the fixation with the need for the most minute investigation e.g. of measurement of in- and out-migration to explain decennial variation in city totals of Irish. She has sought for less exceptionalism with more emphasis on Irish evaluation occurring within the broader social nexus. There is greater awareness of the nature of cultural upholding among migrants. There had appeared an unconscious expectation that the Irish should be on a trajectory towards assimilation and evidence for its occurrence was keenly sought, with measurements of social and residential mobility for the first generation even over a decade, closely scrutinised.59

In the case of the Irish the process of convergence with the norms of the population and cultural adaptation in so far as it can be assessed, reveals itself now as a more inter-generational process, dependent on local ambience and not as rapidly completed as might be assumed. There has been greater conceptual clarification coupled with the recognition that the Irish experience was complicated and diverse, varying in time and place; see Pooley below. This latter-day ability to tease out and rank the important strands in the process with sophisticated incision has been epitomised by MacRaild. He reminded that in a local study, consciousness must be kept of two tiers of influence at play; overarching national attitudes and also local influences. He stated:

‘The variation in the nature of Irish communities, and the cultural nuances in the towns they settled, threw up a bewildering array of sub-plots in the story of how Anglo-Irish relations unfolded in the regions. At the same time, larger questions of nation, religion and economy remained at the heart of English perceptions of Irishness… The permeation of violence towards and between the Irish throughout the Anglo-Irish relationship was a profound reality that influenced these perceptions’.60

In 2011, Swift outlined the present state of historical enquiry and declared the debate is now more refined and complex. Investigation according to him now features interest in ‘change, continuity, resistance and accommodation’61 Topics that appeared as fringe concerns to mid-century analyses become more central to those exploring its later quarter. The extent, identity and role of the children of the Irish-born, casually assumed in earlier centred studies as intrinsically Irish, but who, by the closing decades, as

60 MacRaild, Culture, Conflict and Migration, pp. 12, 13
61 Swift, Identifying the Irish in Victorian Britain, pp. 6-23
adults, are the embodiment of a perceived Irish community require illumination. Panayi remarked in 2014 that ‘most of the scholarship on the nineteenth century Irish focuses upon [the first generation] as one experiencing poverty and deprivation, without taking a longer term perspective. The historiography of the nineteenth-century Irish, dominated by the three Swift and Gilley volumes and focussing on the first generation seems largely unaware of their offspring’. Fitzpatrick was a notable exception and observed ‘it was no longer expatriates and particularly the Famine generation of transient and impermanent migrants that dictated the characteristics of the Irish ‘community’ but a more shadowy and less aberrant population of the second generation’. This second generation mostly born in Britain without the identifying marker in the census of an Irish-born parent are difficult to track and the demographic outline of the ‘community’ becomes obscure.

Recognised too is that ‘en bloc’ decennial structured analyses have their place, but being in place, have shown that the ongoing nature of the migrant experience requires more exposition than decennial stocktaking can provide. Herson is of the view that censal aggregation results in generalisations and fails to explain motivation. He lauds family history for its ability to provide this motivation and richness of experience but recognises in this approach the serious problems of lack of evidence and the generalising from the particular. In relation to this study and others, in so far as ‘family setting’ durational evidence can be obtained, it realistically has to be sought from the censuses. Present-day electronic facilitation for searching and cross-referencing census data has assisted the process, but it only offers illumination on an individual by individual family name basis. Any more widespread family name tracking is a Herculean task with the added risk of straying into genealogical labyrinths. Thus this procedure cannot realistically furnish a comprehensive database on which to found a study. It is only possible for some carefully selected examples of migrant family undergoings, to be furnished to illuminate census statistics. However in the introduction of any usage of illustrative migrant family record there is the risk of attracting the precipitous discredit of disciplinary purists. The view of academic historians was spelled out by Light: ‘professional historians have generally given family history short

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62 Panikos Panayi, *An Immigration History of Britain, Multicultural Racism since 1800*, (Abingdon, Oxon 2014) p. 86
It’s ‘history lite’ or comfort-zone history; solipsistic and myopic’.\textsuperscript{65} It is here argued the opportunity should be taken to seek out some representative families, given the electronic facilitation only recently available to permit inter-censal tracking, the family lattice nature binding this study, and the arresting possibilities in migrant family analysis that Herson has identified.\textsuperscript{66}

This background chapter then sets out the statistical profile of the Irish in Coventry and considers the size of the city’s Irish-born within a national urban perspective. There is reflection on both the representativeness and reliability of totals provided in census tabulations. The value of the census as primary source, will be raised, since any seeking for an Irish community encapsulation has to be achieved in the census through birthplace mention and the relationship of those who share households with Irish-born. Migrant studies have been commonly supported and framed on Irish-born data. In some a sentence, but often no more, acknowledging an awareness of the fact that with local-born children added, figures for an Irish community might be doubled, has been considered suffice to provide dimension to the community. The unfulfilling nature of such a procedure will be explained. Thus the gathering process to collect not just Irish-born but all those who can be identified as having an Irish association and may convey a ‘community’ will then be outlined.

The chapter then moves to consider the strength of the sources made available by the migrants and their contemporaries and how tendentious were the latter. There follows an appraisal of the role, content and consistency of attention given to the Irish over the century by relevant newspapers. Along with the census their pages are relied on to informationally anchor this study, but they also convey prejudicial stereotyping and polemic shaping of local sentiment. Their different journalistic approaches which changed over the century will be noted and an attempt will be made to tell from them what the Coventrian disposition towards the Irish was.

1.1 The historiography of the Irish in nineteenth century Britain

Awakening of interest and sectors of enquiry

Ó Tuathaigh remarked that scholarly exploration of sources on the migrant experience in nineteenth century Britain only seriously commenced in the 1960s. J.A. Jackson’s 1963 seminal study of the Irish in Britain is regarded as marking the new era

\textsuperscript{65} Alison Light, Common People, (London 2014) p. xxvii

\textsuperscript{66} Demeaners of the worthiness of some measure of family intergenerational plotting fail to explain how without even some recourse to it the generations that followed the Famine migrants, commonly perceived as in an uncharted twilight, can ever be descried.
of investigation.\textsuperscript{67} Thereafter interest continued to gain momentum, lifted by a newly found popular enthusiasm to understand the outlook and clarify the happenings of the Victorian age.\textsuperscript{68}

The awakened interest and countering of earlier neglect was facilitated by the increased availability of ancestral detail from a sequence of censuses emerging from their hibernation during the ‘hundred year rule’. This was coupled with the ability of the computer database to store, organise and cross-tabulate pieces of data gathered on every individual enumerated. Also in recent times, because of research into the outcomes of modern transnational migrations, there has been greater understanding of migrant dynamics, and what has ensued has been an interest in freshly interpreting, with this new acumen, earlier migrant behaviours and host responses. A recounting and interpretation of the experience of nineteenth century Irish migrants in Britain involves an exploration of many interwoven strands of enquiry. These strands, relating to the social, cultural, religious and economic circumstances of the migrants in varied size urban settings, have in recent years received comprehensive attention from historians. Particular dimensions of the Irish experience, e.g. relating to crime and riot, cultural identity, estrangement and adaptation, have become niche themes which have attracted keen and specialised interest. The facetted Victorian age in which migrant experience must be contextualised, has been subject to detailed explanation. Its intense urbanisation and its rapidly growing population, with their occupations and classes, lifestyles and religious fervours, have been thoroughly examined.

So too has the age’s inculcated self-image. British society envisioned itself as not only authentic and ideal, but also superior. In the construction of this elevated national identity the Irish migrants were represented as its antithesis; they served as Other. What followed was, antagonism, prejudice and misappropriated blame, directed towards the migrants. Research abounds on the detail of this condescension, probably directed specifically at the ‘low’ Irish, yet nevertheless when the Irish were referenced in collective terms, the popular disrespect attached indiscriminately to all ‘Irish’.

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{68} This was a recent age, lived in by an antepenultimate generation, with its earlier - and continuing - importance still evident in infrastructure, buildings and laws. However as measured by the standards of later twentieth century modernity it was regarded as having passed into antiquity and so its character aroused historical enquiry.
\end{itemize}
The migrant story has been presented qualitatively, quantitatively or jointly in a complimentary balance of both; the decision on the nature of approach swayed by the availability of source material as much as by the interest of the researcher. All these fields of investigation and modes of enquiry have contributed to a now expansive body of work relating to Irish residence in Britain.

Migrant reference in general and local histories of Britain

The level of significance attached to the account of the privations of the Irish nineteenth century Famine, its inadequate alleviation by the state and subsequent crisis migration to Britain was such that it was usually allocated only a chapter, or portion thereof, in chronological or thematic monographs narrating British history. Therein, Irish stereotypes developed from partial accounts of conditions in ‘Irish Quarters’ and ‘Little Irelands’ were recited readily, and the old reliable accusations, e.g. the Irish playing a role in lowering both wages and the standard of living, were aired.\(^{69}\) Redford writing in 1926 about what he termed the ‘disastrous social effect of the Irish influx’ stated:

‘The Irish in Great Britain…retained their native practice of keeping pigs in the house. With this lower standard of living went a lower efficiency as workmen, and a worse moral tone. The Irish were less provident, and were more given to drunkenness; they were slovenly, careless, and stupid… They formed a submerged class, always tending to drag their neighbours to a lower level of living.’\(^ {70}\)

Writing later in the century Hobsbawn devoted three page lengths to a fair recount of Irish migration but in one sentence became highly summative: ‘Their [Irish] wages were lower than anyone else’s, they lived in the worst slums, and the English and Scots despised them as semi-barbarians, distrusted them as Catholics and hated them as undercutters of their wages’.\(^ {71}\) Even when being more positive about the immigrants, there was casual stereotyping by historians such as Ashton, who referred in 1948 to the migrants as having ‘Celtic impetuosity [and] impatience of authority’.\(^ {72}\) Beyond describing that period of concern, many general historical studies had, for too long seen Irish migrants as homogenous and their migration, always referred to as an ‘influx’, as largely marginal to the narrative sweep of the nineteenth century.

It was realised by scholars as the twentieth century progressed that the earlier migrant contribution to social change and the urban landscape, had been neglected or had been reduced to axioms, such as the Irish lived apart, were found in deprived

\(^{69}\) Arthur Redford, *Labour Migration in England 1800-1850*, (Manchester 1926) p. 159
\(^{70}\) Ibid., pp. 159, 160
\(^{71}\) E.J. Hobsbawn, *Industry and Empire*, (London 1968) p. 294
conditions, were strike-breakers or undercut wage rates. This neglect of interest in the nineteenth century Irish was apparent too in historic accounts of municipalities as shown for Coventry and similarly observed by Moran for Birmingham. The older civic histories were usually of the ‘upward and onward’ uncritical style, that depicted the character and progress of a specific city, as rooted in the proud traditions, skills, reputation and past achievements particular to the municipality, with little room for negativity inducing accounts of Irish deprivations. McKinley’s reference to the Irish in The City of Leicester: Social and administrative history since 1835 (1958) amounted to: ‘Irish immigrants, in Leicester as elsewhere, were a source of trouble. They tended to concentrate in one part of St. Margaret’s parish, around Belgrave Gate and Abbey Gate, and the houses that they occupied there were often overcrowded’. Modern civic accounts of Coventry, including the respected Victoria County History (1969) did not refer to them at all. Neither were they mentioned in the deeply researched study on Coventry, 1820-1861 by Searby. Even an academic study in 1989 pertaining to Irish migrants appeared to miss or relegate the significance of their presence in nineteenth century Coventry. That study, albeit of the twentieth century Irish in Coventy, while providing an introductory perspective covering the scale and local destination of Irish migration to nineteenth century Britain, failed in that prelude to so much as mention, the presence of over 700 Irish-born in Victorian Coventry.

The widening and maturing of the body of knowledge

Swift referred to a renaissance in the historiography of the Irish in Britain in late twentieth century. The extent of what he saw as a burgeoning historiography has been comprehensively detailed by MacRaild. This corpus of literature encapsulates a wide variety of format and styles. Mention may be made first of those that are generally

73 James Moran, Irish Birmingham, (Liverpool 2010) pp. 3, 4
75 P.W. Bunce, The Story of Coventry, (Stroud 2013); David McGrory, A History of Coventry, (Stroud 2004)
76 Searby, Weavers and freemen pp. 1-647
descriptive and overview narrations. They outline the scale of migration, the forces of push and pull, points of entry and destinations, migrant demographic and behavioural characteristics, the challenges faced and responses made in settling.

Such is Jackson’s monograph *The Irish in Britain* (1963) which is regarded as having opened the present era of study. John Hickey in *Urban Catholics* (1967) brought an early sociological understanding to the position and experience of Catholics in England and Wales from 1829 to 1965, whose numbers were bolstered by Irish immigrants. In 1981 Ó Tuathaigh offered a rounded if ‘standard’ description of the state of the migrant Irish, noted the slow improvement, and the spectrum of forces that until the end of the nineteenth century preserved cultural distance and hindered assimilation.79 His impressive essay was described as the classic overview by Peach and as magisterial by Swift.80 Fitzpatrick considered the migrant experience for the period 1801-1870 and noted that in historians’ attention to the Catholic majority, there was a neglect of coverage of the minority of migrant Protestants. He referred to a migrant condition of ‘perpetual transience’ nationally and within cities, and observed that this restless mobility had been masked by the statistical stability of the migrant settlement pattern. Fitzpatrick observed that the infamously reputed Irish quarters of British towns were almost never exclusively Irish. While in some cities there was a monopoly of Irish in certain streets, they had not been confined to them and shoehorning Irish concentrations into a ‘ghetto’ model was not appropriate.81 His sequential overview of migrant experience from 1871-1921, contained in its title the phrase ‘a curious middle place’ which has been often employed by historians to epitomize the position of that migrant generation. He noted Britain was still a destination for the Irish towards the end of the century.82 However there was a slow decline in numbers, because while net immigration was voluminous, it was not sufficient to replenish falling Irish-born figures caused by the passing away of the mid-century influx on its reaching old age. The ‘Little Ireland’ types of concentration of Irish had disappeared due to municipal slum clearances, construction of new railway stations and the creation of prestige streets such as Corporation Street in Birmingham. This elimination of those decrepit areas had led to

82 Fitzpatrick, *A curious middle place*, pp. 11-59
Phrase from Felix Lavery, (compiler) *Irish Heroes in the War*, (London 1917) p. 32
a dispersal of the Irish and a loss of location where an Irish sense of community might have been prolonged. It was a population with an older age profile, whose social status was improving, but still over-represented in crime and pauperism statistics. While more integrated into a working class way of life they did not share a close bond with the class. Their children were born in Britain and their own material attachment was less to Ireland as the years passed. Their reduced numbers meant they were less visible and attracted less animosity. The seething hatreds of the earlier century had mellowed, though migrants could still face hostility, which fed their sense of grievance. Fitzpatrick assumed that inter-marriage did not become common after mid-century. He did not see them as a segregated community who were ‘locked in an ethnic defensiveness’ but neither as a cohesive Irish community, since there were divisions ‘between those who tried to replant their Irish culture in Britain, those who created a hybrid immigrant culture and those who did their best to ‘forget’ that they were Irish’.83

The immense contribution of Swift with Gilley, of their own account and through their editorship, has provided the backbone to migration research in Britain.84 Apart from their personal research, the essay style contents of the three influential volumes, which they jointly edited, exhibit not only the extent of historiographic development and conceptual sophistication but also the breadth and scope of scholarly enquiry.85 A feature of the third volume was the interest in the local dimension, and the detection of the diversity of experience, shaped by the variety of settings in which migrants settled. It was clear that an historiographical assumption of a ‘one-account, fits all sizes’ approach, derived from patterns in large urban areas, did not sufficiently allow for the influence of local circumstances.

Essays in the first volume The Irish in the Victorian City (1985) covered locations with large Irish concentrations: Bristol, London, Wolverhampton, Stockport, Liverpool and York.86 For the latter city Finnegan described the conditions of poverty endured by the Irish in its slums, and with the exception of Large’s study of Bristol, her essay with

83 Fitzpatrick, A curious middle place, pp. 30, 44
84 The following syntheses are enlightening: Swift, Irish Migrants 1815-1914; MacRaild, Irish Migrants 1750-1922; Graham Davis, The Irish in Britain 1815-1914, (Dublin 1991). O’Day, Varieties of anti-Irish behaviour pp. 26-43 provides a concise thoughtful review. So also in his two essays does David Fitzpatrick: (1) A peculiar tramping people pp. 623-660 & (2) A curious middle place, pp. 11-59
Roger Swift & Sheridan Gilley (eds.), The Irish in the Victorian City, (London 1985)
Sheridan Gilley & Roger Swift (eds.), The Irish in Britain 1815-1939, (London 1989)
Swift, Irish Migrants 1815-1914,
Swift, Identifying the Irish in Victorian Britain, pp. 6-23
the others, appeared to accept and confirm the received wisdom of the time that the Irish were outcasts and ‘apart’ for at least much of the century. In their sequel volume *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939* (1989) studies were presented, among others, by Herson, Swift, and Pooley. The latter’s contribution of ‘Segregation or integration? The residential experience of the Irish in mid-Victorian Britain’ questioned the assumptions on which historians were approaching migration topics. He examined the conceptual state of migrant investigation and peeled back enquiry to see if the fundamental assumptions of investigation were sound. He identified four areas of concern as listed:

1. That research on large centres provided an incomplete picture of urban response. 2. There was such over-emphasis on the experience of the poor Catholic Irish majority that it served to obscure the existence of a minority of significance. 3. An emphasis on the majority had led to an over-concern with the clusters of Irish and to the neglect of the Irish in the wider town area. 4. He observed ‘any attempt to measure segregation objectively is itself illusory as the spatial framework within which measurement takes place will fundamentally affect the outcome. Since his reasoning that created his concern on the first two practices has been adopted as justification for this analysis of Coventry a short elaboration of these important principles is shown in Appendix 17. There also, is a short explanation of his final two points, relating to his interpretation of how Irish spatial pattern is defined and assessed, since they are mainstays of guidance in approaching this Coventrian exploration.

Swift’s and Gilley’s third volume *The Irish in Victorian Britain: The Local Dimension* (1999) continued to explore the Irish migrant experience through coverage of diverse themes, such as the provision of Catholic education, unanticipated flare-up of rioting, or the nature of the Irish middle class. These were exampled in a region, county, or city, and the influence of such a setting, be it unexpectedly not a leading Irish destination, but Camborne, Stafford, or Hull, was considered on the topic under discussion. Miskell stressed ‘local and regional conditions provide a much more meaningful context in which to assess the impact of immigrant populations’ and from her study of Camborne concluded small Irish populations may have more significance locally than might appear from their lower position in the hierarchy of ‘size’ of Irish populations in urban areas. She noted local factors, rather than, as might be anticipated, traditional causes such as innate anti-Irishness, religious tension, labour disputes or political difference, were responsible for the Camborne riot in 1882.87

Thematic approaches

There is a wealth of studies, usually pinned to a location, that relate specifically to the position or experience of the migrant group in the nineteenth century. They range over migrants’ spatial expression, social standing, cultural characteristics, identity, involvement in crime, religious affiliation, or adjustment to the host society. For example, Busteed described the powerful British cultural forces, which combined with Irish social mobility, to propel the Irish towards the host society’s ‘respectable’ norms. Gilley examined the ‘Paddy’ national stereotype and suggested that the English and the Irish manufactured it jointly, albeit by the latter as a self-defensive means of disarming prejudice. Gilley has particularly authored on a religious theme. He questioned if the modern secular mind had the capability to understand how deep the belief of the Catholic migrant ran. He stated while the lay Irish formed the bulk of congregations, authority was maintained by an English Catholic clerical minority. This was a phenomenon that was present in Coventry. Despite their contribution to the erection of fine churches he noted how hidden Irish Catholic sentiment was within the Church. He noted the later Victorian Church gave purpose and sanction to those who sought respectability and even those who did not engage in orthodox Catholic practice may still have been influenced by older Celtic church values. He saw as the century drew to a close that the Church had brought about a migrant community that was more Catholic than Irish.

Later in 2011, Gilley noting the complication of the subject, examined English Catholic attitudes to Irish Catholics. The enormous task of ministering to the stressed Irish on their arrival was a distraction from the clergy’s desired mission to convert England. The Irish were little credited as Irish and seen as the poor by the Church establishment. His essay suggested the attitude of many English lay-Catholics towards the Catholic Irish, mirrored that of the English population without the anti-Catholicism and was a mixture of hostility and indifference.

The Swift and Gilley trilogy provided a trove of themed essays. As an example Swift considered the causes of crime in Wolverhampton, and the management by the

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89 Gilley, English Attitudes, p. 84
90 Gilley, Roman Catholicism, pp. 147-167
police of the Irish who were involved, in the oft quoted ‘Another Stafford Street Row’: Law, Order and the Irish Presence in mid-Victorian Wolverhampton. A second essay Crime and the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain brought his considerations to a wider canvas.\(^93\) He observed public opinion in Britain over a long period associated the Irish with crime. The Victorian belief in the innate criminality of the Irish was a negative element of the Irish stereotype. It was an axiomatic link that stretched across the gamut from begging, thieving, vagrancy, drunkenness, fighting, town disorder, hostility to authority, and to rioting.

An invaluable insight into Irish crime in Coventry 1845-75 was provided by Mulkern. He described the problematic state of relations between the Irish and Coventry authorities, due to excessive drinking and brawling, which was particularly caused by the disorderly behaviour of four notorious Irish families.\(^94\) Otherwise his essay depicted impassive Irish and provided crucial confirmation to this study of the absence of pronounced tension involving the Irish during the years of Emancipation, Young Ireland movement, Papal Aggression and Fenian outrage.\(^95\)

**Local studies: format, compatibility, target area and population**

Of special interest to this study is the development and style of local studies. Comprehensive micro-studies address migrant response at urban level, through the customary arrangement of chapters or headings on migrant characteristics and behaviour, housing conditions and spatial settlement, demographic structure, occupation, social status, formal religious provision, cultural politics and community relations. Usually aired are the underlining issues such as cultural distance, self-segregation, socio-economic and intergenerational mobility, conflict, crime and host alarm or prejudice.

In county studies, a number of towns may be selected for group attention - four in the case of Cumbria and seven in Lancashire.\(^96\) The census-based approach of these studies varies from the use of city summary statistics, with perhaps an illustrative street or area more closely examined, to using statistics aggregated at ward, parish, or

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\(^95\) Coventry was a major silk manufacturing town and the experience of domestic weavers from Dublin in the similarly engaged Macclesfield and Congleton that was outlined by Williams, is a most relevant example of a themed study. (F.J. Williams, Irish in the East Cheshire silk industry, 1851 -1861 Journal of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, Vol. 136 (1987) pp. 99-126) There were 628 Irish-born in Congleton, 2.0% of city population in 1851.

\(^96\) MacRaild, Culture, Conflict and Migration; Lowe, Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire
direction labelled district level. There is regrettably no direct compatibility between most of these self-contained studies. Some study conclusions, e.g. of Lees on London, Lowe on Lancashire, and Davis on Birmingham rest, not on details of the entire target population, but on samples of varying size which represent occupational or other standings. The systematic sampling method employed may, according to the wishes of each researcher, have different selection intervals. Again, for both, their findings rest on a selection of neighbourhoods or streets in the older part of the city centre where the presence of Irish caught the attention of the researchers, but the findings, although of interest, may not have wider representativeness. Several rest on an exhaustive analysis of a single census, usually of 1851 or 1861, while others, e.g. Lees on London, or Dillon on Leeds, centre their statistical presentation on two or more censuses. With this arrangement, an extra obstacle to compatibility has been varying intercensal comparison intervals; some of a decade, others of a score. Lobban on Greenock and Dillon on Leeds are early examples of researchers with a divergent temporal span. Also studies vary according to the socio-economic classifications employed - which have on occasion been modified by a researcher to suit local circumstances.

Mismatching of studies also occurs where intercensal analysis is based on whether the curiosity of a researcher, centred enquiry, around either the Famine generation years or for a period stretching later into the nineteenth century. In former type studies - usually the vintage surveys, the concern related to origin and impact, e.g. the degree of overcrowding and clustering of a largely fresh migrant cultural grouping. In later studies interest centred on adjustment, as measured by e.g. occupational mobility and the degree of second-generation inter-marriage of those in a longer settled group, whose only entitlement to inclusion in the Irish ‘community’ total might have been a census record showing the presence in their household of an aged Irish-born parent. Caution is thus necessary if comparison is made between Irish ‘community’ totals in separated temporal settings, since ‘community’ quanta could embody Irish with dissimilar group characteristics. The fact remains that while many scholars produce community based

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99 The former felt his study was best served when census figures were called upon to compare the Irish of 1851 with those of 1891, while the latter compared census detail from 1851 with that of a decade later. Both are rounded studies, faithful to the time-frames stated in their titles. However because of the contrasting census time spans to which they refer, the inferences drawn by either scholar, lack comparability. (R.D. Lobban, The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century, *Irish Geography*, 6 No 3 (1971) pp. 270-281)
statistics, the only statistical idiom permitting universal comparison is that of ‘Irish-born’.

Range and scope of local studies

Local studies usually at a municipal, but also at county level, have been produced on areas stretching from Cornwall to Cumbria. With Irish-born totals for 1851 in brackets, shown here are examples of the different dimensions of Irish local settlement that have been researched: Liverpool (83,813), Huddersfield (1,562) and Swindon (75). Monographs about the Victorian era Irish in specific areas have been written, among others, by Lees on London, Lowe on Lancashire, Fielding on Manchester, Finnegan on York, MacRaild on Cumbria, Belchem on Liverpool and Herson on Stafford. Constriction of format permits only the briefest reference to three of these examples of influential published research:

W.J. Lowe in The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire: The Shaping of a Working-Class Community (1989) comprehensively explored the conditions, characteristics and spatial exclusivity of the Irish in seven Lancashire industrialised towns. He saw the migrants as possessing a deeper distinctiveness than the ragged clothes, accents and non-civic behaviours would suggest; it was a distinctiveness that was a ‘manifestation of the development of a coherent community life’. However by the 1870s he, argued, the community had become less distinct and difficult to portray. He remarked that while a reason for the Irish living in close proximity would have been the reassuring presence of other migrants, it was overridden by the availability of poor quality houses at a cheap rent. He stated:

‘In an important sense the Irish did, indeed, occupy a ghetto, but one that was less geographical and the result of deliberate segregation than an economic ghetto formed by the constraints on their financial means. The housing that they occupied was the housing that their occupational status permitted them to rent’.

Frances Finnegan’s, Poverty & Prejudice: A Study of Irish Immigrants in York 1840-1875 (1982) powerfully portrayed the ‘classic’ conditions of prejudice, isolation,

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100 Miskell, Irish immigrants in Cornwall, pp. 31-51; MacRaild, Culture, Conflict and Migration
103 Lowe, Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire, p. 203
104 Ibid., p. 211
105 Ibid., pp. 68-69
squalor, transience and alienation endured in York, but its ghetto-type focus on the Famine centred years lessens its value as a model for city-wide or centurial investigation.

John Herson’s, *Divergent paths: Family Histories of Irish Emigrants in Britain* 1820-1920 (2015) was described by O’Neill as unlike anything else in the canon of Irish migrant studies, and has been the culmination of decades of research.\(^{106}\) It is a new approach focused on Irish families in Stafford and in documenting the life stories of a representative sample, aims to understand the experience of migrants in a more constructive manner.\(^{107}\) The outcome of his technique allows him to challenge common notions of Irish migrants as exiles, victims or opportunists, and to see as simplistic previous interpretations of the interaction between the Irish and the host population as imbued with strain. His ability to outline and clarify issues e.g. on the persistence of ethnic identity together with his considerations on the methodology employed in family based analysis makes this a powerful manual, that will widen the conceptual horizons of historical researchers, apart altogether from his informative findings. His exploration prompted him to suggest that within the specific environmental context of Stafford ‘the processes of identity formation and social interaction’ led to many different outcomes for families who he found fitted into three categories: long-term transients, terminal families, and integrating families.\(^{108}\)

Essays on specific urban areas

Essays of the ‘Irish settlement in a city’ genre tend to have been written during a period after the late sixties when establishing the basic picture in a city was of interest. They are largely descriptive and focused on the years to mid-century, when rates of migrant inflow were high and host animosity had not yet mellowed. Also influenced by the historical approach of the time, they concentrated on the clustered Irish and the dilapidated conditions where the majority of Irish lived. Such was Werly’s study on ‘The Irish in Manchester 1832-49’ (1973). Richardson in 1968 studied Irish settlement in Bradford from 1825 to 1851. Nearby in Leeds, Dillon in 1974 considered the experience of the Irish population which stood at 8,466 Irish-born, 4.9% of city population in 1851.\(^{109}\) In 1971 Lobban saw the Irish in Greenock as having formed

\(^{107}\) Herson’s bottom-up family approach which would surely endorse the facilitation offered by electronic cross-referencing of census data, it is suggested has not been welcomed by some historians. They may be reluctant to see the approach as quite within the confines of historiographic discipline, as smacking of genealogy, or that it might be perceived as over-straying from the convention of drawing conclusions based on aggregates.
\(^{108}\) Herson, *Divergent paths*, p. 4
\(^{109}\) Dillon, Irish in Leeds, pp. 1-28
distinctive communities in the nineteenth century. Large found the Irish in 1851 underwent a different experience in Bristol. In it prior to the Famine there were 4,039 Irish-born (3.3% of city population). Between 1841 and 1851 the Irish-born population rose by 15% to reach 4,645 (3.4% of the city population). However relative to Birmingham which doubled its Irish-born numbers in the same decade Bristol did not experience a large influx of Irish. In an era influenced by ‘outcast and apartness’ orthodoxy, where the findings for York received popular attention, Large courageously pointed out, that in Bristol there was a high degree of intermarriage between the Irish and the non-Irish. This he saw as evidence that there was not the rigid separation often claimed between the Irish and the local inhabitants. He drew attention to the fact that contemporary reports in Bristol barely mentioned the Irish even though 4,039 Irish-born were recorded in 1841. The absence of comment on the Irish in Bristol indicated to him that the migrants were relatively inconspicuous. There was in fact no Bristol ghetto and while concentrated in particular streets and courts the Irish were scattered widely throughout the city. His findings that suggested a relatively harmonious Irish experience could exist there, raise for this study consideration of the possibility that aspects of his conclusions may similarly apply to Coventry.

A more recent essay by Murphy in 1994, on the Irish in Nottingham, where the 1,557 Irish-born formed 2.7% of the total population, showed some interesting parallels with Coventry. The town was constricted by common lands which led to dense back-to-back and court yard housing of inferior quality. It was a leading hosiery centre but trade fluctuated and workers could be unemployed. The Irish presence in its army barracks could unbalance the age-sex distribution of Irish in the city. Dublin workers who had lost their livelihoods due to the flood of cheap imports were attracted to it. In 1851 the evidence suggested that these Dubliners had been overtaken in number by an influx of Famine migrants from Ireland’s western counties. He remarked that there appears to have been an absence of conflict as the migrants were too few in number to pose ‘either an economic, cultural, or political threat to the status quo’.

110 Lobban, Irish in Greenock, pp. 270-281
The number of Irish-born in Greenock is not shown in Census Tables for 1851. There were 4,307 Irish-born, representing 11.7% of town’s population in 1841 and 6,188 Irish-born (Parliamentary Burgh), representing 14.1% of town’s population in 1861.
111 D. Large, The Irish in Bristol in 1851: a census enumeration, in S. Gilley & R. Swift (eds.), The Irish in the Victorian city, (London 1985) pp. 37-58. Large confined his study to Irish-born although in his analysis of Irish occupations he includes children (aged 5-12 inclusive) born in Britain provided one or both parents were Irish-born.
112 Patrick Murphy, Irish settlement in Nottingham in the early nineteenth century, Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire, Vol XCVIII 1994 pp. 82-91
113 Ibid., p. 90
Irish experience in small sized urban areas with similarities to Coventry

York’s treatment by Finnegan, which had a total population size the same as Coventry has already been referred to. Chester where 27,766 persons of whom 2,032 (7.3%) were Irish-born in 1851, had some similarities with a pre-industrialised York and a domestic-industrial Coventry, and was the subject of an essay by Jeffes in 1996. Her essay concerned with the 1840s and 50s has relevance to small town analysis where the extent of segregation and cultural distance may be more difficult to pronounce on, than for large urban centres. She depicted Chester as a small city close to a more regionally dominant Liverpool, with an especial calmness of Irish experience that Moriarty noted for Huddersfield, in proximity to a predominant Bradford and Leeds, opening for consideration that an analogous Irish phenomenon applied to Coventry within the orbit of Birmingham. She provided evidence of greater intermarriage with the native population, and thus greater integration, beyond Steven Street, in St. John’s parish where there was an ‘inordinate concentration’ of Irish-born. She suggested Steven Street was a reception street with mobile young male lodgers moving on to other work-offering urban locations or dispersing to other streets in Chester. She stressed her distinct unease with the use of the term ‘Irish community’ beyond the parish of St. John.

John Herson wrote three prominent essays about Irish settlement in Stafford. In his second essay which was a precursor to his unique monograph mentioned earlier, he was anxious to move beyond the bareness of census statistics and to present, based on migrants’ personal encounters, a richer insight into their differing experience and motivation. He provided details on the family history of a number of named families. He noted nuclear and extended family units were a key social institution and family cohesion was of importance. However his first essay which viewed Stafford from a small town perspective requires elaboration here. It is an archetypal study of the smaller urban area with relatively low in-migration from which guidance may be gleaned from its analytical approach on how to handle an examination of Coventry and its Irish. He justified Stafford as his choice of location on the basis of its typicality as a small town and its very ordinariness. He saw the town as a microcosm of nineteenth century England; it was a county town, a transport centre, a market town that possessed a militia barracks and gaol, and a shoe manufactured centre. Stafford with a population 12,328 in

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115 Ibid., p. 86
117 Herson, A small-town perspective, pp. 84-103
1851, which was precisely one-third of Coventry’s total population, contained 504 Irish-born, representing 4.1% of its total population. However, he did not disassemble his figures for areas below town level, nor did he map or account for the distribution of the Irish within Stafford.

Herson noted that there was a high turnover of Irish in the order of 80.0%. He believed that a large number of Famine migrants had already moved on by 1851 but there was substantial level of in-migration for fifteen years after the Famine to keep, at 494 Irish-born for 1861, a constant Irish number in Stafford. He noted from the Famine years until 1871 that one-third of those who left were skilled or otherwise higher-status workers, who were as equally mobile as labourers. He observed that many of Stafford’s in-migrants by 1851 had come from the vicinity of Castlerea in Co. Roscommon.

He outlined the factors that did not permit the development of a ‘strong Irish community’ in Stafford’. Irish origin of itself did not guarantee a bonding of migrants from the disparate counties represented in the town, though they might have done so at county level. There were Catholic Celts, Ulster Protestants and a body of more urbanised skilled persons from Dublin and other towns who were unlikely to have common values and interests. He proffered that the most convincing reason for the failure of a ‘community’ to develop was an insufficientcy of Irish to ensure viability of specific Irish institutions.\(^\text{118}\)

In Stafford he suggested the evidence pointed towards integration; it seemed likely to him that the Irish in the town would have been subject to a rapid process of ethnic fade.\(^\text{119}\) For this he credited the small Irish numbers, limited residential segregation which ensured day-to-day contact with Staffordians, and the integrative effect of the English small town habitat on the second generation. He believed integrative forces were stronger in the ‘small town’. He also saw the degree of intermarriage with locals – it occurred in one-third of Catholic marriages, as a signifier of integration. The view he posits on integration is contrary to the consensus among writers that from the Famine years until the end of the nineteenth century integration was limited in large cities. Writers such as Lowe stated Irish identity was probably shared by children of Irish-born in Britain, at any rate until they became independent; thereby prolonging a sense of Irish communal distinctness.\(^\text{120}\) Herson acknowledged that integration was not helped by the high turnover, which meant that many were not there long enough to put down roots. Neither was it helped by the fact most Irish were

\(^{118}\) Ibid., p. 94
\(^{119}\) Ibid., p. 96
\(^{120}\) Lowe, *Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire*, p. 48
poorer and had a lower social status than the local residents although he stated the gap was not wide.

Studies relating to the Midlands

Coventry was juxtaposed in the midlands with Birmingham 17m to the west, Wolverhampton 29m to the northwest and Leicester 23m to the north east. Writings on the Irish in these three cities are important in revealing the changeable midland ambience and latent resentment of the Irish that could, given a catalyst find open expression.\footnote{Herson titled his 2003 essay, based again on Stafford data, as ‘Irish Immigrant Families in the English West Midlands’. As that title suggested his work could have been placed for consideration in this study under a ‘Midland’ heading. However at 38m distance from Coventry it was considered beyond the ambit of the midland influences that affected Coventry and its hinterland.}

Beyond their northern concentrations, apart from London and Bristol, Birmingham was the only large city where the Irish resided in substantial numbers. In 1841 it already had a significant pre-Famine Irish population of 4,683 that almost doubled to 9,341 a decade later, and which reached 11,332 in 1861. Moran explores the early nineteenth century sympathy of the Birmingham British Political Union for the cause of reform in Ireland, the frequent visits of Daniel O’Connell to the city and the deterioration of the relationship between himself and its radicals.\footnote{James Moran, \textit{Irish Birmingham}, (Liverpool 2010) pp. 27-88} This initial local sympathy and frequency of visits, which included a meeting in 1832 of 15,000-20,000 addressed by O’Connell, increased public consciousness of Irish presence. He portrays an Irish population in the city from the 1830s as a defensive ethnic group with an awareness of its collective self, which others of the time realized was an entity that had to be reckoned with. Much of this Irish confidence and corresponding local reaction against it was due to the rhetoric of Fr Thomas McDonnell and his establishment of a branch of the Catholic Association seeking justice for the Irish. Of particular relevance, however, is the exposition by Moran of a nineteenth century mercurial, sometimes heated relationship between zealous Protestant opinion formers and those of a Catholic outlook, with the Irish inevitably seen as intrinsically associated with the latter. He saw organized anti-Catholic antagonism developing in the city from the 1830s that gave itself a justification for its existence during the restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy in 1850. He recorded the activities of the Protestant Association inviting anti-Catholic speakers to Birmingham, graphically described the riots and the seething anger that flowed from the provocative antics of William Murphy. He wrote on the growth of the Orange Order following these 1867 riots, the reverberations in the city during the Fenian tension, and the local Irish disdain at the attitude of the Catholic Church towards...
Fenian activity. He showed that latent resentment did exist and could be stirred beyond rhetoric by an outside stimulus, with church buildings often, perceived or otherwise, at risk of mob attack.

Chinn stated many who arrived in Birmingham from the 1820s, were leaving the deteriorating conditions in Connacht, or were seasonal agricultural workers who did not return home.\(^{123}\) By the late 1820s a sizable Irish presence was established that reached 4,683 Irish-born in 1841 and then doubled in the next decade to 9,341 to represent 4.0% of the population. The dramatic increase following the Famine, found the Irish, especially from Connacht, packed in squalid conditions in inner city neighbourhoods, that contained official lodging houses and homes that took in lodgers. He described the appalling conditions and remarked that behind the disreputable image of poor ‘Irish’ neighbourhoods was a community bonded by powerful ties of kinship and common place of origin. Migrants from Connacht spoke Gaelic. The strength and appeal of Chinn’s work is that, similar to Herson, it was exampled by named families and their members, which creates a ‘lived experience’ relationship with the reader. He noted ‘it is apparent that established families played a crucial role in providing a base for new Irish migrants’.\(^{124}\) He further noted the importance of county, township and kinship networks and stressed how vital they were in the emergence and stability of the Irish community. He observed occupational networks where, e.g. an Irish tailor or a nail maker took in similarly occupied Irish lodgers. He did not confine his research to central areas. In outer Birmingham where 24.0% of the Irish-born were located he found Irish kinship and occupational networking with button workers, glass workers, coach makers and brick workers, each residing in proximity to their fellow trade workers. He stated that the Irish at most formed 2.0% of the middle-class total. He observed that it was not unusual for young children to be employed in industry. For this to be happening among children of migrant Irish, indicated that there was a trend away from labouring into the metal trades. Labourers comprised not a majority but one-third of Irish workers, less than admitted by contemporary reports who honed in on the labouring reputation of the Irish. They worked in a wide variety of manufacturing trades, and in activities such as selling, clothes making, shoemaking, etc. When compared, labourers were less numerous in outer Birmingham than in the central ‘most Irish streets’.\(^{125}\)

\(^{123}\) Chinn, ‘Sturdy Catholic emigrants’, pp. 52-74
\(^{124}\) Ibid., p. 64
According to Danaher, Leicester with 877 Irish-born that comprised 1.4% of city population in 1851 was rarely a first choice destination. In noting that Chinn disclosed the majority of Birmingham migrants came from Roscommon, Mayo, Galway, Dublin and Cork, which were similar counties of origin for Leicester, he suggested there might be grounds for seeing migrant mobility in a trans-Midlands framework.\textsuperscript{126} The Irish entered an unwelcoming Leicester where prevailed a proud remembrance of how the Leicestershire military had suppressed the 1798 rebellion and where the local media negatively portrayed the Irish. It was a ‘powerfully’ Protestant city, permeated with anti-Catholic and anti-Irish sentiment.\textsuperscript{127} He suggested that this profound Protestant ambience may, through discouraging Irish settlement, partly explain the continuing small in-migration.\textsuperscript{128} He outlined the deep historic roots of a strong hostility to Catholicism in Leicester that existed prior to the arrival of the Irish. He referred to an agenda of paranoia to which the Irish as Catholics were added. It was fostered by Protestant societies, and invited visiting activists. This left local Catholicism ‘secretive [and] guarded’; it maintained a low profile until mid 1870s when the virulence of the Protestant militancy lessened.\textsuperscript{129} The commitment to anti-Catholic action was as active in Leicester as that found in Lancashire and Yorkshire - areas that had large Irish populations prompting him to comment ‘the vehemence of Leicester’s antipathy is almost startling’.\textsuperscript{130}

Danaher was keen to stretch his study of Leicester into the 1890s, outside the ‘artificial and narrow’ limits that a focus on the 1840s and 1850s would impose, in order to assess the assimilative trend of the migrant population over fifty years. Its central location, chain migration and the job opportunities for those with skills that could be applied in framework knitting, had already attracted a wave of settlement before the arrival of the Famine influx. He found evidence for a sense of ethnic community in the 1830s, and from an Irish second generation crucial source Tom Barclay, that an awareness of Irish cultural identity existed in the 1850s and during the Fenian excitement.\textsuperscript{131} Further, there was interest locally, as there was nationally, in the Home Rule and Land League developments. There was also momentum towards integration. After 1870, he saw the Hickman theory of Catholic Church incorporation and denationalisation at work in Leicester - a strengthening of Catholic identity through

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\textsuperscript{126} Danaher, Irish in Leicester, p. 464
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., pp. 287, 288, 361
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p. 20
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., p. 288
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., p. 323
\textsuperscript{131} Tom Barclay, Memoirs and Medleys, (Coalville 1995)
\end{flushright}
control of schools wherein was offered a ‘curriculum denying Irish identity’. Meanwhile the Church legitimised and facilitated the growth of peaceful Irish nationalism through church publications and use of school buildings for political meetings in Leicester. It was a settled city in the 1870s with an economy that had assimilative force, as it uplifted Irish men as well as women through their increasing employment, in hosiery and boot and shoe manufacture. He looked at street patterns that showed gradual dispersal away from the traditional Irish central districts around Abbey Street, Green Street and Bedford Street after the mid 1870s, and at marriage patterns that by 1891 showed 90.0% of both men and women had non-Irish partners. He reminded of Barclay’s reference to the second and third generations losing their sense of Irishness with many changing their names. Yet, he concluded, while there was some degree of acceptability and integration, the Irish as a social group were not fully assimilated, let alone integrated.

Danaher regarded Leicester as a small city (population 60,584 in 1851) and he sought comparison with Stafford (population 12,328 in 1851) which Herson characterised as a representative of the small town. He observed an Irish Protestant presence in Leicester and the city ‘supported a multi-faceted sense of Irish ethnicity and community’ that he regarded as absent in Stafford. He saw behaviours in Leicester more reminiscent of those associated with Irish experience in the larger city. Due to the numerical size of Irish migrants in Leicester, Irish clubs and pubs could endure and there were organised local Irish responses to the Fenian and Home Rule questions. Though small, he contended Leicester was ‘a microcosm in regard to the generality of issues and experiences of the Irish in Victorian Britain’. Liverpool was a large town and he noted replication of its experience in Leicester. He found a small Catholic bourgeoisie, and aspects of nationalism that were replicated, e.g. it received Catholic Church approval due to an opposition to violence, was politically conformist and non radical. The possibility of duplication of large town experience in the small town is a question deserving consideration in relation to Coventry.

Accounts of the Irish are plentiful; some works, like that of O’Day sparkle with perspicacity. Only those studies that have been totemic in migrant historiography and the most proficient in migrant observation or methodological exploration directly

132 Danaher, *Irish in Leicester*, p. 470
133 Ibid., p. 468
134 Ibid., p. 465
135 Ibid., pp. 361, 464, 469
136 Ibid., p. 466
137 Ibid., p. 470
138 For example: O’Day, Varieties of anti-Irish behaviour, p. 40.
relevant to this study have been referenced. A review here simply cannot do justice to the wealth of detail painstakingly collected and analysed in these research studies. Finely drawn and highly nuanced, they cannot be reduced to a summary without incurring substantial loss of meaning and over-simplification. In referencing other studies, regard must be had for the methodology employed and the development of historiographical insight. Hickman in her critique of the segregation/assimilation model articulates the caution necessary in intercity comparison when she remarks that ‘one instance of relative assimilation in Stafford can always be set against another of relative segregation in London and so on’. The interpretative style of the researcher, together with the historiographical perspective of the period in which a study was undertaken, may be responsible for showing the Irish as experiencing contrasting circumstances in cities located side-by-side. For example Richardson could write in 1976 of Bradford (9,279 Irish-born, 8.9% of city population in 1851) in the period from the 1840s to beyond 1900:

‘There developed a vicious spiral of deteriorating behaviour within the Irish community and between the Irish and non-Irish of Bradford which added to the feeling of separateness of migrant and host communities. By virtue of their numbers the Irish of Bradford were able to exist as a culturally self-sufficient community… mutual antagonism led to the formation of geographically separated overcrowded, insanitary Irish enclaves.’

Meanwhile in contrast to this hostility, Moriarty could write in 2010 of Huddersfield (1,562 Irish-born, 5.1% of city population in 1851) which was a short distance of 10m from Bradford, that anti-Irish feeling was not an issue; its population welcomed the arrival of the Irish whose contribution to the workforce was valued.

Contained in studies, is the common thread of an unskilled majority, found in overcrowded conditions and clustered in areas of poor housing. Also found in some localities in the second and third quarter of the century is a profound ethnic closeness; a Brummagem-Irish community ‘bonded by powerful ties of kinship and common place of origin’, or a Wolfrunian-Irish ‘communal assertiveness and ethnic solidarity’. However there is also as Davis has observed a ‘variety of experience… rooted in the specific conditions that obtained in the different communities in which they settled’. Relating to studies, their most fundamental collaboration, beyond reappraising the ‘Little Irelands’ caricature, is in the finding summarised by Davis who stated: ‘The condition, religion and expectation of Irish emigrants were as varied as their patterns of

139 Hickman, Alternative historiographies, p. 237
140 Richardson, Irish in Bradford, p. 316
141 Moriarty, Irish in Huddersfield, pp. 10, 25, 119
142 Davis, Little Irelands, pp. 128-129
migration and settlement’. It is this variety of experience according to Swift and Gilley that ‘complicates facile generalisations about the place of the Irish in Britain’. The degree of cross-referencing in these fresh studies shows that a solid framework of understanding is now in place. Such comparative referencing provides context and direction beneficial to this local study of Coventry.

1.2 Size of Irish population

Coventry

The Irish-born in the Census Abstracts and for the Study Area as set out in Table 1.2. The Study Area was established to provide a constant sized area that would allow intercensal comparison. It coincides with the Registration District for Coventry which was larger in size than the ‘City’ area quoted in later Abstracts and was sufficiently expansive to contain the built-up area of the city over the relevant range of censuses (Maps 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3). The technical details of coverage are outlined in Appendix 17 which also considers a serious discrepancy in Census Abstract of the Irish-born figures for 1851 and a relative deficiency of coverage area in those offered by the Abstract for the total population in 1871. What may be mentioned here is that Table 1.2 shows the total Irish-born as recorded in the city by the Abstracts included a substantial number of Irish-born recorded within the walls of the Barracks. They were only resident in Coventry at the behest of military command and subject to rotation. Without modulation, such a large institutional inclusion, of mainly young unmarried males, in a low city total would distort the ability of Irish-born figures to convey a sense of Irish-born ‘community’ size or structure. The 1841 Irish-born city total was swollen by over a fifth through its 118 Irish-born barrack occupants; totals for subsequent decades were also inflated though not to the same degree as 1841. These transient barrack residents are not included in direct investigation in this study which focuses on a consideration of the Irish in terms of local commitment and community.

Other locations

Pooley examined seventy towns and provided ranked results of the absolute and percentage Irish-born for the ‘top twenty’ in 1851 (See Table 1.1). As noted in Appendix 17 the Abstract figure for 1851 Coventry Irish-born is particularly suspect, nevertheless in the interest of Census Abstract uniformity the 1.89% figure will be

143 Ibid., p. 106
144 Gilley & Swift (eds.), Irish in Britain 1815-1939, p. 5
145 A very small number of officers or soldiers’ wives with young children lived outside the Barracks. Rather than arbitrarily picking out from the population at large, those who appeared involved with the Barracks, it was decided that for study purposes the Barracks residents were deemed to be those that were confined by its walls or in Barracks enumeration books.
The towns proffered by Pooley each contained 6.0% or more Irish-born in 1851 with Liverpool at 22.3% top of the list. Other large concentrations were found in e.g. Dundee 18.9%, Glasgow 18.2% and Manchester 13.1%, but in that list smaller towns such as Carlisle at 8.0%, Chester at 7.3% and Wolverhampton at 6.8% also feature. Below 6.0% and at a level greater than 2.0% of Irish-born in their total population, existed large towns such as at Leeds 4.9%, Birmingham at 4.0%, Bristol at 3.5% or Nottingham at 2.7%. Although based on smaller total populations than Coventry, county towns such Shrewsbury with 2.8% and Gloucester with 2.6% Irish-born showed a higher percentage than Coventry’s 1.9%. Beneath this percentage for Coventry, stood Northampton at 1.7% Irish-born and nearby Leicester at 1.4%; their total populations were respectively smaller and larger. Thus it can be seen that Coventry at mid-century

146 Reservation on comparability exists where in relation to built up area, it is possible that administrative area may underbound in one city and may overbound in another. Earlsdon was being rapidly developed in the 1880s outside the administrative ambit of Coventry for which figures are shown in published tables. Distortion where community size is a factor under consideration may be caused by the presence in, e.g. Birmingham and Northampton, of military barracks which could have a significant number of transient Irish-born present up to the 1860s.

had, in relative terms, within its population a small proportion of Irish-born. The large numbers in the above mentioned city percentages that could create their own concerning dynamic were absent from Coventry.

1.3 Sources

The census as a source

The interval between censuses is too long to catch the frequency of movement of migrants who were transient and mobile. Herson made an apt observation that the snapshot character of the census can exude an apparent stability which could mask a transient undercurrent.148 The magnitude of the Famine influx particular to the later 1840s is only displayed in 1851 as a decennial change from 1841. Collins refers to the static nature of the census and reminds that as the years progress families fall out of the census through death or its members moving out.149 The first census to identify Irish migrants was that of 1841, and the availability of its data - if rather coarse - allows for an assessment of the numerical condition of the community, in both the pre- and post- Famine years of arrival.150 While the post-Famine arrivals attracted notice, the 1841 census witnesses the fact that these post-Famine entrants were a rapid accretion on patterns established by the 437 Irish-born resident in the city from before the Famine.151 It would be an over-layering process that would again be recognised as applying to the Irish-born in Coventry at the end of the century. Questions on the structure of the censuses, on the information they sought and related, and their reliability have been addressed by Higgs.152 Some further considerations that affect harvesting the data are outlined in Appendix 17.

The household head is placed first in the enumeration and the relationship of all that follow to the head is then recorded. This recording arrangement becomes, in the general mind, one where the most important person in the household is the head and those that follow are the head’s family, after which are ranked those of lessening importance such as kin, servants and lodgers.

To see the latter as mere add-ons to the main family is to underestimate the initial and day-to-day support offered through kinship, the sustenance of the community.

148 Herson, A small-town perspective, p. 85
150 There is an absence of enquiry into the relation of members of the household to its head in 1841.
151 Excluding the 118 Irish-born in the barracks in 1841
through the making available of lodgings which also assisted in creating common bonds, and the financial help derived from lodging income especially to the older widowed. Some of these lodgers were the same age as the census head, and compatriots of the head when rows occurred with neighbours; in real life they may not have visualised the census head as anything such. Some lodgers may have been described as kin; further the same persons might be labelled kin in one census and lodgers in another.\footnote{If a choice had to be made between kin or lodging status, then if the person in question had the same surname as the household head ‘kin’ was preferred.} Comments made by the Inspector of Nuisances, on overcrowding recorded in Appendix 4 told that the Irish were not adverse to labelling lodgers as cousins and relations in the belief they could then take-in as many they wished.\footnote{Coventry Standard 25\textsuperscript{th} April 1851} In some cases, particularly in 1851, viewing a large unit of Gahagans, or of Conroys, or of differently names co-residing related families as a ‘clan’ seemed a more realistic approach to the internal household relationship than seeing the unit in terms of a neat census page arrangement of a family listing that was then followed by the rest.

There was a varied collection of cousins, aunts, nieces, nephews, sisters, mothers, mothers-in-law and grandchildren. Kin, under which these were classified, may not do justice as a term, to capture the deep bonds many had with the household family. Some in a household were unattached adult ‘children’, but in census appearance terms, they seemed never to have left their parents side. Others might be co-residing married ‘children’, accompanied by sons- and daughters-in-law and their offspring. Found at the end of household listings were widowed parents who at an earlier time had their own family relationships under a different head. Time’s passage meant that the widowed parent’s original family structure had collapsed but what remained of it, because of deep kinship ties, was very intertwined with the present household. The interweave fails to draw central attention to itself, in a statistical landscape pinioned by nuclear families. The role of these widowed mothers in linking the outlook of one generation to the next may also be underestimated.

An impression can take hold simply from the listing arrangement on enumeration pages that the head family possessed residential stability and had less mobility than is assumed to be the case for lodgers. While the rearing of young children in head families would tend to lessen mobility, as would the single unencumbered state of many lodgers permit it, both were not in two exclusively different residential mindsets. The practice of living in lodgings was not only engaged in by those, usually single, who preferred the convenience and flexibility of renting but could be slipped into by persons who...
appeared members of a solid family a decade or two earlier, but who e.g. subsequently lost a partner. Some lodgers were in essence families sharing accommodation but were termed as such by the census necessity to declare a household head; the order of their recording under the head transformed them into lodging subjugates of the head. Lodging was part of the mix of modes of habitation. For many around 1851 it was a pre-step to forming marital relationships, the creation of separate households and bearing of children with city roots. Lodging played a useful role in sustaining Irish presence; to the offering party it supplied financial help, especially to the widowed, and to the seekers it provided an initial toe-hold in the city. Those boarders who had a more transient intercity disposition and those boarders who were settled in the city all came under the term lodger. The former were the casual lodgers with light commitment to the city and must have included an assortment of persons seeking casual work, harvesters, jobbers, beggars and trampers. Casual lodging was voluminous, e.g. the city Inspector of Nuisances reported that during the last fortnight in April 1859 the number of casual lodgers that passed through was 601 males and 241 females. The second type were the lodgers who were more domiciled locally and might crystallise into a household head or spouse with the commitment to the city the word household suggests. Since the census designation of lodger does not convey intention on the length of city sojourn, the settled element of the lodging force cannot be quantified for inclusion when figures estimating the size of the settled community are compiled.

‘Ireland’ was simply proffered by many Irish-born as the reply to the question on birthplace. As a result investigation centred on the role of birthplace at Irish provincial

155 That some of these lodgers were temporarily settled seasonal harvesters on a wider tour of England is also possible as it was remarked in 1848 ‘Considerable numbers of these have annually come to England in the spring, to work at hay-harvest, remain for corn-harvest and hop-picking and then have carried home their earnings in the autumn’. The annual Irish increase caused by the arrival of seasonal harvesters and wandering poor was observed occurring in Coventry in April.’ The 1841 census was held on 6th June and would have captured sojourning seasonal harvesters; however, defeating the discovery of such information is the fact that lodging status was not displayed for 1841. Ironically the censuses which allowed lodging to be recorded were taken on: 30th March for 1851, 7th April 1861 and 2nd April 1871, and were too early in the year to capture the harvesters. A consequence of end of March or the beginning of April censuses is that the numbers enumerated may not fully indicate the extra impact in the town of Irish harvesters who might be present when their work season was in progress.

156 Coventry Standard 29th April 1859. The figures must have been gleaned from registered lodging houses. The amount of such traffic through smaller unregistered accommodations is unknown.

157 Or a settled person previously head of a household but who had lost that status for a census e.g. Dublin-born Edward Broughill, 63 years, married, was boarding in 1871 with Dublin-born John Barry and family in 1871. RG10/3177.14.21 ED 23. His wife Sarah had moved to Leicester where she was staying with their daughter Eliza. RG10/3284.32.6 ED 14. Just two decades earlier in 1851, Edward with his wife and 5 children appeared a very solid household. HO107/2067.120.28 ED 6.

158 It is to be mentioned that there were those in lodgings e.g. curates, who were in essence short stayers, but where the term ‘casual lodger’ and the disconnect with the city it implied, was not appropriate to their situation.
or county level in influencing settlement in Coventry has to rely on approximately 36.0%-50.0% who offered more detail such as an Irish town or county.

The birthplace column in census enumerations is the sole gateway through which migrant data is accessed for analysis; it foists birthplace in Ireland as the primary determinant of paradigms of Irish experience. Those singled out on birthplace, during any census inspection, become corralled as the study domain. This applies whether a child spent merely a week after birth in Ireland, or a much travelled person long left Ireland. It lends to the supposition that birthplace cultural formation continues to influence outlook in after years. However birthplace as Pooley noted may be a ‘very imprecise indication of ethnic affiliation’. 159

As mentioned some studies have relied on Irish-born data but have implied that the dimensions of the community would be larger if those born locally with an Irish association were included. 160 Specifically selecting Irish-born as a basis for analysis may be adequate for a mid-nineteenth century study when Irish-born were in volume and substantially gave the community its body and direction. 161 In a long ranging study such as this, reliance on quanta of Irish-born to represent the breadth of a community and its changing characteristics, would not provide for a fulfilling analysis. For example socio-economic change may need time to occur, and within an Irish-born generation may be unremarkable. It may become apparent over the lives of their children and grandchildren but these were mostly local and not Irish-born.

The household arrangement of census data facilitates the collection not only of Irish-born but more of those who, as evidenced by their relationship to the head, deserved inclusion in an ‘Irish’ grouping. These would consist of British-born spouses married to Irish-born and the British-born children of Irish-born (or their offspring) who still resided with their parents. All thus listed make up the group under consideration in this study and are referred to as ‘Irishcom’. The detailed characteristics of Irishcom are shown in Chapters 5 and 6 as aggregates, or shown under the household arrangement of ‘Irish household’ or ‘English household containing Irish. The bland attribution of Irish identity to grown-up children and their offspring has shortcomings. These children

159 Pooley, Segregation or integration? p. 73
160 Frances Finnegan’s study of York where community figures were used was an early exception to the tradition of relying on Irish-born data.
161 Even in these studies that dwell on a specific sentence, the representativeness of Irish-born data may be raised. Chinn in his study based on Irish-born numbers for Birmingham in 1851 observed, but beyond this mention did not address the issue: ‘In these streets as elsewhere, the Irish community could be expanded largely if the English-born children of migrants were included. For example, in Water Street this exercise would advance the Irish from a quarter of the residents to over a third, while in London Prentice Street it would augment them from almost a half to near two-thirds.’ (Chinn, ‘Sturdy Catholic emigrants’, p. 59).
could cross the national identity barrier between the Irish and English with more ease, and may have been distinctly hybrid in outlook.

In assembling databases where information is collected by visiting successive census manuscript pages, British-born children of migrants cannot be practically captured once they mature and leave their Irish-born parent’s residence, since they blend into the English-born populace. When such a British-born male of Irish extraction leaves and becomes 'lost' there is still a chance, especially if the surname is distinctive, that they can be located through electronic searches. However a British born-female on moving out of an Irish household to marry is almost always ‘lost’ due to her surname change, unless later in time the aged Irish-born parent returns to live with her now married daughter and son-in-law and in the process highlights the daughter’s ‘Irish’ background. Enquiries into the ‘lost’ may be undertaken on an individual time-consuming basis; but is an implausible endeavour on a wider scale. This immutable depletion of the referenced children which will hamper attaining the actual total of the Irish community was recognised as early as 1979 by Lees.162

A number of Tables in this study contain a family history underlay and they illustrate the difficulty of truly circumscribing an ‘Irish’ grouping. They show families of Irish-born with their Coventry-born children, who on becoming young adults peel off (in the census) into British society. In longitudinal analysis, depending on the point of perspective, the members i.e. Coventry-born children of Irish parents, of what firmly appears as an ‘Irish’ household in one census can appear less ‘Irish’ – if detectable at all without deliberate detailed analysis - in the households they create in a later census.

There is a risk to be recognised that when the Irish are plucked out of the manuscript pages and aggregated, that a collective identity or cohesiveness may erroneously appear to exist. The determination of the existence and nature of any community is not assisted by censal enquiry concentrated on a narrow range of demographic attributes that do little to tell of the agenda, spirit and coherence of a community or the different Irish identities that might comprise it.

The migrant record

The migrants themselves left little sense of how they experienced their adjustment to British cities and this applies also to Coventry. While primary education had been introduced through the Irish national schools system in the 1830s, with attendance non-compulsory, migrants who had not availed of this free formal education may have been unfamiliar with the skills of reading and writing, and dare it said, ignorant and utilitarian

162 Lees, Exiles of Erin, p. 48
in mind-set.\footnote{John Coolahan, The Daring First Decade of the Board of National Education, 1831-184, The Irish Journal of Education, Vol 17. No 1 (1983) p. 51} Davis informs that in 1851, 45.0\% of the population in Ireland were illiterate, though this may have been lower in the 15-40 age-group from which migrants most likely derived.\footnote{Davis, Irish in Britain 1815-1914, p. 41}

This failing was then not confined to the Irish. In Coventry, marriage registers into the mid-century, showed the celebrant’s well scribed entry was followed so often, with nothing other than a mark from those and their sponsors invited to sign the resister. The actual forms completed in writing by household heads for the 1911 census are presently available for inspection and they show the contribution national schooling made in the meantime to the advancement of literacy. The impoverished overcrowded circumstances of many migrants, the demand to find work, and work itself that was drudging and took up many hours of the day, left little opportunity for reflection, diary writing or correspondence. They may have believed that a record of their mundane experience and generally disapproved of lifestyle had little appeal to a wider and largely unsympathetic audience, or had any place in posterity. Perhaps oral means, facilitated by many public houses was regarded as the convenient method of transmitting impressions. They may have desired to keep a low profile and to leave a light footprint, and thus were circumspect about committing anything to paper, which Griffin reminds was a precious commodity in the 1830s.\footnote{Emma Griffin, Liberty’s Dawn: A People’s History of the Industrial Revolution, (Yale 2013) p. 1} It may have been a practice inculcated into the Irish who were a colonised people to be wary of establishment enquiries, and that a person maintained advantage in life by keeping one’s thoughts to oneself. This ‘paucity of personal testimony’ is bemoaned by O’Leary.\footnote{O’Leary, Irish in Wales, p. 10} However it is to be noted that ego- documents were rarely written by the majority population either.\footnote{Griffin, Liberty's Dawn, p. 16} Only one personal account of life in Coventry, that of Joseph Gutteridge (1816-1899), is available for the nineteenth century.\footnote{Valerie E. Chancellor (ed.), Master and Artisan in Victorian England, (London 1969)} Not all Irish were illiterate, or lacking in confidence to express an opinion in writing, as Thomas McLean showed in his two letters to the Herald (Appendix 2). The second letter provides rare Irish migrant articulation, as well as first hand insight into the poor circumstances that forced children into forfeiting their schooling and their limited future prospects. The body of the letter shows such participation in the English milieu that it would not be suspected, apart from his giveaway reference to the Dublin songwriter Thomas Moore that he was born in Dublin. The lack of observation by the Irish on their experience of intermixing with the native
population sadly means that it is only through police recalling their challenging
encounters with certain migrants that intimation is provided of the Irish mindset which in
such circumstances will only relate to the censurable occasion.

Reflections, including those by Ullathorne, Gutteridge and Lynch (referred to
below) which were penned later in life, may not be beyond fault, with Griffin having
advised that reflections may incorporate ‘failures of memory, inherent subjectivity and
retrospective imposition of meaning and order’.169 Barclay’s account relates to Leicester
which may have had a singular dedicated hostility, but his words still serve as a reality
check, that such attitudes might exist in Coventry while the absence of personal comment
by the Irish in Coventry may lend an otherwise impression of a benign, respectful
atmosphere.

A collection of family behaviour records with more intimate detail, than provided
by the census, providing tracking of a family name across the century, may offer an
impression of what thoughts crossed the migrant mind. However aside from the
prodigious task of assembling such material it could never be as informative as written
migrant self-reflection.170 Censuses only provide a basic ‘statement of position’ that of
necessity has to be interpreted to establish the reasons why the migrants of such an age
and gender were in a particular occupation and residential area. The reasons for their
choice may be due to a set of human factors beyond the conclusions inferable from the
census that it was a requirement to find work and affordable accommodation. Also
migrants cannot be assumed to have continually acted in their own best interest; the
anxious, infirm, or alcohol addicted may not have had the capacity to identify, or take a
course of action e.g. moving elsewhere, that was to their ultimate advantage. It remains
unknown for Coventry if the ‘Celtic Catholic’ element perceptively saw their situation as
one where they were trapped in poverty and subject to host dislike, Perhaps some Irish
determined they would not be overawed by host cultural dominance and encapsulated
their response in the knowing expression ‘they think they are above us’.

Contemporary records

Contemporary ‘official’ reports on the Irish have to be appraised for subliminal bias
or a desire to satisfy the sensation-seeking tastes of the middle classes.171 O’Leary says
the majority of sources relating to the Irish were ‘at best grudgingly accepting of

169 Griffin, Liberty's Dawn, p. 9
170 A person by person investigation is daunting. Thus apart from Herson’s investigation along these lines
in Stafford, comprehensive use of a bottom-up approach by urban historians has little appeal. (Herson,
Divergent paths).
171 Tim Dolin, George Eliot, (Oxford 2005) p. 64
their presence, at worst openly hostile to them.\textsuperscript{172} Written by middle class authority figures such as doctors, policemen, or workhouse directors tasked to officially report on the extent of crime or environmental problems, and influenced by the attitudes of the time, the Irish were adjudged to have been the cause rather than the result (to which they were seen as indifferent) of the troubling conditions described. Best regarded the Poor Law reports as ‘myopic and narrow-minded’.\textsuperscript{173} These observers’ comments, more copiously available for some cities than others, dwelt on extreme examples, and although some distinguished particular behaviour as emanating from only the ‘low’ Irish, the residing impression was that the examples applied widely to the Irish. Such accounts became part of the standard ‘inundation from catastrophe’ narrative for long uncritically promoted in history texts. The report in which James Phillips Kay described ‘Little Ireland’ and ‘Irish Town’ in Manchester is an oft quoted example.\textsuperscript{174}

Interest in municipal improvement, the silk trade, the Irish poor, and vagrancy prompted probing reports in the early part of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{175} While of enormous value, these reports highlighted the issues the Irish faced when their numbers, poverty and reception made their adjustment difficulties prominent. However in contrast to mid-century there were few enquiries that could to the advantage of the researcher elucidate on the later century ‘settled’ Irish situation and rebalance the dominating images of crisis and transience in earlier reports.

William Bernard Ullathorne, Bishop of Birmingham from 1850, was parish priest of Coventry from 1841 to 1846, at a time particularly pertinent to the movement of Irish migrants. He was the only English bishop to write an autobiography and has had two biographies written of him.\textsuperscript{176} However information from this source while providing some insight on Catholic confidence in Coventry is centred on the construction and dedication of St. Osburg’s. It fails to shed light for this enquiry on crucial aspects of his ministry and outlook e.g. on migrant welfare, or the scale of poverty and its alleviation, or degree of community self-help, or the appropriateness and scale of mixed marriages, or the extent of local approval of the Irish, or local Protestant hostility, if any, towards

\textsuperscript{172} O’Leary, Irish in Wales, p. 11
\textsuperscript{173} Geoffrey Best, Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75, (London 1971) p. 142
\textsuperscript{174} The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes of Manchester in 1832 http://www.historyhome.co.uk/peel/p-health/mterkay.htm Accessed 6th March 2018
\textsuperscript{175} Report from Select Committee on the Silk Trade: with the minutes of evidence PP 1831-32 XIX.1 [678]; Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain; Commission on the Hand-Loom Weavers, Assistant Commissioners Reports, Midland District; Reports and Communications on Vagrancy, PP 1847-48 LIII.235 [987]
\textsuperscript{176} William Bernard Ullathorne, From cabin-boy to archbishop, the autobiography of Archbishop Ullathorne; printed from the original draft; with an introduction by Shane Leslie, (New York 1941); Cuthbert Butler, The Life and Times of Bishop Ullathorne, 1806-1889, (London 1926); Champ, William Bernard Ullathorne
Catholicism. This sad omission has prevalence in biographies of religious worthies on which Gilley remarked ‘this species of two volume *Life and Letters* for the most part ignores social questions for ecclesiastical and theological controversy’.\(^\text{177}\) There also may have been, as discussed later, a strange reluctance to acknowledge the contribution of the Irish migrant to the sustenance of the English Catholic Church. No other nineteenth century Coventry priest, described Catholic and associated Irish circumstances, or had their ministering experience written about in depth. Coventry possessed what Gilley bemoaned generally as the ‘secular priesthood and laity, noblemen and commoners, English and Irish, who were socially important if individually unremarkable and intellectually uninteresting, [that] have for the most part gone unwept, unhonoured and unsung’.\(^\text{178}\) Ullathorne was greatly assisted in Coventry by Margaret Hallahan who arrived in 1842 and departed in 1846 when he left the city.\(^\text{179}\) She would have encountered the Irish in her role as sacristan, teacher of their children and a visitor to their homes. In her biography the finding of any informative comment on the migrants would have been of value, even allowing that her biography, recalling her extraordinary religious zeal was hagiographic, having been written by reverential nuns of the order she founded, shortly after she died in 1869. There is but one reference to her caring for the children of a poor Irish woman who had died of fever.\(^\text{180}\) William Murphy, the provocative anti-Catholic lecturer who made an appearance in neighbouring Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Walsall in 1867 did not visit. Had he done so, such a visit might have informed on the temperature of relationships between Catholics and Non-Catholics in Coventry. His absence, like that of another anti-Catholic lecturer Baron de Camin before him in the 1850s, suggests Coventry was a tolerant city and there was not the potential for provocation. The anti-Catholic Alessandro Gavazzi visited Coventry in May 1854. That he received loud applause in St. Mary’s Hall tells that there was in the city at least an amount of anti-Catholic upholders, of the size that comprised his audience. However this has to be measured against the fact that he did not give, as was his norm, a second more graphic lecture, and that his views received a cold reception in the *Herald* and surprisingly so in the *Coventry Standard* (Appendix 5).\(^\text{181}\)


\(^{178}\) Ibid., p. 265

\(^{179}\) Her *Religious Children, Life of Mother Margaret Mary Hallahan*, (New York 1869) pp. 49-133

\(^{180}\) Ibid., pp. 122-3

\(^{181}\) See also Appendix 5 for comments made at a Coventry City Mission meeting in 1857 in St. Mary’s Hall by Rev J. Drury and reaction to them.
Hugh Heinrick in his roving survey of the Irish in Britain in 1872 tellingly passed from Leicester to Birmingham without reference to Coventry. John Denvir in 1892 recorded the city on his journey around Britain and assumed Irish and Catholic as congruent in Coventry in his predictably complimentary but depthless narrative. He provided little elucidation on the condition of the mid-century Irish. Prest who furnished in 1960 a singularly educative and insightful history of industrial Coventry and its impact on the social and residential conditions in the first half of the nineteenth century does not allude to the Irish. Neither did Benjamin Poole (1800-1880), who spent a lifetime in Coventry; knew intimately about the conditions of weavers and the working of silk trade, and who wrote in 1852 The History of Coventry. Nor did Joseph Gutteridge (1816-1899) who lived his life in Coventry and who in 1893 wrote cogently in his autobiography about daily life and the distress of weavers in his earlier years.

Charles Bray (1811-1884) was a prosperous ribbon manufacturer and rationalist who resided at ‘Rosehill’ on the Radford Road in Coventry. His home was the venue for the ‘Rosehill Circle’ where George Eliot and radicals such as Robert Owen and Ralph Waldo Emerson found like-minded freethinkers, liberals and sceptics. Bray was a noted social reformer who is credited with writing the unattributed preface and introductory essay to a book by his sister-in-law Mary Hennell. In his lengthy essay, in similar vein to Carlyle on the condition of England, he was conscious of the Irish, where in a mention of Glasgow he was told of ‘the great influx of the Irish poor’ and on Birmingham he remarked ‘we have seen that 374 lodging-houses are devoted to the reception of a loose population of Irish and mendicants’. That he was so cognisant of

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183 John Denvir, The Irish in Britain, (London 1892) pp. 427-428
184 John Prest, The Industrial Revolution in Coventry, (London 1960)
185 Benjamin Poole, The History of Coventry, (Coventry 1852); Report on the Silk Trade, pp. 52-68
186 Chancellor, Master and Artisan
187 Hennell was not named either as author but all scholars attribute the writing to her.
188 [Mary Hennell], An Outline of the various Social Systems & Communities which have founded on the principle of Co-operation with an introductory essay, by the author of ‘The Philosophy of Necessity’. (London 1844) pp. xvi, xxiii, lxxvi, xc; He wrote on p. xvi: ‘In all our large cities and populous manufacturing districts a very large proportion of the population are living without any certain means of subsistence, or upon wages utterly inadequate to maintain a decent existence, while among those whose earnings are sufficient to support them in respectability, thousands are reduced by intemperance, improvidence, and the vices resulting from ignorance and the absence of moral principal, to the standard of the starving beggar and prostitute. This squalid mass of misery, fostered by neglect, multiplying by its own inherent tendency, and swollen by the continual influx of Irish immigrants, rural labourers in search of employment, and manufacturing operatives by strikes, improvements in machinery, and vicissitudes in trade, advances continually; and, although ravaged by the typhus fever, or decimated by a frightful mortality, encroaches more and more on the boundaries of civilization…..’. His essay reminds that the circumstances ascribed to the Irish by commentators were common to a large section of society. While it
poverty and aware of Irish ‘influx’ and an Irish ‘loose population’ in nearby Birmingham but did not make any reference to the Irish in Coventry even as an example of those in poor circumstances in Coventry, lends to the belief that the Irish existence in early 1840s Coventry did not engender or represent especial problems for them to be singled-out.

This dearth of Coventrian reference, directly commenting on the local Irish is to be lamented and contrary to the case in nearby locations. There is no equivalent for Coventry to the city report on Birmingham contained in the ‘State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain’ which has proved such a boon for scholars of that city. Neither is there for Coventry a detailed local primary source equivalent to the Journal of Thomas Augustine Finigan who sympathetically, if often critically, outlined the circumstances of the ordinary Irish in Birmingham in 1837-38, which was accessed by Davis. Likewise, in Leicester the Annual Reports of the Leicester Domestic Mission Society by the Unitarian Rev. Joseph Dare, even if negatively covering the Irish from 1846 to approximately 1863, was fortunately available to Danaher who used the source extensively. There is one controversial account of life in the Coventry Mercy Convent circa 1869 and some description of the town in Irish-born Hannah Lynch’s (1862-1904) Autobiography of a Child published in 1889 (Appendix 11).

Potential sources fail to deliver on their promise. Accounts of Ullathorne’s adventurous early life, his parochial endeavours, episcopalian management and Fenian challenges are engaging matters for the historian but strip these away and what remains is the paucity of his comments on the Coventry Irish which provide but a meagre resource. This thinness of description can lead to a struggle to flesh out detail in order to make a seamless and compelling narrative. It risks an undesired supplementation by national findings, and dependence and over-scaling of the significance of reports in the weekly newspapers columns on those Irish before the magistrates. Fragmentary is a

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190 Thomas Augustine Finigan, Journal of Thomas Augustine Finigan, 1837/8, Birmingham Central Library Archives; Davis, Green Ribbons

191 Joseph Dare, (ed.), Annual Reports of Leicester Domestic Mission Society, (1846-63); Danaher, Irish in Leicester

word used by O’Leary to describe the availability of such evidence and Fitzpatrick cautions on haste to generalize from fragmentary evidence.\textsuperscript{193}

\textbf{Printed Matter}

The local newspapers of greatest source during the century were the \textit{Herald} (1824-1939) and its rival the \textit{Standard} (1836-1945). The \textit{Coventry Times} (1855-1899) was the first penny paper with material more visually accessible as it was arranged under clear headings.\textsuperscript{194} The \textit{Coventry Telegraph} (1891-1979) was a valuable source at century end. In the first instance they portrayed, and may have had a hand in creating, the character, localism and concerns of the city. Thus they described the setting in which the Irish tookup residence. As commercial enterprises, according to Hobbs, local newspapers ‘thrived as catalysts and chronicles’ of the urban centres where published.\textsuperscript{195} In their shaping of and showing of public opinion they provided an indication of influences and attitudes that bore down on Irish migrants. Reports and views would more likely have found their way into a newspaper if they contained an extreme or sensational angle. Editorials, letters and articles were all written to promote an agenda with the cold message often concealed by prolixity or satire. Narratives therein may not describe reality, as rallying, or anger inducing comments made at election hustings, or expressions at celebratory dinners of convivial satisfaction and goodwill, may have been rhetoric or polished lip service regarded as appropriate to the occasion. In order that the editorial slant of the contributing newspaper can be factored in on reading, titles are often shown in this narrative rather than amassed as foot-notes, even at the risk of bothersome repetition.\textsuperscript{196} Again while newspapers possess the advantage in their ability to show up the attitudes of the time, they contain the equal disadvantage till the 1870s at least, of a degree of ‘othering’ and condescending

\textsuperscript{193} O’Leary, \textit{Irish in Wales}, p. 11
\textsuperscript{194} For 1867 the \textit{Coventry Times} could supply think pieces copied from other publications on e.g. the nature of Irish patriotism (6\textsuperscript{th} February 67), the turbulent state of Ireland (20\textsuperscript{th} March 67), the lengthiest graphic account of the final hours and execution of the Manchester Martyrs (27\textsuperscript{th} November). An extensive piece on what motivated Fenians explained how they saw their actions as a struggle for nationality (4\textsuperscript{th} December). An upcoming lecture in Coventry on the position of the Irish Church to be given by the Rev Charles Vance, who was a popular Birmingham lecturer, prompted the paper on 18\textsuperscript{th} January 1868, with the recent Clerkenwell explosions in mind, to observe in part ‘Nothing, in our judgement will be so well calculated to secure peace to Ireland, and suppress the spirit of violence which is abroad amongst us just now, as the exhibition to our Irish fellow subjects of a spirit of earnest and intelligent determination to redress the grievances under which their country groans. If years and years ago we had done justly by Ireland, that hideous upgrowth, Fenianism with its horrid outrages and power for mischief, would have found no place in the land…’

\textsuperscript{195} Hobbs, \textit{A Fleet Street in Every Town: The Provincial Press in England, 1855-1900}, (Cambridge 2018) p. 4

\textsuperscript{196} Appendix 8 provides an example of editorial partisanship.
antipathy towards the Irish. Reliance on such accounts creates the potential for their subjective observations in a nineteenth century zeitgeist to influence historiographical writing; an influence which MacRaild remarked has been apparent in historical studies.\textsuperscript{197} For the Liberal supporting \textit{Herald} the injustice found in Ireland was a cause to champion. The avowedly Tory \textit{Standard} spoke on the side of Queen and Church and was trenchantly against both the Catholic Church and Daniel O’Connell. Either paper was prepared to use the handling of an Irish issue by a government (or its lauding by supporters) with which the paper did not agree, as a self-serving opportunity to criticise the government or the supporters, and to regard the handling as an example of the government’s ineptness. Much of the general material, beyond editorial and local reporting, that thundered about the Irish or the Catholic Church could crop up in either paper since their columns comprised ‘scissors and paste’ extracts, long and short, without much harmonisation in style that had been published in other newspapers throughout Britain and Ireland. The presence of anti-Catholic or Irish tirades in the newspapers was explained to readers as being the consequence of these papers’ policy of free discussion on all matters of public interest.

The later century saw a great expansion in publishing – national daily, weekly and Sunday newspapers suited to all educational levels. The attitudes of such newspapers may not have complimented insular local newspaper viewpoint, but supplanted it with a wider mass-cultural outlook. There would have been an integrative effect on the Irish through their reading about popular matters published in national newsprint. Given the assumed concordance between the Irish and Catholicism, also influential from the mid-Victorian period, was reading that was available to Catholics. Merrell spoke of an impressive variety of Catholic material that was directed at the educated reader, such as the \textit{Tablet}, the \textit{Dublin Review} and the \textit{Month}, but it was mainly the \textit{Universe} a weekly penny paper that was in reach of the working multitudes.\textsuperscript{198} The Coventry Young Men’s Society (CYMS) ran a reading room for which Catholic newspapers were purchased. Irish newspapers were available on order from English newsagents but such an arrangement reduced easy access and lessened readership.

For long, newspaper copy was not conveniently accessible to the masses because it was not until after the Education Act of 1870 that there was general competency in reading. The \textit{Standard} newspaper with its brand of self-righteous criticism of the Irish

\textsuperscript{197} Donald M. MacRaild, Irish Immigration and the ‘Condition of England’ Question: The Roots of an Historiographical Tradition, \textit{Immigrants and Minorities}, Vol 15, No 1, March 1995 p. 70

and Catholic Church may not have been read by many townsfolk and may not have influenced the degree of aversion that might have existed on the streets of Coventry. Uninformed townspeople may simply have sustained their prejudices on deep-rooted, fundamental anti-Irish and anti-Catholic coarse stereotypes.199

Contributions relevant to the Irish ranged unevenly from trite snippets to lengthy, dense, polemical letters, articles, and parliamentary dialogues. The snippets were scattered around the pages of a newspaper, and because of their convenient size, boiled-down directness, accompanied by an attention drawing sensational headline, may have been more widely read than column-length closely argued pieces. These short pieces may have had more impact, but not in a positive way, if as often they did, make jokes at Irish expense, or report with overdraw on a drunken Irish row. But the longer articles too, if less inviting to read, provided the high-minded dialectic to give legitimising cover and justification to those with raw street-level prejudices. Until later in the century papers were not designed to cater for the public at large and according to Brown at mid-century were ‘aimed squarely at educated readers, leisured and active’. He does point out that while a mass audience was not the goal of newspapers they were ‘nonetheless read by (and read to) a wider spectrum of society, often in public venues such a pubs, barber’s shops, coffee houses and mechanics institutes’.200 It may have been through the large number of Coventry pubs that the import of reports reached illiterate migrants.201

The reveal of newspapers

They were a most potent medium throughout nineteenth-century Coventry; their reactions best tell of the city mood. In these newspapers were direct local references to the Irish, mostly unflattering about their conditions and behaviour. Such pejorative

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200 David Brown, Cobden and the Press, in Anthony Howe & Simon Morgan (eds.) Rethinking Nineteenth-century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays, (Aldershot 2006) p. 81. The John Gulson Free Library was opened in 1869 but it is not clear if it provided newspapers to read. According to Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds.) Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland, (London 2009) p. 515 the provision of a reading room usually on the ground floor of public libraries, to permit the examination of newspapers, was customary from the inception of such libraries. 201 In these public houses they might hear stories brought by friends from nearby Birmingham about Protestant mobs, police brutality, or a sermon referring to Ullathorne’s aversion to Fenianism. These information transfers may have potency, as verbal communication conveyed passion. Structured intolerant newspaper articles, in an ironic pointing to the intolerances of the Roman Church could never have the same catalytic effect as a lecturer in a hired public hall expounding on ‘Romish errors’. (The Standard 26th August 1864 reported on the riot in Jersey when T.G. Owens came from London to lecture on ‘Bible Truths and Romish Errors’).

Many Irish in Coventry would have come in recent years from Dr MacHale’s diocese and would have been reared in an atmosphere infused by his sentiment referred to above. Oral delivery of information even if in a tacit manner might appeal to those Irish who were cautious and clannish.
publishing lessened considerably in the 1870s. The city newspapers provided to their readers sufficient century-wide information about Ireland itself, which in a broad way, kept the nature of Irishness in public discourse. See Appendix 15. Hawkins referred to Ireland as a ‘recurring bête noir’ for governments, involving difficulties, e.g. over famine alleviation or demands for self-rule.²⁰² There was heightened local newspaper attention exhibited on occasions when kingdom-wide concern was raised over issues affecting the island. Those that were distressful, evoked local sympathy, and those which showed Irish contrariness or unlawfulness drew outrage. These sentiments must have affected local attitudes to migrants. The reports, articles and letters published, all outlined the unsettled, precarious and poverty riven state of the Irish masses. For much of the time, Ireland appeared as a place throwing up problem upon problem. Since the problems seemed intractable and solutions seemed unattainable, printed contributions were often written with a censuring, exasperated, bluntness that must have convinced some of the municipal population that the Irish were a fickle, lazy, troublesome and subversive race. Again, often proclaimed in newspapers, as existing in Ireland were ‘Irish’ type peasant frailties, such as: backwardness, rebelliousness and subservience to a Catholic clergy. As a consequence, a sort of flawed national character seemed the norm, and to some degree this must have also been seen as applying to the Irish in Britain resulting in their being treated with suspicion and disdain.

A newspaper might cite the Catholic Church’s behaviour in Ireland to question how deep was Roman Church loyalty or ecumenism, or as exemplified by its control in Ireland, what it would inflict if had the opportunity in Britain. Also mentioned might be how a foolish government showed its ineptness, in its failure to understand, that disestablishment of the Church in Ireland would shake Protestantism in Britain as well as Ireland.²⁰³ The Standard was to the local forefront in this type of charge. Certain legal adjustments or accommodations appropriate and essentially relevant to Ireland provided enough reason for latent anger and defiance to flare in Coventry newspapers against Catholicism and nationalism. Appendix 15 provides an indication of the sympathy shown in Coventry to matters Irish over the years.

Also at certain times in Britain during what Ó Tuathaigh called ‘public excitement’, as exemplified by the Fenian alarm or the destination of the Irish vote in parliamentary elections - Irish matters could directly impinge on the Irish in Britain and

²⁰³ Later in the century the same argument was employed by Unionists that any offer of home-rule to Ireland would shake the foundations of the British Empire.
newspapers reflected this. Naturally the newspapers were outraged by Fenianism and spared no words in castigating this secret movement. Their thundering denunciation must have created an atmosphere in the compact city of Coventry, where people and police were known to each other, that many Irish steered clear of Fenianism, while those with Fenian sympathy may have let their leaning rest unspoken.

The impression taken away from the coverage in the local papers is, that while the misdeeds of Irish individuals were reported often in a mocking style to amuse the readership, and while the Irish as an ethnic group was seen as deserving blame and criticism for many aspects of its situation, culture and behaviour, there was very rarely any direct editorial criticism of the Irish who lived in Coventry. Perhaps nothing needed to be said; people drew their own conclusions on simply reading about the fervid rows of the Irish, or could read between the lines that it concerned Irish persons if there was an ‘Irish’ surname referenced.

Similarly while the Catholic Church was assailed in the papers with the most biting criticism levelled at Popery and the ‘Romish’ Church, there was no orchestrated criticism made of the local clergy or denigration of local Catholics. The latent anti-Catholic passions that eventually drew the Irish into physical conflict with the English in nearby Birmingham, Wolverhampton and elsewhere seem, if such existed in Coventry, to have found the extent of their expression within ordered newspaper sentences. A general antipathy in print to the Catholic Church was in evidence up to the 1870s while reporting on local Irish anti-social behaviour was at its most devilish from 1850 to 1870. Later in the century the papers themselves and their contents display less sustained hostility, though occasional snide articles could appear. There were far fewer mentions in local newspapers of court hearings with a negative Irish stamp but this could be simply due to there being fewer incidents to report.

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204 Ó Tuathaigh, Irish in Britain: problems of integration, p. 30
205 The Coventry Times 27th February 1867 reported that Thomas O’Neill a ‘labourer, a vicious looking fellow’ was charged when he struck and kicked a police officer seriously injuring him and tearing his coat when he had been removed from a lodging house in Much Park Street. James Maguire his companion was charged with trying to rescue O’Neill from custody. No reference to their being Irish was made in the report but the clues were obvious. These two would appear from the 1871 census to be then in Walsall and had not settled in Coventry. Their unsettled stay in Coventry even if their Irish background was never mentioned could only have left a continued bad impression of Coventry Irish.
Chapter 2

Character of Coventry

It emerges from nineteenth century Coventry newspapers that writers often referred with a fond regard to Coventry as ‘the old city’ or ‘ancient city’.\(^1\) It was a city that to them had an especial character. The awareness of the archaic nature of the city that has imbued such writing, alerts this study to the rich historical legacy bestowed to the municipality. However, due to the confines of this periodic study, enquiry here sidesteps the engaging story of its medieval past when it, rather than Birmingham, had national renown. Also this survey of the nineteenth century city must necessarily narrow its deliberation here to those aspects of the environmental, social and economic setting that contribute to an understanding of the experience of Coventry’s Irish residents. The most dynamic periods in the life of three Coventry acclaimed industries, were during the nineteenth century which permits their happenings to be presented as largely a self-contained Victorian package.

The chapter opens with a description of city form, and the influences that prevailed in the early nineteenth century. It was not a city in profound transition at the beginning of the century. Its form then seemed long-fixed in the layout that took shape in earlier centuries. Its established silk industry ran on domestic production lines. While it had the standing of prime town in its own county, it could also be considered a drab and introverted market town. It possessed an entrepreneurial spirit but its livelihood was concentrated, and becoming over-reliant on the unstable demand of the silk trade. It was a traditional city in the early nineteenth century with a significant number of its populace content to continue weaving and pricing in the same fashion in the following year as they had done in the previous one. It may bear description as an artisan or a craft-workers city; its entrepreneurial and industrial disposition has been raised, but neither of those momenta, or ‘coketown’, ‘factory town’ or ‘boomtown’ are entirely appropriate to functionally label the city. Perhaps the word boom may justifiably be applied to the ‘big purl’ time in silk production early in the century as it might also apply to its final decade of cycle assembly. Finnegan states in an introduction to her York study that she was ‘concerned with a particular sub-section of the poor’ which drew her straight to the slums of the city.\(^2\) This study’s concern is wider and its canvas is stretched across a city. It is therefore necessary to outline the morphological and

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\(^1\) For example the *Coventry Herald* 5th November 1875 reported that on the opening of Messrs Newsome and Yeomans new watch factory Major Caldicott ‘expressed a hope that other manufacturers would follow their example, and that ere long we should see many such factories as theirs in our old city’.

\(^2\) Finnegan, *Irish in York*, p. 3
social characteristics of all districts of the city where Coventrians resided. There is a focused account of the growth of the built area noting the stages of development of townscape units and whether they could be distinguished as distinct social areas. The well-being of the populace depended not only on living conditions which are noted but also on the economic vibrancy of the town. Thus the natures of its three renowned industries are acknowledged, albeit very briefly given the exigencies of the format of this study. Finally, there is reference to the character of the city; to those aspects of the affairs of the city that gave it a particular mood which was, if not welcoming to all Irish neither was it openly and persistently hostile to them.

2.1 City growth

Lying in the centre of England, the strong walled city of Coventry was the fourth city of the kingdom in medieval times. In 1451 Henry VI conferred on it county status, but by the nineteenth century it had lost much of its renown. Its city and county prestige had been swept away in 1842 and its regional importance was then much overshadowed by Birmingham - a city of the Industrial Revolution. Coventry’s walls had been raised in 1662 on the orders of Charles II but the line of the city walls contained still in the 1820s, the built up area with its medieval street pattern. In this area admirable half-timbered houses built during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were interspersed with brick houses of the eighteenth century.

Through the medieval core, from west to east ran the Birmingham Old Road through Spon Street, Fleet Street, through the narrow Smithford Street, High Street, Earl Street, Jordan Well to Far Gosford Street and thence to Leicester or Rugby. Crossing High Street with the axis at Broadgate was the north-south road from Nuneaton to Warwick. Access from Broadgate to the Warwick Road was improved after 1812 by the construction of Hertford Street. Broadgate was a short street that was widened between 1820 and 1823 to form a rectangle that represented the town centre square. To the east of Broadgate stood two churches in proximity, that of St. Michael and that of the Holy Trinity each of which controlled a parish (roughly covering areas of the city to the south and north respectively). Much Park Street, off Earl Street and Jordan Well, led south to the London Road. The radiating roads such as Spon Street to the west, and Gosford Street continued by Far Gosford Street to the east acted as spines along which old stock housing and lengthy courts at right angles were attached. Of the 55 numbered courts in Spon St, Court No 48 entered through an archway, alone contained 28 houses. The

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4 Prest, *Industrial Revolution in Coventry*, p. 24
fields in the angles intervening between such ‘spine’ roads were only built over later in
the century. The Spitalmoors district, i.e. the fields north of Gosford Street and Far
Gosford Street, reaching towards the southern edge of Hillfields was built over only from
the 1860s onwards by the triangular arrangement of Raglan Street, Alma Street and Lower
Ford Street. The integration of many bicycle works with housing along such streets reveal
this was the area attracting infill then. Also to the south Hertford Street lined with select
shops and banks connected Greyfriars Green to the city centre. From the early nineteenth
century Greyfriars Green was surrounded by elegant housing and maintained its
residential attraction as the century progressed. Along its west side ran Warwick Row
with long ornamental gardens behind, on the east side was a stylish terrace of substantial
houses called the Quadrant and a number of detached villas in their own grounds, e.g.
Fernilea, Avonmore, and Greylands.

At mid-nineteenth century the manufacturers and professionals continued to reside
centrally in e.g. Little Park Street. They were also resident in suburban villas in their own

\footnote{Kenneth Richardson, \textit{Coventry Past Into Present}, (Chichester, 1987) p. 5}

There was some lateral expansion west along Spon Street towards Spon End, and beyond that again
from 1846, when Chapelfields was developed with streets of watchmakers’ houses. In the
area intervening Hertford Street and Spon Street, in the vicinity of Butts Lane,
development occurred in 1820s with terraced streets north of Butts Lane such as Thomas
Street and Moat Street (Figure 2.2). Building around this area was intense and houses in
Trafalgar Street backed right up to the River Sherbourne. In 1828 to the north east of
the city building of the Hillfields suburb commenced which was an area that attracted skilled

\footnote{7} This area was extended at mid century to include Aylesford Street, Leigh Street
and Bradford Street. North of the city wall, houses were built near Leicester Street. In
1845 Norton Street, Jesson Street, Bird Street and Ford Street were developed between
the wall line and Swanswell Pool, with Hales Street created to link this area to Bishop
Street.\footnote{7} Bath Street, Queen Street, Spencer
Street and Swanswell Street were mid-century creations in this area. The extent of the city and its central area in 1851 are shown in Maps 2.1 and 2.2 and in 1869 in Map 2.3.

At the beginning of nineteenth century the poor of the city lived in timber framed houses in secondary streets. From this time the centre of the town started to become overcrowded and according to Prest very congested. He told that in 1830 in the centre of Coventry, shops, warehouses, slaughter houses, and ribbon manufactories were unplanned and haphazardly crowded together, almost up to the walls of St. Michael’s and Holy Trinity churches. Palmer Lane, New Buildings, Leicester Street, Well Street, West Orchard, Cow Lane, Much Park Street mark out a band of dilapidation about, and indeed into the commercial core. Opening after opening along streets like these, accessed courts that occupied every scrap of ground. The irregular shapes of yards and lanes throughout were the product of antiquity. In a street like Much Park Street the courtyards were established in the elongated gardens at a subsequent time to the building of the streethouse. In areas a little beyond, freshly developed in the nineteenth century which show regularity in street pattern, at the time when their streets were first laid out, the fullest advantage was also taken, to squeeze in courts. Castle Street beyond the central area possessed a number of lengthy courts featuring back-to-back housing running at right angles to the street itself. It is to be marvelled at how ingeniously the courtyards were designed to interlock, or abut each other, so that every inch of ground was utilised. This could involve a back-to-back arrangement of courhouse and street-house. There was an ‘Alice in Wonderland feel’ to some locations such Palmer Lane, White Friars Lane and College Square. They had other wider entry points but popular access was through archways off prominent streets. Hotchpotch throughout the city were to be found houses in named ‘Rows’, ‘Buildings’, ‘Terraces’ and terraced ‘Cottages’. There were labyrinths of connecting lanes and narrow rows in the central area around Cook Street and also about the Bull ring. While they appear chaotic in pattern, they were a lymphatic system that provided direct walking routes and acted as pedestrian highways.

At obvious fault for the congested state of the city was the growth in population which had almost doubled between 1801 (16,000) and 1841 (30,781). This population

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8 Beyond Coventry stretching from Foleshill as far as Nuneaton were villages involved in silk weaving who looked to the city as an administrative centre but had a less prosperous, more backward and distinct trade from that of Coventry. The countryside south of the city e.g. Whitley, Pinley and towards Stivichall was in complete contrast purely engaged in agricultural activity, nonetheless these farmlands were enumerated by the census as part of St. Michael’s parish.

9 Prest, *Industrial Revolution in Coventry*, p. 24

10 There were no courts in the watch making district of Chapelfields at the edge of the city.
increase was due to people flocking into the city seeking employment.\textsuperscript{11} Some caution is necessary about regarding population pressure as the only cause of overcrowding given Lowe’s remark, in relation to Lancashire:

‘There is evidence that unhealthy and overcrowded dwellings were not simply the result of a shortage of housing, although supply of inexpensive housing certainly lagged behind demand. Working-class families crowded Lancashire housing to economize and reduce the proportion of their incomes that had to be devoted to rent’.\textsuperscript{12}

However the main cause of congestion was due to the severe constraint on the city from spreading outwards except in Hillfields. Beyond and almost surrounding the city core boundary, represented largely by the line of the old wall, was a necklace of common land, Lammas lands and Michaelmas Lands (Total 1,000 acres), over which the freemen - weavers, had rights.\textsuperscript{13} They fiercely resisted any change in their use until 1860. A map of 1887 shows an expansive Park Gardens with its nursery stretching between Warwick Road and London Road. It was still pressing on its north side against the southern edge of the built up area (as represented by the southern tip of Little Park Street) and blocking potential city growth southward. The open area of Poddy Croft behind the Barracks was only marked out in the 1880s for street construction. Significant development commenced in Earlsdon late in the century, although large in scale when it did. Both Hillfields in the late 1820s and Chapelfields in the 1840s had proceeded due to release of lands belonging to Sir Thomas White’s Charity (Figure 2.1). This constricting band of untouchable lands forced housing development in long back gardens, yards and lanes behind housing in the principal streets.\textsuperscript{14} In these long gardens speculators, in order to maximise rent return, compressed cheaply built small terraced houses. Top floors were often added as weaving workshops. Entrance to individual courts was through a narrow passageway from the street which effectively created an isolated world behind the street.\textsuperscript{15} Over the century industry continued to intrude into the built-area. Weaving shops and factories premises abandoned on the collapse of the silk trade in the 1860 were now occupied by bicycle and engineering works (Figure

\textsuperscript{11} ‘The City of Coventry: Introduction’, pp. 1-23
\textsuperscript{12} Lowe, Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire, p. 51
\textsuperscript{13} Patrick Murphy stated that Nottingham faced the same problem; the city was held in a vice by the failure to enclose the common lands. (Murphy, Irish in Nottingham, p. 83).
\textsuperscript{14} ‘The City of Coventry: Introduction’, pp. 1-23
\textsuperscript{15} Coventry Standard 29th June 1849 An enquiry was undertaken by William Ranger, under the Public Health Act of 1848 as to whether a local board of health should be established. Ranger described the effect on the city in 1849 that resulted from the constriction of the common lands: ‘These lands very materially injure the health of the city, its trade and intelligence. Its health, by confining multitudes to over-crowded localities, from want of building accommodation; its trade, from want of power to extend and enlarge the town; its intelligence, because, since the town has no suburbs, no villa residences, all who are not engaged in trade or professions, and who have time for thought and study, are obliged to seek a home elsewhere’.
New factories were built on any available ground (Map 6.8).\textsuperscript{16} The arrival of new workers seeking employing in the bicycle era led to the building of new streets. In other areas however, late in the century, in areas represented by suburban Earlsdon, where successful watchmakers resided, there was little intrusion of industrial works and they possessed a solid, uniform, residential feel.\textsuperscript{17} Distinct social areas were generally emerging after mid-century. The response of the affluent is visible in the town plans of Coventry which show the growth of select town terraces (Appendix 13), and at the then edge of the city detached villas identified by house-names, in their ornamental grounds built alongside the radial roads. There were growing areas of homogeneous street pattern and house type later in the century; houses still exist today in areas to provide evidence of the particular social grouping that originally resided there.\textsuperscript{18} Usually newer housing built at the prevailing margin would roll out further the same type of social area already at the edge. Working class areas tended to advance to the north and east while middle-class suburbs grew more towards the south and southwest. A more leafy residential development occurred in the southside of the city.

\textbf{Condition of areas of town}

While the Irish were popularly associated with degraded living conditions, what follows tell that these conditions - before any Famine influx - were more widespread than contemporarily acknowledged. In 1843 J.R. Martin tasked with reporting on the sanitary condition of Coventry remarked, that in comparison to most manufacturing towns Coventry possessed a ‘sombre and unfavourable appearance’.\textsuperscript{19} This was due, according to him, to the fact that many houses in the centre of Coventry were

\textsuperscript{16} The OS Map of 1889 showed to the west of the city: Leigh Mills (Silk, Worsted & Cotton) in Ryley Street, Eagle Iron Works close by in Bond Street, the Lion Iron Foundry, Exchange Ribbon Factory, and Victoria Mills (Ribbons) in West Orchard; both of the latter to the edge of the Sherbourne. On the other bank, on the Well St side was the Vulcan Iron Works, Meteor Works and Albion Mills (both Bicycle and Tricycle). Abutting the Sherbourne behind Fleet Street was Fleet Works, and St. John’s Works (both Bicycle & Tricycle), a Silk Dye Works, and a nearby Watch Factory. St. Nicholas Mill (Coach Lace) and Albion Foundry (Brass & Iron) were in King Street, Rotherham’s Watch Movement works in Spon Street while the large and tall Rudge Works (Motor & Cycle) in Crow Lane was a sign of times progress.

\textsuperscript{17} ‘The City of Coventry: The outlying parts’, pp. 48-50

\textsuperscript{18} On infilled lands in Spitalmoor between Gosford St and Hillfields, or in the vicinity of Bishopsgate Green/Widrington Road might be found the low-cost, plain, minimal street-width terrace house where the door opened directly onto the street, or was protected by a miniature ‘garden’ as represented by Craner’s Road (Figure 2.4). On infilled lands at Windmill Fields, and also in Earlsdon might be found substantial terraced houses with bay windows on one or both floors, more recessed front doors with open tiled porches, fronted by small gardens and style flourishes of the particular builder. Northumberland Road, Figure 2.5, is representative.

\textsuperscript{19} Second Report into the state of large towns, p. 259. Martin, in the report that included Coventry, inspected with a similar eye Nottingham, Leicester, Norwich and Portsmouth. It is clear that the prevalence of overcrowding, unhygienic, dismal courts, lanes and alleyways was not confined to Coventry. The existence of common lands which surrounded three quarters of Nottingham severely constricted the development of the city, just as had occurred in Coventry. Similar lamentable descriptions were given for poorer districts, usually in the older parts of the towns of Leicester, Derby, Norwich and Portsmouth.
constructed on a timber frame, in the sixteenth century fashion, with irregular frontages overhanging the streets which increased the gloom of those streets. It was also due to the fact that the streets were narrow, crooked, poorly arranged and unpaved. Neither were they properly lighted or cleaned. Off these badly ventilated streets were to be found a myriad of lanes, close packed courts, yards and alleys in ‘every direction and of the worst description’. Martin stated: ‘Bad and unhealthy quarters are plentifully distributed through Coventry, and may be found a few yards in rear of any street in the town, in the form of court, alley, or lane’ and that even in districts regarded as healthy he added ‘there are many small yards and courts where the inhabitants are so huddled together and so ill-constructed, that disease takes root in the human frame as though the locality itself was pestiferous’. He identified the most wanting areas:

‘Amongst the worst localities are Dog Lane or Leicester Street, together with Brewery Street, Swan Street, Tower Street, and Henry Street,--- all decidedly unhealthy. These form one neighbourhood, and its mortality bears a high proportion chiefly from epidemic fevers of various characters and types: typhus being prominent, along with dysentery, cholera, and diarrhoea. Palmer lane, which lies extremely low, and under which flows a foul stream of the River Sherbourne, is one entire mass of old rubbishy houses, scarcely one of which ought to be inhabited by human beings; and yet all are densely occupied by very poor people. The same description will equally apply to a great portion of the buildings of Lower Well Street, and to an extensive court called Caldicott’s Yard,--- a most offensive compound of everything detrimental to health.’

Martin singled out the neighbourhoods of Cow Lane, Warwick Lane, Greyfriars Lane, Barrack Yard, Much Park Street and St. John’s Street as neglected and unhealthy, while parts of Spon Street were notoriously unhealthy. He identified those locations near the river which carried the refuse of the town, as having a tainted atmosphere and most susceptible to serious disease.

Martin’s report, describing the houses occupied by the working classes, mentioned as typical a court house that measured 18 feet from front to back and 12 feet wide. This contained a kitchen 12 feet by 10 feet, a pantry and coal hole and a staircase leading to two bedrooms. It was not unusual that these bedrooms might be used for business purposes while an upper story could contain weaving looms.

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20 Ibid., p. 259
21 Ibid., pp. 249-294
22 Ibid., p. 259. His report complained about the manner in which houses were provided which led inevitably led to their deterioration and the creation of health and environmental problems. There was ‘the ungenerous principle of erecting the greatest possible number of dwellings on the smallest space of ground, ill-arranged, ill-constructed, and ill-provided for’ that had been ‘got up in the cheapest manner possible, finished off a little tawdryly to allure tenants, but formed of rough and unsubstantial materials. The interior, in a short time, becomes dirty, and begins to crumble to pieces’. Once occupied they were neglected by landlords and tenants alike and soon fell into disrepair. Many were built back to back with little use of party-walls to protect against fire.
As poor as the condition of these houses that each generally housed one family, they were superior to what could widely be found in the older part of the town that dated back centuries. There he instanced ‘houses three stories high with one entrance and without ventilation, containing three or four families, one over the other in each house’.\footnote{23} Prest described the conditions where the people lived without lighting or paving in developments that were in-fill, as having ‘too little air, bad water taken from a standpipe, or possibly a well, which served a dozen or several dozen families, and with cesspits and no main sewer.\footnote{24}

Coventry’s conditions were analogous to Birmingham according to R.A. Slaney who inspected the latter.\footnote{25} A positive reference to Coventry is found in the Report on the Health of Towns 1840. Therein Joseph Fletcher said ‘there is a material distinction between Coventry, and the towns in the south, from those in the north; the habits of the people of Coventry are remarkably superior to those of the people of Macclesfield and Manchester; their homes are humble, but their habits of cleanliness, compared with those which prevail in the north are quite conspicuous.’\footnote{26}

In the almost twenty years before enclosure commenced in 1860, which allowed the city to grow outward, the majority of the 2,000 houses built were located in Hillfields. While such housing helped to relieve congestion in the centre city courts according to Prest it aided division in the class structure:

‘For the last hundred years the working men of Coventry had been crowding into these courts. Good workmen and bad workmen rubbed shoulders in the same court, or lived in adjacent courts. Now, however, with the opening of the new suburbs, it was the better class of weavers and other working men, corresponding closely to the freemen, who were extricating themselves from the old city. In their new quarters there was air and light, and though many of the roads were still badly made up, the houses were well built, and there gardens and allotments. The standard of living of those who could remove to Hillfields, or Chapelfields, or Earlsdon was going up, while the old courts became slums, and those who lived in them, degenerated into slum dwellers.’\footnote{27}

He noted the result of this process of spatial differentiation:

‘Hillfields was to become the home, not only of so many of the upper class of freemen weavers, but of the cottage factory, while the old city was to become the home of the lower class of weavers and of the factory. Over a period of thirty years, however, from 1830 to 1860, the working class in Coventry was divided into two’.\footnote{28}

\footnote{23}{Ibid., p. 259}
\footnote{24}{Prest, \textit{Industrial Revolution in Coventry}, p. 26}
\footnote{25}{R.A. Slaney, \textit{Report on the State of Birmingham and other large towns}, (London 1845) pp. 5-11}
\footnote{26}{Report from the Select Committee on the Health of Towns 1840 (384) p. 69}
\footnote{27}{Prest, \textit{Industrial Revolution in Coventry}, p. 41}
\footnote{28}{Ibid., p. 41}
Causes of problems affecting the health of Coventry

The lack of adequate housing provision was but one of a number of serious problems which affected public well-being. There had been frequent incidences of epidemics; cholera had broken out in 1832, 1838 and again in 1849 while influenza had swept the city in 1837. In the years 1840, 41 and 42, the mortality rate was 2.6% annually, while the English average was only 2.2% and in several districts below 2.0%. Child mortality was excessive and there was also a large number of dependent widows and orphans.29 Already inadequate infrastructure was strained by the increased population. Problems had arisen due to non-enforcement of local laws or ineffective municipal action. Twenty years after building commenced in Hillfields of c2,000 houses there were no sewers, or any kind of underground drains ‘the sullage is discharged from the houses upon the surface where it lies stagnant to the constant annoyance of the inhabitants’ while ‘none of the roads…have ever been made, and in wet weather the wheels literally sink up to the naves, the ruts containing stagnant water and filth unfavourable to health’.30 There was no integrated sewer system for the city (or indeed map of the same), or a regular and coordinated disposal of refuse. There was a failure of the general populace to perceive that their well-being might be improved by individual basic actions such as ventilating houses. Municipal improvements were hindered as many courts were in private ownership.31

However there were more than environmental conditions affecting the well-being and health of the populace.32 Dr. Balbirnie in 1843 attributed the prevalence of chronic diseases to ‘close confinement, cares, poverty, the exhausting labours of an ill renumerated trade, and inadequate and innutritious diet…there are derangements of the digestive functions, primary and sympathetic, anomalous nervous affections simulating more formidable diseases of almost every texture, general cachexia, or vitiated and wasted constitution, without any marked local disorder; these are par excellence the

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29 Second Report into the state of large towns, p. 263
30 Coventry Standard 29th June 1849
31 The efforts of a court owner minded to improve were hindered because there were no neighbouring drains available. There was concern raised that municipal improvement on public health promoted a ‘centralizing principle’ by ‘sanatarians’ and would ‘burden’ the rates. Coventry Standard 29th June 1849. It was also believed that municipal upgrading would reward those who had profiteered through shabby construction in the past.
32 Martin identified in 1843 five serious issues which put at risk the health of the populace in Coventry: 1. Lack of a comprehensive sewerage and drainage system. 2. Inefficient disposal of refuse and the existence of earth middens. 3. Inadequate provision of public water for drinking, street cleansing and fire suppression. 4. Absence of sufficient burial space for the increased population. 5. Obstruction of the River Sherbourne by obsolescent dams that had turned the river into a filthy state. (Second Report into the state of large towns, pp. 260-266)
diseases of the weavers’. He was in no doubt the prevalence of consumption among the poor was caused by ‘the miseries of long-continued poverty and bad diet’.  

Martin wrote in the early 1840s, which was a time of depression, with consequent unemployment and falling wages:

‘The wages of workmen engaged in the silk business ranges from 5s. to 10s. per week, very few indeed rising above this latter sum. The uncertainty of labour subjects the operatives to the most severe and trying privations.’

Approaching 1849 valuable insight can to be found on the state of the city at a named street level. Raised on concern over the prevalence of epidemic and contagious diseases in fifty streets, and a higher than average national death rate, an enquiry was undertaken by William Ranger, under the Public Health Act of 1848 as to whether a local board of health should be established. His report found that ‘the atmosphere of the town is unanimously described as tainted and impure in the extreme’. He found ‘The labouring portion of the inhabitants are chiefly occupied in the manufacture of ribbons, silk, and watches, many of whom work in confined and ill-ventilated habitations – evils to which those who work in factories are less subject’. He stated the prevailing diseases were epidemics like scarlet fever and typhus, and that the latter and diarrhoea had induced a great mortality. Ranger viewed the city as being ‘literally hide-bound, and the occupants of dwelling in lanes, yards, &c., exposed to wretched existence’. He described the environment and the scale of the overcrowding:

‘The streets generally are long but narrow, and mostly tortuous;…there are no less than 164 courts, alleys, and yards, in numerous instances without any thoroughfare, and approached by long covered passages 7 feet high by 3 feet wide, containing 1,813 houses, occupied by 7,408 persons….the greatest amount of overcrowding prevailed in Dog lane, Brewery street, Leicester row, and Swan street’.

33 Second Report into the state of large towns, p. 262  
34 Ibid., p. 263. Martin wrote: ‘Bread, potatoes and tea, undoubtedly constitute the staple diet of the working classes, with a very small proportion of butchers’ meat, dependent upon the state of trade and earnings. Of firing in winter hundreds of families are certainly unable to procure a sufficient supply, although a large quantity of charity coal is annually distributed to the poor of Coventry during that season’. His report stated that there were ‘too many instances wherein the pressure of poverty, inability to maintain decent appearances in clothing and household comforts have led to a low and grovelling mode of living; and much immorality – especially immorality of language – prevails amongst the young of both sexes, more especially those who are employed in factories’. He saw further evils in factory employment. ‘The mothers are taken away and their infant children are exposed to every conceivable disadvantage in the hands of other junior members of the family, or of children hired for the purpose at a trifling sum per week’. (Ibid., pp. 262-263).
35 Coventry Herald 23rd February 1849
36 Mr Wyley a surgeon stated to Ranger in regard to Spon Street, Sherbourne Street and Albion Street: ‘Children especially suffer from low fever and diarrhoea; the air of the dwellings is foetid, the poorer class being very reluctant in attending to ventilation; on visiting the houses he frequently opened the windows, but they were closed again as soon as possible’. (Coventry Herald 29th June 1849)
37 He provided some examples of this overcrowding: ‘In Lamb and Flag yard [Spon Street], a woman with daughter, 19, son 16, and four other children, all sleep in one small room. There is no outlet at back,
He outlined the inadequate toilet arrangements and repeated Martin’s comment of some years earlier about the condition of the river and environs.38

Ranger further remarked on streets directly relevant to this study. Palmer Lane where cholera had broken out in 1832 was described as in ‘wretched condition’, some of the buildings were ‘extremely filthy’ with many offensive courts, privies, ash pits and cesspools; in the middle of the lane a sub-drain opened upon the surface. Well Street was very unhealthy with many courts similar to Palmer Lane, while Caldicott’s Yard had experienced ‘typhus of a bad character’. St. John Street abounded with yards right and left, where open privies and ash-pits were to be found, and when fever appeared, it was of the worst kind. In some of the yards at the top of Much Park Street, there had been very aggravated cases of fever. These yards were private property, over which the Council had no control. In New Buildings there were no water closets and the privies were common to a number of houses.39

Heightening concern in 1849 was, coincidental to Ranger’s investigation, an outbreak of cholera. At a public meeting held to adopt measures to treat the cholera outbreak the necessity of ‘enforcing a prompt abatement of nuisances’ was emphasised. Attention was drawn to an open drain in Palmer Lane where its contents flowed for a considerable distance. The speaker mentioned as an example of some of the habitations in that neighbourhood, a family adjacent to his own premises ‘living in a room in the immediate vicinity of a slaughter-house, very dirty, and destitute of water’.40 See Map 2.3. Following quickly on Ranger’s Report, on 30th July 1849, under the auspices of the Public Health Act, the city council was established as the Local

nor are there other means of ventilation. In Phillip’s yard the number of persons average 8 to a house, 7 sleeping in one room, 12 feet by 10 feet, on two beds. At Caldicott’s yard I found a man, wife, and 5 children occupying a room 12 feet by 6 feet. In several other cases as many as 7 persons occupy one small room for sleeping, 12 feet square. He believed ‘The crowding together of the working class is extremely prejudicial to their comforts and morals, subversive of social decency, productive of disease, mortality, destitution, and injury to the health and well-being of the inhabitants generally’. Coventry Herald 29th June 1849

38 He outlined the inadequate toilet arrangements: ‘The better houses generally have privies and covered soil pits but by far the greatest portion have only open soil-pits, and the number of privies vary from 1 to each house to 1 to 17 houses, containing 64 persons; whilst the average in 163 courts, yards, &c., does not amount to more than 1 privy to 6 houses…Aggravated by close proximity of the pits to the dwellings occupied by large families, being in some cases within two feet of the entrance; consequently the inmates are constantly subject to an intolerable stench. In other instances the ground floor is actually appropriated to a nest of four privies and open pits, and the upper rooms in one instance are approached by outside stairs. The houses and courts not being generally with ash-pits, vegetable matter and offal with other filth is either thrown into the privy pits or into the streets’. He regarded the failure of the public scavenger to cleanse courts, alleys and undedicated streets as a serious evil. Public cleansing of streets left much to be desired. He noted the river which was loaded with the refuse of the lower part of the town saturated the soil of areas in its vicinity. These areas had an ‘impure state of atmosphere’ and suffered from ‘aggravated forms of disease’. Coventry Herald 29th June 1849

39 Coventry Herald 29th June 1849

40 Ibid. 14th September 1849
Board of Health. It turned its attention in 1851 to improving drainage and Ranger was asked to return and advise on drainage requirements. He recommended an arterial sewer system to which every street would be connected and the abolition of cess-pools. Work commenced on the recommended sewer system in 1852 which continued during the 1850s. Attention was also given to the suppression of privies and cesspits and the imposition of building regulations. According to Prest the public health issues were being addressed vigorously by the 1850s and the death rate falling to 2.3% indicated this. John Vice Inspector reported to the Board of Health on 7th September 1852 ‘that the streets have been properly swept during the last fortnight and the sweepings removed; the watering has not been done…there not being a sufficient supply of water. I also beg to state that I am unable to make a correct return of lodgers for the last fortnight, some of the lodging house keepers having been summoned and convicted for not conforming to the Bye-laws’.\textsuperscript{41}

A new waterworks was commenced in Spon End in 1845 and completed in 1847. By 1851 Prest could note that of a total of 8,000 houses 3,500 were supplied by mains water and that the health benefits must have been enormous as in the absence of a sewer many of the wells in courts that were close to cesspits must have been contaminated.\textsuperscript{42} Other municipal improvements were the removal of two of the obstructive dams on the Sherbourne in the 1840s which in reducing the risk of flooding around Pool Meadow area, allowed building to occur there.\textsuperscript{43} A new thoughtfully designed, landscaped cemetery was opened beside London Road in 1847. Poole described a more regulated environment that was coming into existence at mid-century. White Street, Bird Street, Baker Street and Norton Street in the vicinity of Swanswell Pool ‘were efficiently sewered and paved, and the gas and water mains laid through them’.\textsuperscript{44}

Some aspects of the difficult conditions of life for families are further considered in Appendix 12. The regular reports from 1874, when Wicklow-born Mark Fenton became Coventry Medical Officer of Health (Appendix 2) revealed the continuation of unsatisfactory living conditions which affected people’s health. For example in 1877 he stated that there was an ‘insufficiency of house accommodation for the working classes of Coventry’. He referred to the ‘cosignant occupation of houses in such a condition as to be totally unfit for human habitation, and the general overcrowding of all houses of this class. He said this impacted on the health of the people and especially the health of

\textsuperscript{41} Coventry Standard 10\textsuperscript{th} September 1852
\textsuperscript{42} Prest, \textit{Industrial Revolution in Coventry}, p. 38
\textsuperscript{43} ‘The City of Coventry: Introduction’, pp. 1-23
\textsuperscript{44} Poole, \textit{History of Coventry}, p. 24
the children. He noted that scarlet fever existed in the city and the existence of slaughterhouses in the ‘most thickly inhabited neighbourhoods’.45

2.2 Industry

Ribbon making

By the end of the 18th century Coventry had become an important centre of ribbon manufacture and was ‘bound to its fortunes and misfortunes’.46 After the ‘big purl’ time there were periods of trade prosperity, with Searby recognising that the years from the mid-1830s to 1860 were more prosperous than the period before 1835, with ‘fewer downswings in the climb’.47 The 1850s were years of steady growth; many steam looms were installed in factories where efficiency allowed wages of operatives to rise, and the use of steam was also applied in cottage factories. Yet it was a dubious prosperity. There was an underlying trend of decline whose significance was not sufficiently appreciated and which culminated in the collapse of the trade in 1860. Over the years it was a trade affected by the whim of fashion, seasonality, periodic depression and an oversupply of weavers. It faced competition from superior productive methods in other cities and from the variety and quality of imported silk weavings. Tariff reductions were introduced in 1826, 1846 and 1860 on competing imported goods and in 1861 it endured a tariff imposition on its exports to the United States. Its skilled weavers could not, or did not keep timely pace with the implications of the arrival of steam power and changing technology on efficiency. Home weavers had so revered traditions of individualism, ossified work practices and arrangements for payment at fixed prices, that such veneration had created an inflexibility and inability to adapt. Within the constraints of relevancy, the entangled but engrossing history of this trade cannot be completely unravelled or fully outlined; thus only the most salient points are sketched.

A typical first-hand journeyman worked at home in Hillfields, on perhaps two or more looms which he owned, aided by his wife and family and often assisted by an

45 Coventry Standard 2nd February 1877; Coventry Times 31st January 1877.
46 The City of Coventry: Social history from 1700’, pp. 222-241
47 Peter Searby, Chartists and Freemen in Coventry, 1838-1860, Social History, Vol. 2, No. 6 (Oct., 1977) p. 763
apprentice. The weaver collected his supply of yarn each week from his ‘manufacturer’ or ‘undertaker’ and returned the woven ribbons on his next visit. He worked at his own pace; perhaps taking Mondays off to do some gardening, and in a crescendo of work over the rest of the week, to make up for time lost earlier in the week, completed the ribbon weaving task. The freedom of such weavers to work to their own schedule appealed greatly to them and they feared being confined in a factory. This superior class owned or were prepared to pay a good rent for their houses, lived in comfort and had kitchen ranges. When trade was good they could afford meat but even in normal times could afford a sufficiency of food. These working men had ‘bourgeois virtues’ and as freemen had a ‘stake in society’. The independent spirit of Coventry emanated from this group. In 1838 there were 1,828 of these first-hand journeymen of whom 214 were women. They worked 3,967 looms of which just under 80% were worked with the assistance of their families (Table 2.1). With their families they accounted for a total of 6,796 persons. In the mid-1830s a first-hand journeyman earned 21s. per week working with family members on two looms.

Another group that lived in smaller two roomed centre city houses, the second-hand journeymen, also called the journeymen’s journeymen, who worked for the first-hand journeymen or in the factories, were not as well-off. It was a younger transitional group and with young families was exposed to any fluctuation in trade. According to Prest they had a ‘slightly’ lower standard of living because they earned less. A varying account in the Victoria County History stated this group lived ‘in a most demoralising state between the loom-shop and the workhouse’. The seasonality of the silk production cycle which was slack in winter and busy in spring meant these journeymen could find themselves without work in the winter months and reliant on poor relief, charity, and borrowed money for two or more months each year. There were 878 men and 347 women totalling 1,225 in this group of whom 852 worked for first-hand journeymen and 373 in factories. With their families they accounted for about 2,480 persons.

Beneath them although the precise number is unknown it is believed were several hundred factory hands that also lived in the small houses in the congested city centre. At the bottom, female ancillary workers earned as little as 5s. All payments must be seen

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48 Coventry: Past into Present. p. 32
49 Prest, Industrial Revolution in Coventry, p. 38
50 Ibid., p. 67
51 Ibid., p. 66; Searby, Chartists and Freemen, p. 763
52 ‘The City of Coventry: Social history from 1700’, pp. 222-241
53 Prest, Industrial Revolution in Coventry, p. 75
54 ‘The City of Coventry: Social history from 1700’, pp. 222-241
55 Searby, Chartists and Freemen, p. 763; Prest, Industrial Revolution in Coventry, p. 75
against rising prices, uncertain continuity of work arising from strikes, seasonal and less predictable trade depressions. It is not an easy task to delineate the economic or social position of those engaged in the silk trade. On the economic and social continuum the ribbon manufacturers and ribbon masters and indeed first hand journeymen can be positioned to one end of the continuum. There was a broad central mass whose individuals are less easily placed because firstly their occupational titles and circumstances are described or understood differently in various accounts. Some were economically stagnant, others quietly sliding towards the misery of poverty, and still others through the frugality of ‘Malthusian’ behaviour, by not marrying or having few children, might accumulate enough to purchase a loom in order to upgrade their status. Some without traditional skills and not of a high social standing may have, as operatives in the expanding factory system of the 1840s and 1850s, come to enjoy rising wages, perhaps quickly frittered away, that were not available in pre-steam motive days. Cutting across this were the seasonal and periodic depressions which caused reductions in weekly income or unemployment that led to uncertainty of economic status. It was a feature of the industry that when demand lessened, work was held back for the factory and less work was put out to outworkers.

From the early 1830s in order to increase efficiency and reduce costs there was movement towards a factory based system. In 1838 there were twenty seven loom-shops or factories but it was not then a factory town. Prest remarked that Coventry ‘epitomized the old order’ and ‘had fallen behind the times and the organization of the silk ribbon weaving, remained more characteristic of the eighteenth than of the

56 ‘The City of Coventry: Social history from 1700’, pp. 222-241
57 The ‘old’ manufacturers up to 1830 had been paternalistic and generous and these qualities seemed to have elevated the spirit of Coventrians. However ‘new’ manufacturers, not having capital reserves, were tougher in their approach and less concerned about paying a living wage. Thus wages were reduced, women permitted to work on the engine loom and half-pay apprenticeships arranged. At its simplest the ‘old’ manufacturers were facilitated by ‘undertakers’, many of whom later became the ‘new’ manufacturers. The move from a benign spirit of fraternalism to a commercial based method of operation offered greater supervision and control. This reduced disagreements over the amount and quality of silk given out to home weavers. Working evenly throughout the week and not in a rushed tired fashion as the weekend approached, could produce cloth less likely to be flawed. However this led to attempts by weavers to play off the ‘old’ against the ‘new’ while undercutting the ‘list of prices’ was to engender bitterness and distrust.
58 Prest, *Industrial Revolution in Coventry*, pp. 45-47. Figured ribbon Jacquard machines were common in Coventry but steam power was more suited initially to turning machines that produced plain ribbons and was introduced without demur in the black plain-ribbon production in Derby, Congleton and Leek. However when Joseph Beck attempted to open a factory with looms worked by steam power in Coventry and employing young women to manage his looms, weavers who feared that these new methods would lessen the demand for labour, in Luddite manner burned down his factory in November 1831. This oppositional behaviour unfortunately stalled the introduction of steam mechanisation for six years allowing competitors in other towns to gain edge, and only changed after the rivals in the north introduced fancy ribbons.
nineteenth century’. There was among the domestic weavers a ‘complaisant belief in the rightness of their methods’ fostered through years of protection until 1826. They clung to a list of prices believing it essential if they were not to destroy each other in a race to the bottom. Edward Goode a weavers’ leader, said in 1832 that ‘the pauperising effects of steam power, as applied to manufactures…may be seen at Manchester and other places’.

From the 1830s, tolerance for the list system lessened and there was less cordiality shown during trade disputes. There was a division in interest to emerge among the weavers, though all the while represented by the one weavers association. There was the first-hand journeymen living in Hillfields, who as time went on came to work less advanced looms but who were accustomed to a higher standard of living and for whom the maintenance of the list system was imperative. There was in the centre of the city the journeymen’s journeymen who did not own a loom and might work for first-hands or in a factory. Beneath them also in the centre were the factory operatives who depended on a weekly wage that improved with factory efficiency, and so were less reliant on the list system.

In 1838 two manufactures used steam to power 53 looms but this increased through the 1840s and 1850s. In 1846 tariffs were removed nationally on textiles but retained at 15.0% on silk which ensured a relative prosperity for Coventry as a practically monopolistic producer of ribbon. By 1857 over 2,000 looms were powered in factories that employed 5,000 workers. Details of the six principal firms are shown in Table 2.2.

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59 Ibid., pp. ix-x
60 ‘The City of Coventry: Crafts and industries’, pp. 162-189
61 Searby, Chartists and Freemen, p. 763
62 Searby, Weavers and freemen, p. 117. They also tried to have payment according to the lists, rather than weekly wages, introduced to the factory system. They disliked factory competition which jeopardised their way of life, standard of living, and which lessened the distinction between artisan and labourer. They regarded factory life as coarse and conducive to immoral behaviour. Factory operation they believed, ruined family life because in taking women away from the home children would be neglected. They disliked the prospect that their freedom to plan their time and pace was to be replaced by the discipline of the factory clock and by the continual attention needed to oversee powered factory machines. After serving a seven year weaving apprenticeship to qualify as skilled and then becoming a freeman of the city, it must have been to the dismay and anger of many weavers that their effort to become self reliant and independent was being demeaned and made irrelevant by the advent of the factory system. Weavers detested the indoor apprentice system which had served to restrict an oversupply of weavers being replaced by half pay outdoor apprentice factory based schemes. (Peter Searby, Paternalism, Disturbance and Parliamentary Reform: Society and Politics in Coventry, 1819–32, International Review of Social History, Vol. 22, Issue 2, (August 1977) pp. 215-216).
63 ‘The City of Coventry: Social history from 1700’, pp. 222-241
64 Prest, Industrial Revolution in Coventry, p. 75
65 Ibid., pp. 49, 93
66 Searby, Chartists and Freemen, pp. 762-763
National demand for ribbons grew and the 1850s appeared to be a time of prosperity and advance; many steam looms were installed - some in topshops, but many in factories (Table 2.3). The unceasing struggle between employers and weavers had continued over the years until the ultimate confrontation ended in disaster in 1860. Serious disputes had occurred in 1840, 1842-3, 1848, 1854, 1856 and 1858. Underlying, and prior to each dispute there was usually a periodic slump. When this occurred, the piecework rates of 1835, that remained standard in the trade, were abandoned. Depressions had occurred in spring 1837, from late autumn 1840 to spring 1843, throughout much of 1847 and in the early months of 1848, in autumn 1854 and in the beginning of 1855, in the second half of 1857 and in the spring of 1858, and in the disastrous spring of 1860. As years went by, the disputes became more of a labour and capital issue; a weavers versus employers confrontation.

A response to the factory system that enabled the weavers to take advantage of steam power but maintain their independence was provided by the cottage factory system. However even using larger more advanced a-la-bar looms they could not compete with the productivity of the large factories. In 1858 the weavers pressed for the reintroduction of the list of prices to those factories paying weekly wages. The six large manufacturers led by James Hart were targeted with the intention of withdrawing labour from one factory at a time. The manufacturers responded by stating that if there was a strike at one factory there would be a lock out at all of them. All six

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67 Searby, Weavers and freemen, pp. 217-221. By 1860 most ribbons were made in factories and the less efficient outdoor system was under greater attack. Wages in factories improved particularly in the 1850s with wages between 12s. and 14s. offered in 1855. Meanwhile outdoor weavers were paid according to the list of prices drawn up in 1835 a situation that intensified the hostility of the domestic weavers. Taking the cost of living into account the spending power of a weaver in one of the most productive factories was double that of a journeyman weaver of 1835. The domestic weavers could not increase their earning capacity until the 1850s, when if they switched to the more advanced a-la-bar loom their real income (operating two a-la-bars) trebled relative to 1835. If they remained attached to the engine loom (and worked two) relative to 1835 they would be worse off in 1839 and 1840, considerably better off in 1851 and slightly worse off in 1860. There was a three to one ratio in favour of the a-la-bar loom by 1860, with an incomplete census showing 3,412 a-la-bar looms and 1,052 engine looms in operation by domestic weavers.

68 Searby, Chartists and Freemen, p. 763; Searby, Weavers and freemen, p. 213.

69 Prest, Industrial Revolution in Coventry, pp. 88-92

70 This could be seen in Hillfields where existing rows of houses were converted and new ones built in squares that could accommodate steam motivation. In a typical terrace of weavers’ houses the third or top floor of each house was the workshop with enough space for up to three looms. In such a row a single shaft was installed that ran through all of the workshops and was turned by a steam engine at the end of the row. One engine could power 100 looms and approximately 40 tenants. This arrangement became popular in 1847 and was a serious alternative to the factory system. In 1859 Coventry had fifteen large factories with 1,250 powered looms and 300 cottage factories with between two and six looms each. A total of 383 cottage factories were recorded in 1860. Two large designed cottage factory schemes were begun: by the benevolent Quakers, the Cash brothers, at Kingfield beside the canal where 49 of the planned 100 houses (there was an ultimate vision of 300) were constructed in 1857, and Eli Green’s 67 house triangular arrangement in Vernon Street, Brook Street and Berry Street was built in 1858-9. (Ibid., pp. 94-106).
manufacturers stood firm and the dispute began in September 1858. The pressure on the factory owners through strikes and a degree of intimidation, was so intense that after eight weeks five of the six large factory owners capitulated. Prest observed that ‘the outdoor weavers and the factory weavers had shown an astonishing unity...What had happened is, perhaps without parallel in nineteenth century England...the outdoor weavers had for the time being humbled the factory system itself’. As a result large factories were no longer built after 1857 and those that were built were in the style of the cottage factory. While the strike of 1860 is often blamed for ensuring the ruination of the Coventry silk trade it was the strike of 1858 which created bitterness and anger that resurfaced in the responses of those involved in the 1860 strike and lock-out.

In 1860 the Cobden Treaty eliminated tariffs on the importation of silk goods. The market was inundated with continental ribbon which was superior in design to that of Coventry. In disputes over the years between themselves, the weavers and manufacturers, shielded behind the tariff wall, had been distracted from the real enemy. The treaty was announced in February 1860 and by April there were thousands of weavers unemployed. In July a group of 44 employers withdrew from the list. They refused a request from the weavers to accept the list but with agreed lower prices, which resulted in the weavers calling a general strike. There was bitterness on both sides but especially among the manufacturers where it had become pent up from the previous dispute. Due to the intimidation of workers the town was no longer sympathetic; the police were more obvious on the street, the magistrates warned against violence and shopkeepers were accused of refusing credit. The factory weavers were being advised not to continue supporting the domestic weavers. Since all weavers were on strike there was little in the strike fund, which had already been exhausted by the 1858 strike, and the situation became desperate. Some weavers taking the best terms on offer were already returning to work, such that early in 1861 the strikers gave in without obtaining any return to the list. Wages were cut in half and for many there was no work to return to. The distress and misery over the winter had been great; there was destitution and

71 Ibid., pp. 112-118
72 Gutteridge who was out of work for over a year because of the strike pointed out that it was not simply the Cobden treaty with France that ruined the industry. The Morrill Tariff at 40 to 60 percent on imports to the United States affected the sale of silk goods from 1861. A silkworm disease in France reduced supply by four fifths thereby steeply increasing the price of the raw material. Silk goods were thus no longer affordable for many and the fashion turned to feathers. (Chancellor, Master and Artisan, p. 178).
73 The Freeman’s Journal on 11th April 1860 reported: ‘Great distress exists among the riband workers of Coventry, owing to the stagnation of trade, which has thrown thousands out of employment and the rest upon half time, and which is attributed to the uncertainty that has prevailed ever since the announcement of the French treaty.’
dependence on relief. A fund to alleviate the suffering raised £40,000. The strike had also proved ruinous to the manufacturers with stock having to be auctioned; of the more than eighty that existed at the beginning of the strike only twenty remained by 1865. In March 1860, 383 cottage factories were occupied but a year later only 198 were tenanted. Eighty three were occupied by new tenants, 25 were vacant and 9 were idle. Conditions worsened and by the mid-sixties two-thirds of the weavers were women and children, who found work for half the year on wages reduced by up to 40.0%. Most retrograde, in order to save on steam young boys – 300 in 1866 – were used to manually power looms again. By 1884 the number of power looms had fallen to a third of those in operation in 1860. The stagnation continued for years and ribbon weaving never again regained its position as Coventry’s foremost industry; this role by 1886 was undertaken by the cycle industry.

Between the census of 1861 and that of 1871 there was a decline of 1,534 persons in Coventry; this figure may not truly capture the extent of an early 1860s exodus as the population may have been rising again toward 1871. Prest wondered did many of the workers leave for nearby Birmingham, or Leicester, or Lancashire; the latter advertised locally for workers. He noted that it was popularly understood in Coventry that many had gone overseas. In the decade following the Cobden Treaty in 1860 imports of French ribbons free of 15.0% duty trebled to £3 million, while in depressed Coventry production fell from £2.5 million to £1 million. The city had not taken account of standardized production that permitted lower pricing and styles suited to the general market. A writer in the Times 16th September 1867 criticised the blindness of enterprise for so long failing to recognise the danger that surrounded it from competition. He was reproachful about the fact that while this was occurring imports flooded the country.

‘Well you carried out your principles of big watches and heavy ribbons out-working and slow production and I have seen your skilful and intelligent artisans walking the streets in forced idleness and wan poverty. I have seen your workshops empty, and your property depreciated in value, your capital wasting and your trade decay.’

74 In September 1859 there were 310 persons availing of outdoor relief. This rose to 837 in September 1860, to 1,228 in March 1861 and to 2,540 in September 1861. The relief offered was mean spirited with the poor law board insisting on the able-bodied picking oakum in order to obtain the relief. Searby refers to Abijah Hill Pears, a paternalist ribbon manufacturer, who declared ‘that many of the weavers reduced to penury held respectable positions among their fellow men, and had been in the habit of having many social comforts around them. They were now in necessity and very great distress, having parted with almost all their domestic furniture and clothing; but they cannot and will not bring their minds to have the appearance of public beggars.’ (Peter Searby, The Relief of the Poor in Coventry, 1830-1863, The Historical Journal, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Jun., 1977) p. 356).
75 The Coventry Standard 22nd April 1865 stated that Mr Baker, the Government Inspector of Factories noted the depressed state of the Coventry ribbon trade in his report for 1864-5; ‘The City of Coventry: Crafts and industries’, pp. 162-189
76 Prest, Industrial Revolution in Coventry, pp. 119-133
The *Victoria County History* saw an uplifted spirit in the town as the 1860s progressed. A cotton mill was opened in 1867 supported by Lord Leigh. Some companies in order to survive diversified into elastic webbing and specialised forms of ribbon making i.e. Stevengraphs.77 Watchmaking regarded as superior to the declining weaving trade, and bicycle production which begot an end-of-century golden age in Coventry are outlined in Appendix 13.

### 2.3 Disposition of Coventry

An air of calm deference was to be found in Coventry; there was little recourse to violence in disputes over conditions of work. Searby remarked that in Coventry ‘middle-class aspirations were readily accepted’ by artisans.78 The voting rights of the freemen meant that workers/weavers believed they were not outside the decision making process. To become a freeman of the city a person had to have served an apprenticeship, to one and the same trade for seven years, and thereafter make an application to the town clerk.79 Searby observed ‘Many weavers were freemen. Their common good fortune helped to create complaisance and a pervasive moderation of conduct’.80 He further explained that:

‘Weaving and the freedom sustained deference, in different ways, but both were correlatives of paternalism. The weavers’ experience created bonds of unity and sympathy. Freemen’s privileges divided groups within the working class from each other and gave to freemen a respect for hierarchy and the settled pattern of society’.81

The activities of many weavers were mundane and self-interested. They were occupied making their living in good times, surviving in bad and having a continued resilience during agitation, maintaining the list of prices, adjusting from engine, to a-la-bar or Jacquard looms and to the factory system.

\[87\] "The City of Coventry: Crafts and industries", pp. 162-189; Stevengraphs were woven silk pictures and bookmarks.

\[77\] Searby, Chartists and Freemen, p. 776

\[79\] A freeman of the city could not only vote in parliamentary elections but also had the right to pasture two cows and a horse, or two horses and a cow throughout the year on the common lands and from Old Lamas (1st August) or Old Michaelmas (29th September) to Old Candlemas (2nd February) on the Lamas and Michaelmas lands. As the proprietors of these lands did not have absolute control over them due to this pasturing they could not be sold. A ritual clearing away of any fences or buildings that could be deemed to be preventing access to the freemen was held each year by the chamberlain and freemen restating their rights. Disputes over the future of these lands continued throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, and the problems their non-availability for housing caused, in constraining the population of the city into cramped streets and courts, was well noted in reports on public health. Because of the strength of freemans’ votes the two local members of parliament would not risk facilitating any legislation to permit enclosure.79

\[80\] Searby, Weavers and freemen, p. v

\[81\] Searby, Chartists and Freemen, p. 776
There was a benign approach to those in poverty. Coventry’s relief of the poor, according to Searby, could be described as paternalist till the late 1820s, to the extent that outdoor relief supplemented wages. From the 1830s cut-backs were necessary as the high rates imposed were not sufficient to cover the expensive relief. While this caused hardship the city still had a kindly disposition after the passage of the Poor Law Act in 1834, even in the face of pressure from the Poor Law Commissioners to administer relief with greater stringency. After 1844 under the full force of the commissioners’ instructions the operation of poor relief was mainly through the workhouse and led to an austere regime. There was a realization in Coventry, not shared by the commissioners, that due to depressions many decent weavers could fall on very hard times. Out-relief and charity maintained some dignity; it was not believed locally that it served best interest by weavers having to be demeaned and their spirit of independence broken by being forced to submit to picking coconut fibre or oakum, or enter the workhouse in order to obtain assistance. The particular nature of the weavers’ trade meant that forcing unemployed weavers into the workhouse would result in the selling of their looms and the risk of their becoming permanent paupers. Deference was also inculcated by the paternalistic presence of well-endowed charities in Coventry which according to Searby were ‘agencies that created deference’. The strength of their disbursal power is shown when the £1,700 annually dispensed in Coventry is compared to the £150 doled out in Leicester in the 1820s. The weavers of Coventry were restrained and made deferential by the paternalism of manufacturers in Coventry. Paternalism in upholding the list of prices suited manufacturers in Coventry as it avoided damaging competition. It was also paternalism without self-advantaging ulterior motives, in that the payment of a living wage was good for all including the shopkeepers who depended on a healthy economy. The local citizenry responded to public appeals for finance to help weavers in years of stress. This paternalism caused the weavers to moderate their behaviour. The weavers realised that public collections in time of slump would be less generously supported by the middle class if criticism for the miserable circumstances was class based. The magistrates and respected

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82 Searby, Relief of the Poor, pp. 346
84 Searby, Relief of the Poor, pp. 349-356
85 Searby, Chartists and Freemen, p. 776
Coventrians had warned the weavers’ leaders that continued support depended on restraint and an absence of conflict. Articulation beyond placard waving, processions or public meetings would not have evoked sympathy. The individualism, the aspirations, the self-concern of the domestic weavers and their freemen’s character ensured social discipline and staidness except where their own interests animated them. Weavers were ‘working men from necessity and not from choice and their individualism was not conducive to the growth of such political and social action as was found in the factory centres of the north’. 

Following the Chartist years the atmosphere of deference and paternalism was not as pervasive. In the 1850s the presence of a strong outwork industry operated by men in comfortable circumstances, underpinned by the list system, being astonishingly assisted by factory workers, meant that a simple class based antagonism towards manufacturers appears absent. A working class consciousness had not clearly emerged in the ribbon trade during the period under review in Coventry. However over the years with more manufacturers becoming magistrates some of the weavers began to see differences between the manufacturers and themselves in terms of class struggle. These differences became more pointed where there was physical intimidation of workers who continued to work during a strike (Appendix 16).

The city manufacturers did not call on ‘outside’ labour during strikes; behaviour which might have annoyed Coventry workers. Allowing for the burning of Beck’s factory as an aberration, it is still to be recognised that over the years despite the overarching harmony and restraint, there was low level degradation and violence in the fabric of the city. The appearance of calm and an absence of overt violence could have been maintained by the threat of violence and low level intimidation (Appendix 16). There were parliamentary election campaigns and rallies and the recurring spectacle of the Godiva processions that could arouse collective passion, though equally it might be

86 Ibid., p. 764
87 The City of Coventry: Social history from 1700’, pp. 222-241
88 Astonished in the sense that although well paid in years of expansion factory hands would strike against their own interest, to support the greater weavers’ cause.
89 On 7th November 1831 Josiah Beck’s silk mill with its powered looms was burned down in a Luddite manner during a riot by Coventry weavers The destruction of Beck’s factory contradicts the self-restrained image of the city, that while capable of being exorcised about issues, its response always stopped short of violence. However the behaviour at Beck’s factory is generally explained as the exception, a one-off occurrence and the result of a spontaneous combustion of feeling. Beck did not suffer any permanent injuries and within twenty years the matter was largely unremembered locally. It was seen as a mobbish action which the weavers’ leaders condemned and which prompted those leaders at the time of the fire to enrol as special constables. It would appear to have served as a warning as to what could happen if matters were allowed to get out of hand, and brought about a determination that in order for violence to be avoided at all costs settlements should be reached. Searby actually saw a remarkable ‘discipline and moderation’ in the mob’s behaviour illustrating to him ‘qualities profoundly instinctive and habitual’ in the city. (Searby, Paternalism p. 222).
said such parading and rallying provided occasions in the city where any build-up of populist steam could be vented.\textsuperscript{90}

The city seemed to have entered a stagnant era marked by demographic decline following the shock of 1860-61. Those who left may have been the motivated while many of those who remained may have felt distressed and lacking a spirit of confrontation. Beaven and Griffith wrote of the period of Coventry regeneration and inward strong migration resulting from the growth of the cycle industry coupled with the emerging motor cycle and car industry from the beginning of the next century. They noted it required workers that were semi-skilled and young and by the end of the century the city had become a magnet for such from the midlands and southeast. There were two responses to the altering of the social composition of the city. Dominated by the presence of employers from the traditional industries and retailers, and not by industrial capitalists as in Birmingham, the council spent little on municipal renewal. The boom had created fresh housing slums to emerge but there was little sustained municipal housing action between 1870 and 1914. Secondly there was a general perception that Coventry was in civic decline. The prosperity had caused crime to increase as wrongdoers had come to the city looking for cycle work. The authors noted that it was stated in the \textit{Herald} in 1891 that Coventry was becoming rougher with blame attributed to rowdy young cycle workers.\textsuperscript{91} They quoted the \textit{Graphic} in 1914 where it observed that:

\begin{quote}
‘the city has not absorbed its new people into its old history, traditions, and ways. There are two peoples, the one a settled and fast dwindling race, natives and those of long residence, whose outlook embraces the old and the new period; the other the newcomers, who contribute little’\textsuperscript{.92}
\end{quote}

Since they were from elsewhere they were seen as having no civic spirit or local patriotism; engaged in semi-skilled monotonous production, their focus went little beyond squandering in an unruly manner the good wages they could earn on overtime during busy periods.\textsuperscript{93} Yates in 1950 writing about the turn of the century stated:

\begin{quote}
‘Coventry was not a bad place for the ordinary man, at least the hundreds who came to it, from elsewhere thought so…The public houses were open all hours of the day and night, so were the shops, and a sixty-hour working week was common in the factories. There was more drunkenness…. But the biggest worries of the ordinary man and woman in the street were the fear of unemployment (involving
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{90} McGrory, \textit{Coventry}, pp. 229, 230
\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Coventry Herald} 14\textsuperscript{th} August 1891
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Coventry Graphic} 24\textsuperscript{th} July 1914
\textsuperscript{93} Beaven & Griffiths, \textit{Urban Elites}, pp. 1-18
the workhouse) and...the desperate overcrowding’. He saw too in this time a sheer grinding poverty that ‘existed in “prosperous” Coventry’.\textsuperscript{94}

In such a milieu after 1870 the Irish arrivers of mid-century may have seemed a less noticeable concern, who in a turnabout were now regarded as persons of ‘long residence’ rather than boisterous newcomers.

\textsuperscript{94} John A. Yates, \textit{Pioneers to Power}, (Coventry 1950) pp. 19, 44
Chapter 3

Circumstances of the Irish in Coventry to 1875

The previous chapter established the features of a compressed municipality, with its occasional periods of prosperity, accompanied by stretches of deep economic relapse. It is the intention of this chapter to consider the migrants in relation to this locale and their involvement in the weaving trade recently outlined. Consideration is given to influences that brought migrants to settle in the city. The conditions they experienced and the reputation they created are then explored. The approach here is to attempt to find a number of illustrative vicinities where the Irish were present but not necessarily where they resided in highly significant numbers. Good fortune offers a selection of written and visual source materials that together provide enhanced portrayals of a number of streets, lanes or courtyards that also constituted residential vicinities for Irish migrants. Edward Greenhow’s Report to the Privy Council published in 1860, undertaken at a perfect time to inform this study, suggests a number of meaningful Coventry loci where the source materials as mentioned can be collectively employed to advantage. ¹ This chapter proposes to raise awareness that within its reference time, two relatively different inflows in origin and character occurred. A pre-Famine contingent that engaged with the city through participating in its silk trade was followed by a post-Famine coterie, a section of which in the initial settlement years displayed anti-social and criminal behaviour.

3.1. Influences on the selection of Coventry by Irish migrants

Central location

Ravenstein was convinced that long distance migration to London was achieved by using a gradual town to town migration process.² Coventry was on the direct route from Liverpool or Birmingham to London, and the town being a day’s walk from Birmingham, may well have served as a resting town for a period for those whose ultimate destination was the capital. The significance of Coventry’s stop-over location is shown in relation to the workhouse which had to alleviate a large number of transient vagrants as was explained in 1837: ‘we were troubled to an immense extent, Coventry being upon the Liverpool road, with mendicants and vagrants of this description’.³ The Coventry Herald 21st May 1847 recorded: ‘Irish Vagrants - We understand it is the

¹ Suitable contemporary visual materials are scare for Coventry and when a judiciously selected, later-dated image is used as evidence, more anachronistic paraphernalia in the image must be ignored to appreciate the underlying actuality tendered.
³ Fourth Report from Select Committee on the Poor Law Amendment Act, with the minutes of evidence. PP. 1837-38 XVIII Pt.I. (145) pp. 22-23
intention of the Directors of the Poor in our City, at the suggestion of Dr Arrowsmith, to provide temporary or separate lodgings for the Irish vagrants passing through the town, in order to prevent contagion in the Workhouse’. The 1841 census suggests Coventry’s resting role, where four households on Much Park Street, a thoroughfare that exited to London Road, routinely took Irish lodgers.

Liverpool was the usual port of entry for migrants from Dublin and western Ireland that were found later in Coventry. The city was equidistant from South Wales which was the entry area for many journeying from southern parts of Ireland. Steam packets travelled from Dublin to Liverpool from 1819 and their offer of cheap passage facilitated migration.

With the exception of silk trade migrants, and those in a Coventry chain, the town was not a priority destination. Awareness of it came to those who were minded towards London or Birmingham. The former as capital city had drawn Irish migrants for centuries; a process strengthened according to Lees by easier sea access in the early nineteenth century. Birmingham’s spectacular growth since the second half of the eighteenth century drew traffic into the Midlands. In 1834 Rev. Edward Peach, a Catholic priest in the city stated that on his arrival as a priest in 1807 he was in charge of no more than one hundred Irish but from 1820 there had been a considerable increase.

‘About 1826 a vast increase took place, so that my chapel would not hold my congregation by many hundreds. There has not been such an influx since…The Irish Roman Catholics now under my charge amount to at least 5,000 or 6,000… many have come from Galway, Roscommon, Tipperary, Dublin, Drogheda.’

Coventry in the heart of England was accessible. It was on the Lancashire to London axis via Stone, Lichfield, and Coleshill, (or via Stafford and Birmingham) and also on the main coach route from Holyhead to London via Chester, from the sixteenth century at least. The Holyhead to London mail coach via Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton was altered to run via Coventry instead of Oxford in August 1817 and continued thus until May 1838. On 7th August 1817 a notice in the *Dublin Evening Post* advertised the new return mail coach service running from the Swan with Two Necks, Lad Lane, London to the Eagle and Child Inn, Holyhead with the Inside fare £5.5s.0d and the Outside fare £2.12s.6d. and having a carrying capacity of four and three respectively.

4 Jackson, *Irish in Britain*, pp. 6-7
5 Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, p. 45
7 Harper, *Holyhead Road*, p. 15. The route via Lichfield, Tamworth, Hinkley, Lutterworth, Northampton to Hockliffe which by-passed Coventry was also followed.
8 George Ayres, *History of the Mail Routes to Ireland until 1850*, (Lulu.com 2011) p. 42
In 1836 Coventry could be reached in twenty seven hours from Holyhead and in nine hours from London by coach. Ostlers, farriers, fodder providers, innkeepers, cooks, waiters and chamber-maids, would have encountered Irish people en-route through the town. This may have helped to bring understanding and acceptance of an Irish presence in the town since the Irish, travelling at some expense by coach would have represented to the town an aspect of Irish people that was prosperous, educated and relaxed in English society. Coventry was a nodal point in a local network of roads that linked towns such as Leicester via Warwick to Worcester, or to Oxford via Banbury. Coaches ran to Birmingham, Lichfield, Leamington, Cheltenham and Stratford-on-Avon. If Irish migrants could not afford coach travel, the routes over which coaches trundled provided pathways towards Coventry. On a journey from Liverpool to Coventry towns, such as Warrington, Congleton, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stoke, Stafford and Wolverhampton were close by or on the route to Warwickshire and could have acted as halting areas.

The advent of long distance rail travel in the later 1830s allowed greater ease of movement for migrants. In Ireland it must have facilitated not only the seasonal harvesters but the emigration of, until then left-at-home wives and families, who would have found a long trek arduous. In Britain railways opened up the Midlands, as travel was possible between Liverpool and Birmingham from July 1837 on the opening of the Grand Junction Railway. From Curzon Street station in Birmingham it was possible to get a train to Coventry from 9th April 1838 when the London and Birmingham Railway was opened. The North Railway facilitated movement by offering very cheap fares to those travelling in cattle trucks. The north Wales railway line, offering the most direct and swift route to Coventry opened in 1850. Though railway travel offered a speedy direct path to Coventry, not all arrived in an expeditious manner. The journey to reach Coventry could wend over several years, as was illustrated by the movement of Charles and Margaret Connor and the birthplaces of their children detailed in Table 3.1.

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9 Harper, Holyhead Road, p. 292
10 J.A. Banks, The Contagion of Numbers, in Dyos H. J. & Wolff Michael (eds.), The Victorian City: Images and Realities, (London 1973) p. 117. Wolverhampton was referred to as Little Rome because of its association with Catholic recusancy. Until 1850 it was the seat of the Vicar Apostolic of the Midland District.
11 It remains somewhat elusive in literature as to what method lowly migrants, especially with young families, employed to travel these long distances in the pre-railway era, unless it is felt that walking was so obviously what occurred that it does not need specific mention.
12 Reports on Vagrancy, p. 16
13 In 1853 the fare between Kingstown via Holyhead to a number of English cities was published. The fare increased according to the distance travelled and may have influenced choice of destination. A second class ticket to Liverpool was 15s., Manchester 17s.6d., Leeds and Sheffield 23s.6., Derby 25s., Birmingham 30s., and Coventry 32s. (Dublin Weekly Nation 5th February 1853).
Seasonal workers
O Grada suggested that in the mid-1830s between 35,000 and 40,000 were engaged in seasonal work in England and Scotland and by 1841 it was closer to 60,000. By the mid-sixties he considered a figure of 100,000 was not an exaggerated one. From the late 1860s numbers declined due to farm mechanisation. The coming of the Midland railway in Ireland had assisted movement through its promotion of special fares for harvesters and reduced what O Grada referred to as the ‘economic distance’ between the west of Ireland and Britain.\(^{14}\)

In July 1824 the *Herald* was conscious that ‘the great influx of Irish peasantry into this country, which is much on the increase, is an evil to our own labouring and agricultural classes which requires remedy’. While stating that it had no ‘unkindly feelings towards the natives of the Sister island - far from it - we would not banish them from our soil’ the underlying concern was clear that Irish labourers were taking scarce jobs which they saw as more particularly belonging to English labourers.\(^{15}\) In February 1848 Aneurin Owen reported the master of Coventry workhouse as stating: ‘Last year was the first year that the Irish harvest men brought over their wives and families, they used to come alone. While the husbands were last year in regular employment at the farmers ten miles away, earning 12s. per week, their wives and families would remain in the city begging’.\(^{16}\)

Peter Burke (Table 3.2; Chapter 3.5) in his family census entry for 1851, illustrated the movement of a family between Coventry and Mayo. It would appear they were married in 1838 in Coventry where John was born, then returned to Ireland for some years where Dominic was born before returning to Coventry between 1843 and 1849. The Irish were known to travel about seasonally in agricultural labouring gangs staying on farms in e.g. Cheshire, Shropshire and Derbyshire. However other labourers were city based and were prepared to travel six miles daily beyond the urban area so that their children could keep work in the towns. Chinn noted a large number of agricultural labourers in Birmingham at mid-century. In a compact town like Coventry, the countryside was in close proximity and thus agricultural labourers had even quicker access to the countryside. Migrants might change from the initial town of settlement once they had become more aware of what surrounding towns had to offer. There was a contingent of Irish, mainly agricultural labourers, in Stourbridge in 1851 clustered in Hughes Entry and George Walk. They appear to have come lately with their families from Ireland; the recentness of arrival indicated by births of their Stourbridge

\(^{14}\) Cormac O Grada, Seasonal Migration and Post-Famine Adjustment in the West of Ireland, *Studia Hibernica*, No 13 (1973) pp. 51, 52, 54
\(^{15}\) *Coventry Herald* 16\(^{th}\) July 1824
\(^{16}\) Reports on Vagrancy, p. 18
born which occurred usually within the previous year or two.\textsuperscript{17} Table 3.3 shows how a young Martin Malone came from Mayo with his parents and family in the mid-1840s to Stourbridge. He would come to reside in Coventry in 1881 attracted by the prospect of building work. In 1868 Thomas Harris a farmer of 400 acres in Kenilworth, 8 miles from Coventry, stated that the men who provide extra help at hay and harvest time come from ‘Coventry, Ireland, Buckingham and Berkshire’\textsuperscript{18} However from around this time it was being remarked that the number of harvesters coming from Ireland was diminishing considerably. This fall away continued for the rest of the century and was due in part to the mechanisation of farmwork.\textsuperscript{19}

That a lesser number of temporary migrants was appearing, was not due to fewer migrants leaving Ireland. Many were still leaving but now taking an arduous, permanent option beyond Britain. In June 1893 a commissioner of the \textit{Freeman’s Journal} wrote ‘At Castlebar I was witness to the usual painful scene of emigrants parting from their friends…Even in the present month they are departing in shoals’.\textsuperscript{20}

The distinction between seasonal harvesters and vagrants was often not immediately apparent, a situation induced by the harvesters themselves who might present as paupers in order to be passed home as vagrants following the harvest.\textsuperscript{21} Irish vagrants had been identified in Britain for centuries. In their historical establishment of suitable walking tracts, knowledge of cheap lodging houses and assessment of local benevolence, they offered, as precursors to the newer poor migrants, a useful means and guide to survival. From early in the nineteenth century the number of Irish vagrants was increasing; O’Leary mentions that following the 1815 post-war depression that vagrants travelled along two main routes from the ports of Holyhead and Liverpool and also from south Wales and Bristol to converge on London.\textsuperscript{22} Redford stated that from the 1820s there was a noticeable increase making their way towards Birmingham and the other

\textsuperscript{17} HO107/2035.65.26 – 36 ED 1c
\textsuperscript{19} An interesting observation was made in 1893 by Edward Wilkinson, Assistant Commissioner, Royal Commission on Labour, about the agricultural labourers in Holbeach, Lincolnshire.
\textquote{There is less immigration at particular seasons than formerly…[when] a great many men came to the district, not only Irishmen, but Norfolk and Suffolk men. Still, a good many English-Irish, as they are called, that is, Irishmen whose regular home is in the big towns of the Midland, as well as Irishmen from Ireland come regularly.’ (Royal Commission on Labour. The agricultural labourer. PP 1893-94 [C.6894-VI] Vol. I. England. Part VI. p. 107)
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Freeman’s Journal} 27\textsuperscript{th} June 1893
\textsuperscript{21} Coventry Archives BA/E/2/55/1, 2 contain a handwritten statement of purpose from 1838, by the mayor and magistrates, together with templates of forms to facilitate the removal of Irish paupers to Liverpool. There is no record of how frequently they were used but their preparation must have been the result of concern about rising numbers.
\textsuperscript{22} O’Leary, \textit{Irish in Wales}, p. 25
large towns of Staffordshire and Warwickshire. Vagrancy figures for Warwickshire are unhelpful in assessing the size of the problem in Coventry as the county results include within them those for a dominant Birmingham. When the public reached for stereotype, differentiation between the behaviour of Irish mobile migrants and wandering Irish vagrants was not deep; the indolence, craftiness, lack of commitment and begging antics of vagrants were characterised as traits of the Irish in general. Vagrants who came before the bench in Coventry were given one hour to leave town; they did not enhance Irish reputation but neither did they increase the number of Irish dwelling in the town.

The Cavalry Barracks and the decisions of pensioned soldiers

Cavalry regiments that served tours of duty in Ireland rotated through Coventry barracks in Smithford Street in the very heart of the town. These military tours may have resulted in information about Ireland being brought to the city and possibly raising interest in, and goodwill towards Irish people. Some of these regiments had an Irish designation and had high Irish enlistment such as the 4th Dragoons who were resident in Coventry during the censuses of 1851 and 1861. Not only were they clothed in recognisable symbols of the realm but Coventrians could see Irish men in a complimentary light that came from being associated with smartness of appearance inherent in their cavalry costumes.

However the role of the barracks in augmenting the

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23 Redford, *Labour Migration*, p. 141

24 The *Coventry Standard* 15th February 1850 reported ‘Patrick Ford, a sturdy Irishman, was brought up by Policeman Symonds, charged with going from house to house craving alms, and pretending he was entirely destitute of food, at the time his pockets were crammed with bread, cheese, bacon, &c ... this time last year he was brought up on a similar charge, but was dismissed on promising to leave the town; but he had now not only returned and renewed his applications, but he had caused his wife and children to come from Ireland, and become strolling mendicants. - He was committed as a rogue and vagabond for 13 days imprisonment, with hard labour’.

25 The ‘Irish’ named unit, the 4th Dragoon in Coventry in 1826 had been in Ireland from 1822-26, the 5th Dragoons in Coventry in 1830 had been in Ireland from 1821-1825, and the 17th Lancers in Coventry in 1837, had been stationed in Dublin from 1828-32. The ‘Irish’ named unit, the 6th Dragoons, resided in Coventry in 1841. The latter appeared to have arrived from Newbridge just before the census was taken on 6th June. They replaced the 10th Royal Hussars who left for Dublin. (Richard Cannon, *The Fourth, or Royal Irish Regiment of Dragoon Guards*, (London 1839) p. 61; Richard Cannon, *The Fifth, or Prince Charlotte of Wales’s Regiment of Dragoon Guards*, (London 1839) pp. 74, 75) ; J. W. Fortescue, *A History of the 17th Lancers*, (London 1895) pp. 124, 125

26 The *Freeman’s Journal* on 10th September 1861 reported ‘Yesterday morning seven officers and 150 non-commissioned officers and privates, and 124 horses of the 1st Royal Dragoons, embarked in the Windsor steamer at the North-wall, en route from the Curragh Camp for Coventry.’

27 Coventry Times 10th July 1861 told of a ‘grand day’ in Coventry when Volunteers of the Warwickshire Rifle Volunteers were joined by other county companies to take part in a drill on Whitley Common.

‘The afternoon being fine brought out numbers of townspeople to see the sight, …[eventually] many thousands had assembled to witness their movements…The ground was capitaly kept by a company of the 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards’ The men were called on to give three cheers.

‘This was done right heartily, the band striking up "St Patrick’s Day". The vast concourse of people then moved towards the town, the volunteers preceded by the splendidly mounted Dragoon Guards; and altogether the whole affair was the most exciting and interesting military spectacle ever witnessed in this City.’
number of Irish-born actually settling in Coventry must have been slight because the regiments with their enlisted soldiers would have regularly moved on.\textsuperscript{28}

At the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1812 many Irish-born soldiers would have stayed on in Britain following their discharge.\textsuperscript{29} Brown points out that in Wiltshire many English soldiers had married Irish women who then brought up their children in the county. She noted too that Ireland held little attraction to pensioned-off Irish-born soldiers who would, if they had an English spouse, settle in the home village of the spouse.\textsuperscript{30} Danaher dwelt on the possibility of Leicestrian soldiers while stationed in Ireland meeting Irish women and thereafter returning to settle in Leicester, however as there was no ‘Coventry’ regiment the same process would not have occurred in the town. Nonetheless, local-born men joined other regiments, with Army discharge records from the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, Dublin showing 25 discharges of Coventry-born soldiers who had been stationed in Ireland between 1808 and 1821.\textsuperscript{31} Some may have returned to settle locally with wives found in Ireland.

The army contribution to Coventry Irish-settlement is unclear, since it cannot always be distinguished from the census, if those in the Irish ‘community’ mentioned as pensioned had met their wives while in service or later. The journey of Thomas Black to Coventry, most likely drawn there by his Warwickshire wife, Susan, is shown in Table 3.4. He had been a widower and carpenter and on his remarriage, on April 16\textsuperscript{th} 1849, he settled in Coventry.\textsuperscript{32} The influence of a wife in ex-soldier location is shown in Table 3.5 which provides an instance where a Coventrian woman had given birth in Ireland, and who had prevailed on her Bristol-born husband, who had met her in Coventry, to return and settle in Coventry. Though their son William is included in totals as Irish-born, he would have had little sense of ‘Irishness’, illustrating the fault (as does Thomas Black) in the common presumption that all Irish-born belonged to an Irish ethnic community.\textsuperscript{33} Again, the army connection may not be clear enough to assess, because a soldier after leaving the army may have described himself initially under his new occupation and only later reverted to ‘pensioner’ as a description. Table 3.6 shows that

\textsuperscript{28} There was too, a reserve by army command about such barracks becoming involved with the community life of the towns in which they were located. That said, evidence from baptismal records show that newborns in the barracks, where appropriate, were brought to Hill Street for Catholic baptism.

\textsuperscript{29} Jackson, \textit{Irish in Britain}, p. 7

\textsuperscript{30} Brown, Irish Railway Workers, p. 69

\textsuperscript{31} The National Archives, Records, http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/results/r?_ps=60&_p=1800&_q=coventry+Irish Accessed 27\textsuperscript{th} August 2016

\textsuperscript{32} It is to be wondered what understanding of Irish identity those in the family related to Thomas possessed.

\textsuperscript{33} The 1851 census provides two further examples of Irish-born children of English-born soldiers (living outside the Barracks).
in the census of 1851 there were 9 Chelsea pensioners among the 272 Irish Households heads. Age differences of up to twenty years may be noted between partners. Any female disinclination based on age difference may have been overcome by the realisation, in the environment of the time, that the pensioner had a reliable, if meagre source of income.

**General increase in Irish movement to British urban centres**

By the 1830s, according to MacRaild, emigration had become ‘part of the Irish peoples’ culture’. He pointed out that the Irish had a sufficient presence in Britain during the 1830s that they were believed deserving of their own separate report by Lewis, when an enquiry was being made into poverty in Ireland.34 The migrants had been driven to leave an impaired Ireland by that very poverty and lack of opportunity; their passage facilitated by the increased adoption of the English language in Ireland. (Appendix 14).

Ó Tuathaigh said that in 1841 there were approximately 420,000 Irish-born in Britain with about 100,000 having arrived since 1831.35 By 1841 there was a substantial settlement of 284,128 Irish-born in England alone which represented 1.89% of total population of 14,995,138. The regional distribution showed concentration in the South East, Midlands, North West and North East of England. Irish-born in the London counties (84,507), Liverpool (49,639) and Manchester (30,304) could claim 57.8% of this national total. Other regional cities such as Leeds (5,027), Birmingham (4,683) and with a similar figure Bristol (4,639) had significant Irish-born presence.36 The reality was that while quantitatively noticeable in the large urban areas, the Irish were found throughout Britain. As exampled by the County of Warwick, they were not confined to Birmingham and Coventry. Figures for Warwickshire in 1841 (401,715 total pop) show 6,333 were born in Ireland. If the Irish-born in Birmingham and Coventry are withdrawn it is to be seen that 1,095 were residing in the remainder of the county. Hemlingford Hundred that almost surrounded Birmingham contained 350, while 524 were found in Knightlow Hundred that surrounded Coventry while Warwick Borough held 89 Irish-born.37 Again in the census of 1851 Irish presence was to be found throughout the county (Table 3.7).38

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34 MacRaild, *Irish Migrants 1750-1922*, pp. 15, 41  
36 Enumeration Abstract 1841 PP 1843 XXII (496) pp. 98, 111, 139, 183, 313, 331, 397-399. The 1841 census does not provide Irish-born figures specifically for London. The numbers of Irish-born in the four counties in which London was located: Middlesex 58,068, Surrey 13,822, Kent 10,401, Essex 2,216.  
37 Enumeration Abstract 1841 PP 1843 XXII (496) p. 331  
38 This census provided data for Registration Districts which allowing greater local reveal at census Abstract level than for 1841.
Place of origin links and chain migration

Fitzpatrick emphasised the importance of chain migration in steering migrants towards particular locations. T.M. Macdonald in 1836 referred to the Birmingham Irish as being chiefly from Mayo and Roscommon. Chinn referred to the existence of chain migration in the same city and the ‘powerful kinship bonds and common places of origin’, especially from Connacht, found in dilapidated streets of Greens Village and Old Inkleys. He wrote that half of those in 1851 Birmingham who gave an Irish county birthplace came from Connacht: with Roscommon accounting for 24.0%. There was a significant and long-standing presence of Dubliners that amounted to 14.0%. Herson noted that 40.0% of the Irish in Stafford came from Galway, Roscommon or Mayo based on his 1851-71 summation. He said that the 1851 census data suggested strong origination in Castlerea, Co. Roscommon which was not detectable in the census a decade earlier. He observed that the linkage with Castlerea, most likely established by accident in 1847, resulted in many more migrants making for Stafford through the chain process (Appendix 14).

Danaher’s analysis of census data for the 1850s and particularly 1860s led him to conclude that ‘there were three main areas in Ireland which decanted migrants to Leicester: Galway, Mayo and Roscommon’. Other important sources for in-migrants he noted were the south and east of Cork, Down and Dublin.

Table 5.16 provides details of origin available for Coventry. The tradition of silk weaving in both Dublin and Coventry perhaps accounts for the prominence of Dublin-born at mid-century. Similar to the findings for other cities, migrants from Mayo followed by Roscommon and Galway featured strongly in Coventry. Being within the ambit of Liverpool where these west of Ireland migrants disembarked, it too received its share from this strongly donating province of Ireland.

Place of origin links within Ireland, between migrants, cannot be systematically quantified but it is apparent that the numerical presence of some counties was of sufficient size that it was possible that chain migration could accelerate. Word may have gone out from Coventry to occupants of a particular county in Ireland, that in some of the streets of the city, there was sufficient fellow county residents, to offer

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39 Fitzpatrick, A peculiar tramping people, p. 636
40 Report State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, pp. 1-4
41 Chinn, ‘Sturdy Catholic emigrants’, pp. 56, 63, 72
42 Herson, A small-town perspective, p. 89
43 Danaher, Irish in Leicester, p. 56
44 Other studies: Murphy noted that of 192 Irish migrants in Nottingham who provided county of birth detail in 1851, 36.0% were from Dublin, with 22.0% from Sligo and 14.0% from Mayo (Murphy, Irish in Nottingham, p. 88). Dillon noted of the 417 in Leeds in 1851, 26.0% were from Dublin, while those born in Mayo and Tipperary were each ranked next with 8.7% (Dillon, Irish in Leeds, p. 6).
companionship to new arrivals from the same county. However as Herson reminds such kin attraction may have been limited if the prospect of obtaining employment locally was poor.\(^{45}\)

The chain migration process assumes a member of a household in Ireland who has moved to Coventry will facilitate other adult members in the household to join the member. This process cannot be systematically measured from census data. The telling link, of sibling or other kin, is only stated in the census in relation to the head of the household in which the migrant resides. Though separate households had members, with different surnames but who were in some way or other related to each other, the ‘wall’ between separate households prevents the exposition of kinship links in the search for chain migration. Same surnamed siblings who lived apart, even as close as next door to each other, are seen as constituting separate households, and their blood relationship is not conveyed. Indeed in cases, folk similarly surnamed to the household head, unhelpfully expressed their relationship not in consanguineal terms but simply as ‘lodger’.\(^{46}\) On the basis that the majority of migrants were according to Swift ‘young single and disproportionately male’ - though not necessarily so in times of influx - evidence of ‘hidden’ chain migration in enumeration books is mainly to be found in the assemblage of individuals close in age and with similar surnames, and particularly if the surname is distinctive, suggesting kinship, through which the process operated.\(^{47}\) The phenomenon is more detectable through surnames borne by males and is more easily recognised when similar surnamed households are found living in close proximity in a courtyard or street. However, since it will also, only best reveal its presence at a time of influx when migrant reception areas are temporarily swollen, chaining may be too readily associated merely with the profile of those in ‘clustered’ situations during migrant incursions. Again, the arrival pattern may not make for easy distinguishment of chaining. The commonly understood procedure of a sequential younger sibling following an older sibling may have been supplanted by a number of adult siblings, or a family moving ensemble, such as the Gahagan/Galligan/Gallagon family circa 1850 (Table 3.8). Table 3.9 furnishes some examples of apparent chaining.\(^{48}\)

\(^{45}\) Herson, A small-town perspective, p. 89

\(^{46}\) Differently named lodgers may have been related to other lodgers, but that fact, subsumed under the word ‘lodger’, is not on display.


\(^{48}\) A further example may be afforded by John Lamb who was a 60 years old silk weaver from Ireland residing in Coventry with his family in 1851. He was still present in 1861 but an Irish-born 50 years old, ribbon weaver James Lamb and family that had resided in Congleton, had also by then come to live in Coventry. The distinctive Lamb surname is key to exposing a possible pulling force by one brother on the
Irish involvement in the silk trade

Coventry had an historical link as early as the eighteen century with Dublin from where weavers or apprentices originated. It is a link that may have endured and ensured a less frosty reception for nineteenth century incomers. Just as they had done so in Spitalfields, the Huguenots had developed silk manufacture in Dublin. At the beginning of the 19th century there were 900 weavers in the Liberties of Dublin. Following the Act of Union in 1801 and the movement of parliamentary representation to London there was a fall off in demand from aristocratic, fashionable society for silks, ribbons, curtains and coach trim. During the Napoleonic Wars the silk weavers endured severe hardship as it was difficult to source raw material. The industry collapsed in 1826 due both to the abolition of tariffs on imported silk product and the reduction in its shipping costs permitted by steam powered ships. This left 600 looms inactive and three quarters of the ribbon weavers out of work. The desperation was recorded in Dublin newspapers.

The following as then written were the names, and details of such people in 1740 seeking poor relief in Coventry, and show Irish engagement with the city in the mid-eighteen century as journeyman weavers.

John Clear: Weaver about 32 years of age: he was born in St. James’ Street in the City of Dublin: he hath been in the City for 17 years: works for John Gibbons.

Samuel Rylance: Weaver aged 21. Born at Clonmell, Tipperary in Ireland: served 5 years of his time: his master, Daniel Stanton, came to settle at Coventry and about 6 months ago his master sent for him to come over and he came and worked with Martha Underhay.


Daniel Ripley: Weaver aged 29. Born in St. Luke’s Parish, Dublin, where he served his apprenticeship: has been in this city for about 12 months: works for Thomas Walker in Welstreet: has a wife but she is in Ireland.

John Haylock: Ribbon weaver aged 40. Born in Stephen Street, Dublin in St. Bride’s parish where he served his apprenticeship and then came to this City where he continued to work as a journeyman until now. He has one child, Ann, about a quarter of a year old, by Mary, his wife who is Irish.

The list, apart from showing the variety of less obvious patronymics linked to Ireland, displays chain migration based on occupation and town of origin. Daniel Stanton from Clonmel ‘sent’ for Samuel Rylance also from Clonmel. Wives chosen were also Irish although Ripley’s wife had not joined him.

The Saunder’s News-Letter 8th April 1826 under the headline ‘Distress of the Dublin Weavers’ reported: ‘…Many weavers with seven, eight, and ten children each, are doomed to witness the agony of their wretched, starving, and almost houseless wives and children; …Yesterday many of these poor creatures, amounting in number to about 300, walked in procession from the Coombe…This sorrowful procession moved slowly…’; Dublin Morning Register 12th January 1830 published a letter which contained the view that: ‘Were it not for the exertions of the relief committee, and the generous subscribers, a single day would not pass without numbers of industrious persons being found dead in the streets’.

Magee furnishes details of two files lodged in the National Archives, Dublin giving details of relief work and assistance provided to weavers and their families during the slump of 1826. Magee furnished the names 1900 males who involved in the rag trade in 1826 who worked repairing roads in order to obtain relief. Eight possibly 10 had almost similar names to those mentioned in Coventry. The second file provided details of relief provided to weaving families and 9 possibly 12 had similar names to those in Coventry. The exciting promise of a large-scale finding of families in Dublin who matched weaving
The Mansion-House Relief Committee, under the auspices of the Lord Mayor, through public subscription assisted a number of weavers to emigrate. The *Dublin Morning Register* 8th April 1830 stated that £9.19s. was disbursed to aid the ‘Passage and subsistence of twelve destitute silk, cotton, and woollen weavers, and their destitute families, having promise of employment at Coventry, Manchester and Leeds’. However travelling to Coventry was not a move to Arcadia for Irish weavers as in January 1830 and noted in Chapter 2 there were reports of much distress in the city, with ‘persons in respectable ranks of life, who themselves have been in the habit of contributing to the poor, not only find themselves unable to continue such contributions, but are, in many instances, actually obliged to apply for relief themselves.’

In 1838 Joseph Fletcher an Assistant Commissioner reporting on hand-loom weaving in Coventry wrote:

> When the ribbon trade of Dublin succumbed under English competition about twelve years ago, several hundred Irish came to Coventry and its vicinity, and have ever since been employed in the trade; some being very good hands and others indifferent. They were not particularly liked by the masters, and at first were regarded with jealousy by the men; but this feeling is now forgotten, and there have been no further immigrations of late years…The manufacturers have at different periods said that the supply of labourers was much beyond the demand of labour’.

Coventry would have attracted Dublin weavers as the domestic system was still important in the city and because Macclesfield, originally nearer at hand, was not entirely fulfilled. This was due to the gap of fifteen years between the restriction of the first list to males, who if they migrated may have brought a family but its members’ presence cannot be confirmed, or simply because Dublin weavers in Coventry in 1841 had not sought relief in 1826. (Sean Magee, *Weavers and Related Trades, Dublin 1826*, (Dun Laoghaire 1995)).


Dublin Evening Post 21st January 1830

Report on Hand-Loom Weavers, p. 53. The accuracy of Joseph Fletcher’s remark that ‘several hundred Irish came to Coventry and its vicinity’ cannot be checked and it would also be unwise to over depend on one reference. His words intrigue; while they leave the valued impression of what then was thought of the scale of Irish movement to Coventry, the word ‘several’ lacks a longed-for precision. It most likely included members of the weavers’ families. An asterisk in Fletcher’s report where his remark is made, is footnoted as ‘Cope, Ratliff, Caldicott’. Cleophas Ratliff (1839), Richard Caldicott (1847) and Thomas Cope (1848) were mayors of Coventry in the years bracketed and were also ribbon manufacturers. It is suggested they would have an understanding of local employment conditions and knowledge of town developments that would plausibly support what they reported to Fletcher. These ‘hundreds’ of Irish would have arrived without looms (as indicated by Brocklehurst above) and so if male, and intent on silk working, would have worked as journeymen’s journeymen, i.e. second journeymen. The increase, observed in the 1820s would correspond to the sharp but unsustainable increase, which was noted by Edward Peach in Birmingham. It is possible that the ‘several hundred Irish’ that Fletcher left an impression of being composed of weavers (and must surely have included their families), motivated to migrate through unemployment, were not all such, but actually represented the 1820s increase in general immigration noted in Britain that was caused by dismal conditions over much of Ireland.
increasingly seemed without opportunity. Coventry may have attracted Irish-weavers who initially settled in Macclesfield or in Lancashire. Redford referred to the ‘persistent distress’ of handloom weavers from 1836 and noted that it related to Irish weavers, who, used to a lower living standard continued to survive in Lancashire, when local weavers had quit. The exemplar families in Table 3.10 illustrate the Congleton, Derby, Coventry trail, the length of time (by ages of children) it might have taken to eventually reach Coventry, and that Coventry was seldom the first option.

The population of Coventry Registration District increased by 9,584 (45.0%) in the twenty years from 1821 and this general inward movement may have masked the visible increase of Irish in the city; thus lessening possible acrimony if such an Irish increase was glaring. The prevalence of lanes and courts with a single entry may have served to make the extent of Irish numbers less obvious. It would appear the reason why few Irish were observed arriving en-masse after 1826-30 was because there was little employment opportunity to attract less than desperate work seekers, due to an oversupply of labour resulting from local in-migration from the surrounding villages. Fletcher’s direct reference to the Irish is disappointingly the only one available, to inform how the Irish interacted with the staple trade of the city. It does predictably reveal that the Irish were initially disliked but had over the years become tolerated and employed. They had arrived prior to the occurrence of a more distinct distancing in factory-master and employee relations in Coventry; thus there is no evidence to show that they were seen or used as strike breakers. A further point is that some of these

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54 In 1832 John Brocklehurst stated that the Irish poor [weavers] in Macclesfield were in great distress over the winter of 1831-32 and had not recourse to the parish. He remarked that in 1830, and in the year before, and previously the silk trade was in a miserable state in Macclesfield. He continued: ‘a portion of the [Dublin] weavers who came over at the time (bringing with them their scanty all, consisting of an old loom) … never succeeded in obtaining any direct employment; but raised a few shillings on this moveable, perhaps the value of it as old timber, and since that time they have occasionally obtained a short job as journeymen; in too many sad instances living huddled six or eight together in a small room or cellar, without furniture or a bed, their wives and children obliged to subsist on charity.’ (Report on the Silk Trade, p. 792).

55 Redford, *Labour Migration*, p. 112

56 Census of England & Wales 1851, PP 1852-53 LXXXV Population Tables Vol. 1 p. 82

57 The only other locatable reference to this incursion was in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* 21st March 1914 where in its ‘Topics of the Week’ columns the following piece featured. ‘I wonder how many persons in Coventry were present at the local festivities in connection with the Coronation of Queen Victoria on June 28, 1838. An old and respected citizen with whom I was chatting the other evening was there - and he does not remember much of what occurred, for the simple reason that he was at the time but six weeks old…Talking of "long ago" my friend was reminiscent of very old times. His parents came over from Ireland, as he put it, when the effects of the Union were beginning to be felt; and he added that he could count fifty families now in the city who settled here about the same time. Legislation had most adversely influenced the weaving industries in the "ould counthry," with the result that many Irish weavers made their way to Manchester, Congleton, Coventry and other places, where employment to which they were accustomed was to be found. That they were favoured here is clear from the remark of one of the employers, who, on some of his workpeople complaining to him, when work grew slack, that the Irishmen were first considered, said he thought he was right in doing so, as he had got his share of the
weavers may have been Protestant which may have eased their introduction to the host population. Thomas Elston a weaver from Ireland was married to Emma Kimberley from Banbury in St. Michaels in 1836.  

In the presence of Warwickshire surplus labour it can be inferred a continuous stream of fresh Irish migrants would not have been welcomed. There appears to be an absence until the late 1840s of further en-bloc in-migration and this allowed time for accord to develop. Generous outdoor relief which was a feature of Coventry, and which continued until the late 1820s may have lessened a sense of hardship among the population. Without that assistance, blame may have been placed more directly on the Irish presence for local unemployment and misery. The silk trade was cyclic and it is not clear if Irish entry to Coventry was facilitated by a period of expansion in Coventry. The year 1826 had been one of much distress for the silk districts of Britain as it had been for Dublin; the distress had not abated by 1830. The Irish may have arrived in a period of downturn but sustained by hope of better times in the future may have relativised the situation, that while it was a struggle in Coventry, conditions were not much better elsewhere. Irish families came with a particular skill in silk weaving that found an opening for its exercise in Coventry and very few other towns besides, so there was a strong incentive to settle down no matter at what point on the economic cycle the city found itself.

The dominance of weaving and associated activities in 1841 among the household heads of Irish Households may be seen in Table 3.11. It is to be regretted that so many people, in all censuses merely stated ‘weaver’ as their occupation, without further specifying whether they were hand-loom or power-loom operatives, but it may be assumed that male arrivals up to the 1840s acted as hand-loom journeymen. Females found work in the subsidiary areas of filling, winding, or warping. Outside the domestic

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Irish trade of which their old masters had been deprived!’ It is to be noticed that his interlocutor was a ‘respected citizen’. Might it have been William McGowran born in 1838? (Appendix 2).

Warwickshire Anglican Registers, Roll: Engl/2/1030 Year 1836 p. 176 (527). Caution must be exercised in assuming that marriage in an Anglican church meant the couple were Protestant, as it was a legal requirement to marry in the Church of England until 1837. There is no reference to their marriage, or to the baptism of Mary their daughter in Catholic registers.

The Herald 13th January 1826 sympathised to hear that:

‘the alarm in the Silk trade is still excessive. The applications for relief from the poor rates, this week were extraordinarily numerous; and we are informed that at the present moment 3,000 persons are out of employ in this City alone... Accounts from other Silk Districts are equally distressing. In the neighbourhood of Congleton, three individuals connected with the Trade have, in consequence of its depression, committed suicide’.

The Dublin Evening Post 21st January 1830 reported ‘the state of the artisans and other labourers in that city [Coventry] as most deplorable. The poor rates and the number of paupers are fearfully on the increase...the inhabitants of this once opulent city will be involved in one common ruin...Persons in respectable ranks of life, who themselves have been in the habit of contributing to the poor, but are, in many instances actually obliged to apply for relief themselves’.
system females were in place to take up employment in the new steam powered factories which were taking hold from 1840. The ‘children’, both Irish-born and Non-Irish-born in these Irish Households were also much involved in the silk trade. Again in English Households containing Irish both Irish males and females were prominently involved in the silk trade.

Labouring Opportunities

According to Prest weaving was not a healthy activity. Moisture content of silk increased if left in the open air and smoke damaged it so weavers had to work indoors in unventilated spaces, and without a fire in winter. Being cramped against a loom from an early age, it was believed, led to their small stature, stooped demeanour, poor muscle development and pale appearance. They did not turn their hands to activity beyond weaving as they had to preserve a fineness of touch to handle the silk thread. The same tactile sensitivity was required of watchmakers. In the light of these local traditions, work that called for able-bodied labourers might as a result have been available to the Irish. The network of Irish kin and of those originating from the same Irish parishes may have assisted in the finding of employment for Irish on building schemes. The hand-weaving and watch trades limited numbers, by restricting entry through apprenticeship (with its seven years of serving time and a reduced wage for the duration). This meant it was not an appealing option to young migrants from rural Ireland who necessarily had to turn to labouring to gain immediate and sufficient income. Their ability to earn may have been hampered by the seasonality of labouring work, and perhaps an excess of available workers kept wages low. However the long lay-offs and strikes that affected the weaving trade, the cyclic pattern of the industry, the indoor nature of weaving, together with the commitment and attention to fine detail required of weavers made weaving appear an activity suited to older people and an unlikely option for them.

Market town dealing and hawking activity

Hawking, street-selling and costermongering were common activities in British towns in the nineteenth century. This form of selling, that also involved dealing in old clothes and in scrap, was popular among the Irish. Little capital outlay was involved, while the meagre, unreliable income from such activity could be tolerated by Irish who were familiar with the rigour of hand-to-mouth living. A dealer’s barrow or cart may have provided some income if hired by frequently moving tenants to transport their belongings. Regarded as low on the social scale, they were not too proud to handle

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60 Prest, Industrial Revolution in Coventry, pp. 75,76
61 Victorian Occupation Index, Hawker http://victorianoccupations.co.uk/h/h-is-for-hawker/ Accessed 12th October 2018
materials that others may have regarded as rank waste, or not so affluent they could afford to dismiss as not worthwhile the extraction of any residual value in used goods or materials. There can be little doubt that the search for firewood to sell, resulted in July 1874, in Bridget Sheridan a 45 year old, widowed, Irish-born hawker, with 42 year old Cork-born hawker James Davis and Mary Ann Davis being charged with damaging a countryside fence in Stivichal.\(^{62}\) Denvir observed that dealing was an Irish intergenerational phenomenon. Apart from having acquired the art of selling through such a traditional manner, perhaps an innate Irish love of bargaining made them participate in dealing. Denvir told how Irish people could become involved at little cost and how they saw in the activity a pathway to advance.\(^{63}\) Even so, Fielding saw in such activity the mark of poverty rather than enterprise; in later years some clothes dealers and shopkeepers were to him little more than permanent street traders although some did become part of a solid shopkeeping class.\(^{64}\)

A total of 9 Irish-born hawkers in 1841 had risen to 24 by 1851. Goodman observed that until the 1860s and the invention of the sewing machine which allowed ready-made clothes to become widely available, working people made extensive use of second-hand clothes.\(^{65}\) The abounding poverty in the Coventry of the 1860s may have sustained a market for second-hand clothes. In 1840 John Bracken (Appendix 2) was noted for keeping an old clothes shop in Greyfriars Lane. He described himself in the 1841 census as a broker, so did John Galaor and Patrick Cunnigan (Cunningham) in the same lane.\(^{66}\) It was said of the adjoining Warwick Lane in 1862 that it was ‘a miserable street of rag shops, old clothes shops, boot and shoe shops, and of low, antique houses, neglected and tumbling down’.\(^{67}\) Living with her children at 66 Warwick Lane, was Peter Burke’s Irish-born widow, Bridget Burke, 45 years, who was described as a dealer in old clothes (Table 3.2). The Irish may not have come to Coventry intent on dealing but may have pursued it on becoming familiar with the city after a few years residence.

\(^{62}\) RG10/3176.16.1 ED 13; RG10/3176.158.24 ED 22 Meriden-born Mary Ann Davis in newspaper report was called Thompson and a lodger of James in Census; Coventry Standard 3rd July 1874

\(^{63}\) An Irish harvestman or labourer finds himself in one of the small English or Scottish towns, and he tries his luck at dealing – a few pence or shillings at the outside, often constituting his only capital. He becomes a collector of rags, old ropes, bones, old metal, rabbit and hare skins, and other apparently waste materials, for which trade has its uses… By dint of pinching and screwing he is able to leave the hawking to others, and to set up what is termed a “marine store.” (Denvir, Irish in Britain, pp. 453, 454).

\(^{64}\) Steven Fielding, Class and Ethnicity, pp. 31, 32

\(^{65}\) Ruth Goodman, How to be a Victorian, (London 2014) p. 48

\(^{66}\) Coventry Herald 12th August 1842 referred to Thompson (most likely Charles who was a hawker in Cow Lane in 1841) as an Irishman from the neighbourhood of rag-fair, in Greyfriars lane who was committed, for want of sureties to keep the peace.

\(^{67}\) Coventry Herald 16th May 1862
The changing description of this form of selling is seen in the case of Michael Harvey who was a hawker in 1871, a general dealer in 1881 and a marine store dealer in 1891.68

Mention might also be made of factors that possibly repelled settlement up to 1860. The positioning of Coventry on a Liverpool to London route axis may have induced migrants to see Coventry as a mere staging post on the journey to their ultimate destination in the capital. The Trent valley line that opened in late 1847 allowed rail traffic from Liverpool, and later Holyhead, destined for London to avoid Coventry, using the pass route from Stafford to Rugby.69 Migrants may have passed at speed to the north east of Coventry on this rail line largely unaware of its presence. Mulkern took the view that weaving and watchmaking activity was so dominant it kept the market for casual labour low thereby holding down migrant numbers.70 Perhaps other locations such as Birmingham with its enormous workshop type industrialization, where there was a prospect of finding employment together with strong communal identification and support, appeared simply more promising. After 1860 Coventry’s depressed state for many years would also have lessened its appeal to migrants depending on casual employment.

3.2 Perception of the Irish poor

Apart from references by Inspector Vice to Irish overcrowding (Appendix 4) at mid-century, there are few direct accounts of the Irish in their living conditions in Coventry.71 In his 1843 outline for the State of large Towns Inquiry, J.R. Martin noted

68 RG10.3179.35.2 ED 3; RG11/3067.30.18 ED 11; RG12.2453.30.5 ED 7; The Herald 29th November 1867 reported that on the opening of the New Market Hall, stalls or standings would not be allowed elsewhere. By January 1868 strict enforcement had almost ended hawking as a practice. (Coventry Standard 4th January 1868). The Herald 28th April 1871 reported that Mary O’Neil was charged with hawking without a certificate which was a requirement from 1870; on her promising not to offend again she was discharged. Mary and her husband William were from Tyrone; the latter was described as a Church of England Butcher in 1851. Though they had arrived by 1851 it was not until 1861 (See Table 3.15), that Mary was described as a hawker which continued to occupy her in 1871 at 39 years of age. William, now 41 years, was noted as a labourer. Over the years they reared five children and had moved from Leicester Street to 5 Caldicotts Yard to a Room over H3C9 Greyfriars Lane. There was no reference in court to her Irish background. The Times 21st May 1879 reported that Ellen Cronin, of Well Street, was before the court for hawking without a licence. In 1871 she was described as a 32 year old charwoman, living with her, also Irish-born, was husband John, a 33 year old gimp spinner. In 1881 she lived as a charwoman in H1C1 Spon End with her husband John who was now a general labourer. In both censuses she was referred to as a charwoman, which cautions that the occupation provided at census-time may not be factual or may not indicate the extent of the activities engaged in. RG10/3179.70.34 ED 4; RG11/3070.56.18 ED 34

69 Robin Jones, West Coast, (Horncastle 2012) p. 39

70 Mulkern, Irish and Public Disorder in Coventry, p. 121

71 It is worth adverting to the evidence taken in January 1834 relating to the condition of the Irish poor in nearby Birmingham. It reveals an addiction to lodging-houses and to overcrowding which was present over a decade before the Famine influx. It was a residential practice that was, not as is often thought, necessarily due to destitution but a lifestyle choice. Any wider application of Birmingham conclusions must be treated with care, since they were – though not unsympathetic, a product of the outlook of the time and because the Irish were ‘a distinct community’ and relatively more embedded in Birmingham. These comments on Birmingham Irish are quoted in Appendix 8.
the most deficient areas of Coventry, but did not mention Irish (Chapter 2). Neither was there direct mention by William Ranger of Irish in his 1849 report on the sanitary condition of Coventry also referenced in Chapter 2. However his ‘wanting’ streets e.g. Palmer Lane, Well Street, and West Orchard all featured as areas where the Irish were enumerated in significant numbers in the census of 1851. The opportunity in these reports to single out the Coventry Irish and associate these migrants to deprived conditions was not taken, nor was a quarter, court or street ever referred to as ‘Irish’. It suggests the poorer Coventry Irish were not perceived as singularly different from the countrywide view of Irish migrants, or that they were especially different or separate from the poor among whom they resided. While some families stood out as ‘low’ Irish, other families were so similar in form and experience to host families that only the census would reveal an Irish dimension. A weaver, John Hewson, came before the court with a number of other debt defaulters in August 1848. He had reneged on a former arrangement to repay a tailor called Brown. He stated he was unable to pay from ‘want of employment and illness’. He agreed that he had a son, wife and daughter earning 15s. per week on average, but he had eight children to care for. This was surely Irish-born John Hewson who was recorded living in Well Street with his wife and eight local-born children all in the census of 1841.

3.3 Reputation and settlement at mid-century

The causes and course of the Famine which occurred in the later 1840s have been widely recounted and need not be recalled here. It led to an influx of Irish with the census of 1851 recording approximately 520,000 Irish-born residents in Britain; a figure that represented a 78.7% increase on the 291,000 recorded a decade earlier. Those figures cannot portray the desperation, which had to an extent lessened by 1851, but they do reveal the impact. This was keenly felt in cities where there was already an Irish footprint in 1841, but also experienced in most other urban areas which saw a rise in their Irish-born numbers.

The pre-Famine Irish who were accommodating themselves to their urban circumstances, may have found the streets in which they lived re-stamped as Irish areas. They may have been noticed anew as Irish, and simply because of common-origin in Ireland faced criticism over Irish anti-social behaviour even though it was caused by recent migrants. Critics were given cause to complain by the antics of some newcomers.

72 *Coventry Standard* 29th June 1849
73 *Coventry Herald* 18th August 1848; HO107/1153/2.36.27 ED 4. John or Ellen could not be traced after 1841.
who had brought with them to their poor surroundings, a traditional rural life-style that only fellow newcomers thought apt. The criticism was sharpened by what MacRaild referred to as a ‘specific anti-Irish dimension’ that ‘reared its head in response to epic migrations from the neighbouring island.’

The immediate Famine impact on Coventry was most felt in the Workhouse and the arrangements it made are outlined in Appendix 7. There appeared to have been no city-wide alarm over the presence there in 1847 of ‘Irish fever’ [typhus], or that 3 attendants had died as a result of it, or a sense of crisis that the Workhouse was totally overwhelmed. It is worth recalling that Chapter 2 described how at this point in time many silk operatives in the city were also in the throes of poverty. The following report indicated the post-Famine tone in the Herald in July 1849. It would have locally reinforced the seasoned national stereotype, which on occasions was restricted to the ‘low Irish’, but without much rumination was applied to Irish one-and-all. Usually newspaper reports featured the ‘Irish row’ where the Irish settled scores with each other. However this report described the Irish attacking an innocent local who tried to walk away. It assumed anti-social attitudes and a lawless outlook were part of the Irish national character and it contained the classic ingredients: multiple references to ‘Irish’, alcohol fuelled violence and disorder, ‘hordes’, ‘filling the street’ ‘frequent disturbances’, overcrowding, with a final flourish on begging. The quick fiery Irish temper is given contrast by an official John Vice, who had a calm, reasoned English stance.

‘Owen Grogan, Michael Burke, and a stout lad named Thomas Grogan, all Irish were charged with committing a violent assault upon a young man named Mansill…[A row broke out in the Barley Mow public house, Leicester Street] … Michael Burke struck his fist upon the table, and commenced a loud uproar of abuse. Seeing that a storm was brewing, [Mansill] rose to leave the room saying he had no mind to stay there in such a noise. This was the signal for a general attack [Mansill] had the greatest difficulty to fight his way out of the [public] house, and when in the street, was knocked down and sadly mutilated…A witness named Dodd, who happened to be passing near the spot, identified the boy Grogan, as the person who struck the complainant a severe blow on the head with a candlestick. The scene of the disturbance was described by the police as most disgraceful, whole hordes of disorderly Irish filling the streets about that part of town. Inspector Vice said disturbances were frequent in the neighbourhood, and no wonder, as he had been informed by a gentleman near the spot, that no less than 90 persons, mostly Irish were living in small houses at the back of Dog-Lane

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[also called Leicester Street]…the boy Grogan is a fat-faced Irish lad, and is in the habit of begging.\textsuperscript{76}

The defendants were fined so the incident was not regarded by the magistrates as too serious. Of all, the presence of a ‘horde’ of ‘no less than 90’ may have been the point of most concern to the reader who may have been worried about the scale of the recent ‘influx’. How the ‘gentleman near the spot’ could have counted a rather specific 90 persons and no less, and not ventured a more common response of ‘around 100’ remains curious.\textsuperscript{77}

The damage this type of reportage did to the image of the local Irish has to be acknowledged.\textsuperscript{78} Mulkern remarked, a small number of families that settled in Coventry post-Famine ‘would prove to be a great source of disorder in the coming decades’ He isolated four: the Gahagan (spelled in a variety of ways), Grogan, Harrity and Harvey families. Their exploits are recorded in Appendix 4.\textsuperscript{79}

Finnegan could similarly say of York, that a small number of individuals in the Irish concentration in Long Close Lane, through their behaviour created notoriety for lawlessness in the area that damaged the reputation of the Irish.\textsuperscript{80}

In reality the incident was not exceptional for Leicester Street. The \textit{Herald} 2\textsuperscript{nd} September 1842 reported a recent session of the magistrates had largely engaged in

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Coventry Herald} 6\textsuperscript{th} July correct 1849. The 1851 census showed Owen Grogan as a married 26 year old Irish labourer and Thomas Grogan as an 18 year old Irish hawker. Michael Burke was not found.

\textsuperscript{77} A few months later the \textit{Herald} could write again using a lurid epithet and the word ‘ferocious’ adjectivally and adverbially to tell of violence and on this occasion a consequent assault to a policeman: ‘Hannah Grogan, a young Irishwoman, belonging to the filthy swarm herding together in a small house or two up a yard in Leicester street, was brought up, charged with being concerned in a ferocious assault upon Police Constable Iliffe in the execution of his duty’. It was said Iliffe in an effort to quell a violent row amongst them about two o’clock last Friday morning was pounced upon ferociously and received many severe wounds and bruises about the head. Hannah promised to leave the town. In November 1850 James Harvey who had assaulted a policeman was described as one of a gang infesting the Street. (\textit{Coventry Herald} 19\textsuperscript{th} April 1850 and 15\textsuperscript{th} November 1850)

\textsuperscript{78} Irish violence was not specifically a post-Famine phenomenon or found always in a throng. In September 1841 Joseph Hewson, referred to by the \textit{Herald} as an ‘Irish tailor’ residing in Greyfriars Lane was ordered to find bail and keep the peace for six months having been charged with violently assaulting his wife. The paper had then again brought together in the common mind ‘violent assault’ and the ‘Irish’ through its gratuitous and common practice of mentioning the nationality of the accused. (\textit{Coventry Herald} 3\textsuperscript{rd} September 1841). While four male Hewsons of Irish background were found in the census of 1841 none were tailors or lived in Greyfriars Lane. It is difficult to know if such labelling was simply of its time as immediately above the account of Joseph appeared the following ‘Mary Rowlett, a terrible shrew, was called on to find bail of £10, to keep the peace towards her husband for three months.’

\textsuperscript{79} A look at the background of the troublemakers in the Barley Mow is pertinent. Owen Grogan in 1851 was a 26 year old, married Irish labourer living in Fleet Street who had two lodgers with a surname to be noticed, Richard and Thomas Gahigan, both Irish hawkers. Owen’s drunken, thuggish behaviour would constantly reverberate down the years. Thomas Grogan was an Irish hawker lodging with Michael Grogan an Irish labourer in 8 Malt House Yard, Well Street. At No 6 in the same yard lived married Irish labourer Patrick Bourke. It may be seen that, already through residential arrangements, lasting friendships were made and fostered; the Yard would also be known as Court 8 which would sustain many Irish over the decades…

\textsuperscript{80} Finnegan, \textit{Irish in York}, pp. 58-61
hearing complaints of neighbours in dispute with fellow neighbours with ‘the most notorious parties being from Dog-Lane (Leicester Street), where repeated rows have of late been occurring’. The *Herald* reported 16th August 1850 Michael McKeogh, ‘a prominent
Map 3.1
Locations of Vicinity Maps

Map 3. --
2. Leicester Street,
3. Palmer Lane,
4. New Buildings,
5. West Orchard,
6. Gosford Street,
7. Much Park Street,
8. Greyfriars Lane,
9. Well Street.

Underlying map © British Library
Figure 3.1 Part of Leicester Street circa 1926 looking west, featuring back to back housing on the unpaved left and Barley Mow pub with gas lamp on right. ‘C’ on Map 3.2 marks the position of the camera.

Map 3.2. Leicester Street showing back to back housing and Irishcom in 1871.\textsuperscript{81}

member of the notorious garrison of low Irish, about 40 or 50 of whom are crowded in a tenement or two in Leicester-street, was charged with gross disorderly conduct, between

\textsuperscript{81} Underlying Map © British Library
one and two o’clock on Sunday morning’. Leicester Street had a dubious reputation into the 1880s. The Chief Superintendent of Police was quoted as saying in the *Herald* 15th October 1880 that the street ‘was becoming so bad that it was scarcely possible for an officer to attempt an arrest there without being assaulted’. His remarks arose in the case of William Ludford who was sent to gaol with hard labour for three months for assaulting a police officer.83

Map 3.2 shows the distribution of Irish households in Leicester Street in 1871. Their ‘Coventrisation’ in terms of the number of local-born children and inter-marriage was apparent by 1871. At No 50 Leicester Street (Marked ‘X’) resided Job Mander, 30 years, a bricklayer from Marton and Sarah his Dublin-born wife, 20 years, and their two young Coventry-born children. At No 54 (Marked ‘Y’) Thomas Lynes aged 35, a labourer from Mayo resided with his Roscommon-born wife aged 32 and their eight children ranging in age from 13 years to 1 year, all born in Coventry.84 The Irishcom at No 59 (Marked ‘Z’) were Irish-born Sarah Smith, a 61 year old, former servant living with her step-son Charles Smith, a 43 year old Coventrian weaver, who was head of a household of 4. This household containing Sarah was the only one with Irishcom in the street in 1881.85 Although it was very central and had early Irish notoriety, Leicester Street may have come to be seen by the Irish who liked to live in streets close to the city core, as too far away at the ‘edge’ of the city, or it may have just have become an unwelcoming vicinity.

3.4 Reputation and settlement from the 1860s

The Irish influx manifested itself during the 1850s in overcrowding of dwellings and for a longer period in disreputable behaviour. Several fulsome examples of the nature of overcrowding are outlined in Appendix 4. The streets where the Irish were occupying ‘lodging houses’ were being noticed. The *Standard* 10th September 1852 seeking a clamp down on unregistered lodgings stated ‘some of the wretched holes in Coventry, not recognised as “common lodging-houses,” but where the Irish who are fast accumulating upon us, are huddled together in loathsome profusion, in Much Park-street, Well-street, Leicester-street and lastly in New-buildings…’ John Vice, the Inspector of Nuisances in June 1851 remarked that ‘most of the houses occupied by the

82 The *Coventry Standard* 16th August 1850 stated McKeough was blind.
83 In 1861 while ribbon weavers and coal wharf labourers were plentiful in Leicester Street, at 42 lived Richard Bradshaw, a proprietor of houses, and at 40 resided Frederick Payne an Inspector of Police, so it was not completely anarchic.
84 The behaviour of Bridget Lynes is referred to in Appendix 4.
85 The Smith family was also in Leicester Street in 1881 RG11/3074,92.22 ED 24. Also in 1871, lodging at No 34 was Dublin tailor John Pengilly age 26 years. In the Industrial Home, Mary A McConnor 11 years, and Sarah A Johnson 8 years, both were Irish-born in training for service. RG10/3182.33-38.16-25 ED 24.
‘low Irish’ were in a most filthy state and required some interference on that account’. His early diligence in suppressing unlicensed lodging, led to smaller households and residential diffusion, and prevented Irish ‘quarters’ from developing. Their notoriety might be epitomised in a single remark by Vice. In 1854 when James Shaw was summoned for not having premises in Cow Lane whitewashed, he was advised by Mr Vice ‘not to let those places to the Irish, as they were so filthy’. Mr Shaw said ‘they might depend upon it he would have none of that fraternity again’. The same Appendix also provides abundant examples of drunken behaviour and fracas.

There is no mention of Irish migrants in relation to the municipal distress of 1860-61, which over a severe winter saw Coventrians attend soup kitchens, and engage in levelling Whitley Common which was a work project created by a relief fund. Prints of the time (Figure 3.9) show scenes reminiscent of the dire conditions found in Ireland during the Famine. The plight of Coventry was known in Dublin where ‘A Divinity Student’ at Trinity College wrote to the editor of the local Saunders’s News-Letter 22nd December 1860 regarding the Coventry weavers, saying:

‘There are in that town upwards of 40,000 poor people utterly destitute, without fire, food or clothes, at this inclement season. I would suggest that Christmas Day would present a suitable opportunity for a collection on behalf of these poor people.’

Greenhow in his 1860 Report made only one reference to the Irish which was in relation to Palmer Lane, indicating that there was not wide-scale official concern that the migrants per se were a cause of serious environmental deterioration. Table 3.12 provides the list of streets he selected as representative districts based on his ability to compute their diarrhoeal statistics. A number of these locations, with Palmers Lane and

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86 Coventry Herald 6th June 1851
87 Ibid. 13th Oct 1854
88 McGrory, Coventry, p. 216
89 Edward Headlam Greenhow, Second Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council 1860 PP 1860 XXIX.20[2736] pp. 65-77. He outlined the results of his enquiry into the circumstances that gave rise to higher mortality rates from diarrhoea. He placed Coventry first on his list for investigation followed by Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Dudley, Merthyr Tydfil, Nottingham, Leeds and Manchester. For Coventry, he was keen to discover the cause ‘which renders its inhabitants unusually liable to death from diarrhoea’. His report in 1860 was important in adding to the sequence of environmental and social description of Coventry and follows Rangers report of 1849. Wolverhampton and specifically Caribee Island was the only other town from those listed where he referred directly to the Irish and singled out the ‘lowest class of Irish’. In order to provide perspective on his account of Palmer Lane it is worthwhile to remind of his reference to Caribee Island: ‘Some of the worst parts of Wolverhampton…[are the] ill-conditioned courts in the rear of Stafford Street. Cholera prevailed in them in 1849, and the medical men reported fever and diarrhoea as being sometimes very prevalent among the inhabitants. They have been recently channelled and supplied with water; privies have been constructed; and the courts are now regularly cleansed by the public scavengers. Although said to be much improved, they are still in bad condition. The rate of diarrhoeal mortality in these courts could not be estimated, neither could any trustworthy information on the subject of its prevalence be obtained from the inhabitants, who belong to the lowest class of Irish and frequently change residence’. 
Greyfriars Lane, are now considered with maps showing their Irishcom distributions in 1861 and in 1881, thereby revealing adjustments which had occurred over 20 years. Map 3.9 shows collectively, with Leicester Street, the location of these considered vicinities. As in the census pages in the following narrative, C if used represents Courtyard, and H if used stands for House.

**Palmer Lane**

Living conditions in the lane were always poor. The *Standard* 14th September 1849 reported that several butchers were summoned for keeping swine there. Five years later the situation had not improved with the *Herald* reporting on 29th September 1854 that summons had again been issued to a number of persons. At the hearing Vice, Inspector to the Corporation gave his opinion that all pigs must be removed from Palmer Lane. Among others summoned was William Millerchip, who was given a week to remove his pigs. Mr Barton, the surgeon, stated Millerchip’s pigs ‘were a nuisance, being so surrounded with houses. There was so much disease [diarrhoea] in that district, that it was necessary they should not be allowed to be kept.’

Said Greenhow in 1860:

‘Palmer Lane is a narrow, dirty, ill-kept street, and the worst conditioned in Coventry; the courts, five in number, are confined, ill ventilated, and filthy; the population is squalid, a large proportion of it consisting of the lower order of Irish, who are usually dirty in personal habits, and engender filth wherever they congregate. The privies in Palmer Lane were in almost every instance in foul condition, and sometimes were placed in close proximity to the dwellings; pigs were kept in several of the courts; in two of the courts are slaughter-houses, and in a third there was, at the time of inspection, a large heap of stinking manure. The soil of all the courts is saturated with filth. Bad enough as is the present condition of the street, it is represented as being in a much better state than formerly. Several houses have been pulled down, and the courts have been partially opened out by the removal of ruinous buildings, so as to improve the ventilation…some of the houses are let out in single rooms…There has been considerable mortality from diarrhoea in the street which, if seven persons be allowed for each house now standing, would exhibit an annual death-rate of 5.5 per 1000 persons for the last five years.’

The impression taken from this description is one of Irish concentration and that the Irish were responsible for the lane’s grim condition because of their assumed tendency to ‘engender filth’. The description of the physical condition of this lane is close to the classic denotation of the ‘Irish slum’ and similar to the surroundings detailed by Finnegan that were experienced by the Irish in the Walmgate area of York referred to in Chapter 1. She added that York’s Irish population was so transient that it was

90 Greenhow, Second Report, pp.74,75
‘practically replaced at each census.’ This Coventry lane also displayed the same post-Famine immense transience. No named Irish, present in 1851, could be found in the lane in the next census, nor were those listed in the lane in 1861 to be found there a decade later. However as Table 3.13 shows, the scale and intensity of this mere lane was different to that of Walmgate, York. Britannia Yard in Walmgate, featured by Finnegan for its intensive settlement of poor Irish and its reputation for rows and overcrowding contained in 1851 a population of 171, of whom 154 Irish. The corresponding figures for 1861 were 132 (120) and for 1871 were a remarkable 91 (89).

The transience in the lane was not dissimilar to what was occurring to the population at large in other central streets; Greenhow had remarked on Court 34 Gosford Street that ‘the houses are old, and the rooms low and population so migratory’. Table 3.13 indicates the Irishcom, even with a serious presence in 1851, never numerically monopolized the lane, especially around 1861 to justify Greenhow’s remark of the time that they comprised ‘a large proportion’ of the lane.

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91 Finnegan, *Irish in York*, pp. 48, 61, 159
92 Greenhow, Second Report 1860, p. 72
93 The occupying Irish in 1861 were:

At 3 Palmer Lane, lived John Ganley 26y, a masons labourer, with his wife Whinifort 25y, a charwoman, both Irish-born, and their 4 (eldest 9y) Coventrian children (6 in household).

In C3 lived Ann Barrett 23y, her sister Mary 19y, both Irish-born unmarried charwomen, and 2y John, who was Anne’s son, born in Birmingham (3 in household). Also residing in C3 was Bridget Mullin 36y, another unmarried Irish-born charwoman (1 in household). In C3 likewise was John Charney 34y, an ag labourer and wife Mary 34y, a laundress, both Irish-born (2 in household). The previous three households shared the dwelling with 3 other non-Irish small households.

Next in H4C4 ‘Palmer Lodging House’ resided Martin Bass 50y, an ag labourer and wife Mary 45, a laundress both Irish-born, and their 3 (eldest 5y) Coventrian children, with 4 Irish-born lodgers, 3 of whom were ag labourers, and also a 70y, school master totalling 9 Irishcom (5 other lodgers completed the household at 14).

In H10C4 was Martin Jennings 38y, a silk thrum dealer and wife Anne 25y, both Irish-born, their 3 (eldest 5y) Coventrian children and a 22y, boarding charwoman from Ireland (6 in household). (Jennings’s subsequent behaviour is related in Appendix 4)
Figure 3.2 (Left) Palmer Lane looking North from Ironmonger Row, 1934. ‘C’ on Map 3.3A marks the position a little forward of where the camera stood. Figure 3.2A (Right) Pilgrims Rest Inn on the corner of Palmer Lane and Ironmonger Row. 

The door to right in Figure 3.2 was the entrance to the Pilgrims Rest Public House.
Map 3.3. (Top) Palmer Lane showing location of Irishcom in 1861. Map 3.3A. (Bottom) Palmer Lane showing location of Irishcom in 1881. 94

94 Underlying Map © British Library
The lane had an unsettled reputation throughout the century (Appendix 4). Maps 3.3 & 3.3A indicate that Court 4 displayed a stronger cluster of Irishcom in 1881 than in 1861. Table 3.14 in listing the Irishcom occupants of the court reveals the licensed lodging house acted as a local attracting force to fresh Irish-born. Its Irishcom numbers also included Coventry-settled Irishcom: 7 members of the Richard Gahegan family and 5 of the Sheridan family who were all born in Coventry. Richard featured first as a lodger of Owen Grogan in 1851 and had been in front of the bench on fourteen occasions since. There was a settled feel to the Court in 1881 as many of its occupants such as Cicely and Catherine Burke, Mary Riley and the Sheridan and Gahegan households were present in 1871. Close by in New Buildings lived a troublesome Austin Ryan with his family and his boarder Patrick Mortimer, both bricklayers’ labourers from Mayo. In 1874 Ryan and a Patrick Dufley had attacked James Rouse in the Falcon Inn, Well Street. Mary, wife of Austin was charged in 1875 with threatening to cut the head off a widow called Eliza Smith. Austin Ryan and Mortimer were part of a ‘Five Irishmen’ group referred to later, while Mortimer’s strategic marriage to Catherine Burke is outlined in Appendix 2. Mayo-born labourer Mark Burns who was an unmarried lodger of Cicely Burke in 1871, was charged in 1877 with violently assaulting his wife Coventry-born Mary Ann in Palmer Lane. She appeared in court with a black eye and said he had beaten her badly. He had previously been sent to gaol for treating her cruelly and on this occasion he was sent to prison for three months with hard labour. They were still living together with their 3 young Coventry-born children in Fleet Street in 1881.

Map 2.4 shows the unhealthy environs of the lane in 1897.

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95 The Coventry Herald 23rd June 1848 reported four prostitutes, occupying apartments in Palmer Lane were charged with disorderly conduct. The Coventry Herald 11th May 1849 reported that three women charged as prostitutes ‘belonged to one of the infamous brothels in Palmer-lane, the resort of thieves and characters of the worst description’. The Coventry Herald 11th November 1887 reported that Harriett Perrin H3C2 Palmer Lane was summoned for keeping a brothel in Palmer Lane. See Appendix 4: 13th July 1866; 12th December 1873; 15th October 1880; 25th May 1883.
96 Coventry Standard 19th June 1874
97 Ibid. 13th August 1875
98 Ibid. 25th May 1877. According to the Coventry Standard 3rd September 1875 Mark was fighting in June in Ironmonger Row. When summoned he then absconded and only surrendered in September.
99 RG11/3069.69.10 ED 29; Mark was found in the Workhouse in 1901.
New Buildings

Map 3.4. (Top) New Buildings showing Irishcom 1861.
Map 3.4A. (Bottom) New Buildings showing Irishcom 1881. 100

100 Underlying Map © British Library
Figure 3.3 New Buildings, during demolition of old property, 1935. ‘C’ on Map 3.4A marks position of the camera.

In the vicinity of Palmer Lane and in the heart of the town, New Buildings, best described as forming a Y shape, ran from Ironmonger Row toward Hales Street. Smithfield cattle market and three timber yards were close by. The Irishcom numbered 54 in 1861 and 39 in 1881. Though thus diminished since 1861 Map 3.4A shows a household presence particularly in Courts 3 and 4, in 1881.\textsuperscript{101} Michael Hogen, a shoemaker, and family were present in both years, so was John McHale a general dealer, with his family, as was John Moran. The Ryan family was also settled in the Lane. The \textit{Herald} 5\textsuperscript{th} July 1861 reported:

\begin{quote}
101 Susanna Foster wife of William who was the ‘Instructor of Volunteers’ provided the Irishcom connection for the family of 8 Irishcom shown in the Armoury in 1881 (Map 3.4A).
\end{quote}
‘An Assault. John Moran, provision dealer, New Buildings, appeared in answer to a summons, charged with assaulting a boy named Henry Duckman. It appeared from the evidence of the boy that he was in New-buildings about half-past seven o’clock, on Monday morning last, selling whey, when the defendant remonstrated with him for making so much noise. The boy very indiscreetly said there was nobody to awaken at that hour except the Irish, and they were of no account. Moran being an Irishman himself, took this as an insult, and beat him severely. Moran was fined 1s and costs.’

West Orchard
Greenhow had no concern over any particular courts and remarked:

‘West Orchard is a long narrow street said to have formerly been in a wretched condition. ...diarrhoea used to prevail to a great extent…The street was subsequently drained and otherwise improved, and the River Sherbourne, which flows near to it, cleaned. The public health of the street and adjoining courts is said to have greatly improved.’

It is surprising that Greenhow did not mention Caldicott’s Yard, in West Orchard with its apex at the confluence of the Radford Brook and the River Sherbourne, where a large contingent of Irish was located. J.R. Martin it will be recalled wrote it was as an extensive court and was a most offensive compound of everything detrimental to health. In it a number of houses were built to the edge of these watercourses – indeed House 10 was built over the brook, so they could have suffered from dampness, vermin, river odours or flooding. Houses backing on to the Sherbourne were three storied, which would have provided extra space to take in lodgers. In 1760 there were four houses on the site which had increased to 22 in the years close to 1790, so by 1860 these houses, built to an eighteen century design were at least seventy years old. It is suggested that Irish gathered here because rents were affordable to those with low-income occupations and it was close to the market area for hawkers, two of which are shown in Table 3.15. West Orchard was a street reputed for taking in lodgers and thus attractive to newcomers. A known Irish presence in the vicinity would attract other Irish anxious to hear word from compatriots of job opportunities. It is likely that the court itself had an appeal because the brook and particularly the bounding river, together with the single street entrance, gave it the comforting feel of an enclave. The problems caused by proximity to the river may have made it less attractive to Non-Irish renters, as might the reputation of some of its 1861 occupants: Charles O Donnell and Richard Gallagon.

The Herald 30th December 1853 reported that John McIntyre was charged by John Vice with maintaining an unregistered lodging house in Caldicott’s Yard. Vice said, in

102 Greenhow, Second Report, p.70
104 Richard Gallagon/Gahegan had moved to Palmer Lane in 1881
any case he could not register the house as it was unfit for lodging. There were only two rooms, one above and one below. In McIntyre’s kitchen there was a bed where he slept with his wife. Upstairs four men slept in two beds and a little boy who was McIntyre’s son slept on the floor. He had been cautioned in the past without success. The confined conditions coupled with the personalities residing therein meant that the yard had a charged atmosphere with their rowdy antics referred to on a number of occasions in newspapers. The relative abandonment of Caldicotts Yard by Irish is visible in 1881 in Map 3.5A, and it was devoid of Irish in 1891.

105 See Appendix 4 Coventry Standard 14th September 1849
106 On 18th Nov 1853 the Standard reported on the behaviour of James Harvey who in future years would frequently appear before the Bench.

‘James Harvey was charged by James Moore, both Irish-men, with assaulting him on Saturday night. This arose out of one of those frequent rows which take place in Caldicott’s yard, at the bottom of West-orchard, and in the present case, as usual, hammers, pokers, and other such articles were freely used about the heads of the combatants, and Moore came in for his share of wounds and bruises. On the other hand, the defendant, Harvey, whose face showed he had been very brutally treated, proved, by the evidence of an Englishman, that he was first beaten, and his head broken with a hammer. –The case was dismissed.’

A christening led to a melee and assault on a constable on 28th December 1855 (Appendix 4). The very same behaviour occurred in January 1860 when on the 13th the Standard recorded:

‘An Irish Christening – Richard Gallaghan was charged with being drunk and disorderly and assaulting a constable in West Orchard, at one o’clock the same morning. This was a case of [a] fierce Irish row in Caldicott’s Yard, and the prisoner was a participator in the fray…He promised to take the pledge…Mary Kearney, John Kearney and Patrick Brannan were also charged…all concerned in the Hibernian rumpus…’

Thomas Kelley alias Gallaghan was charged with rescuing Richard from the police constable. At the time he avoided apprehension ‘but his curiosity prompted him to come to the Court and see how his companions fared’ whereon he was taken into custody. All were fined various amounts. Richard was again before the court in August 1861 for being involved in a tremendous ‘Another Irish Row’ fully described in Appendix 4. This appendix also describes Thomas Gahagan’s involvement in a fight leading to the death of Samuel Oliver in West Orchard in 1871.
Map 3.5. Irishcom in West Orchard in 1861. The popularity of Court 9 is apparent.

Map 3.5A. Irishcom in West Orchard in 1881.  

107 Underlying Map © British Library
Gosford Street

While Greenhow expressed concern over Courts 11, 14, 34 and 44, he reported the total of 43 courts in the street as in good condition, ‘open, airy, and often have garden ground at their further end.’ There were no Irish in the courts of concern. The presence of Irishcom in the vicinity of Gosford Street, listed in Table 3.16 is represented in Map 3.6 (See Figure 3.4).

Involvement in the silk trade, shoemaking and tailoring is evident, as is origin in Dublin, Cork and Kilkenny. It is suggested that if Catherine Manning and Mary Tomms were not sisters then they were good friends. Further, it is suggested that most of the persons in 1861 shown in the Table would have known each other simply from the length of time they had spent in the vicinity. Lydia Cleaver had come to Coventry over 26 years ago, Mary Tomms over 23 years ago, the Spiller family between five and twelve, while the Eaton family had arrived within the last seven years. In 1881 the only Irishcom household to be found in the area covered by Map 3.6 was at H3C22 which was that of Coventry-born shoemaker John Piggott 71 years, and Ann, his Dublin-born wife, and 2 adult sons born in Coventry. The Irish in this part of the street appeared to have an older-settled feel about them if measured by the the more frequent mention of other ‘Irish’ areas during proceedings before the magistrates.
This rare image looks east on Gosford Street; the languid scene hides as much as it reveals. Map 3.6 shows the arched entrance just left of centre, through a long passageway, provided access to Court 22. The group of people are standing in the vicinity of entrances to Courts 23 and 24. The windowed top shops in this weavers’ area of the city are noticeable. The large windows must have rendered buildings cold in winter, while the chimney stacks having each but one chimney pot also suggests these houses were not sufficiently warmed. Perhaps in order to preserve heat some of the windows on the building to the left have been bricked up. It may also have been because the heavily windowed walls did not offer enough support to the upper part of the building; the flanged walls seen on either side of the entrance to Court 22 suggest the brickwork between them was flimsy. In 1861 the New Inn (with gas lamp attached) contained Coventrian publican & butcher John Cluley, 46 years, his family of 7, together with 12 lodgers and 1 visitor. Court 22 contained 28 persons, Court 23, a total of 34 persons and Court 24, a total of 35 persons.

In 1871 the New Inn was the residence of Coventrian tailor & publican William Lea, 62 years, his Irish-born wife Jane, 58 years, and Coventrian daughter Jane, 19 years, who was a dressmaker.
134

Map 3.6. Gosford Street near bridge over the Sherbourne showing Irishcom 1861. ‘C’ marks position of the camera taking the image displayed in Figure 3.4.108

Much Park Street

Of the street Greenhow said:

‘It was open and airy… with about 40 courts inhabited by the poorer classes, and frequently entered from the street through narrow arched passages…Almost all the houses and courts have water laid on from the public works…A few of the courts are provided with waterclosets, the remainder with privies, which are well away from the houses…’

Greenhow expressed concern over Courts 21, 27, and 33. His concern centred on the location of toilets:

‘Privies have been built against houses, as in court 27, or are so situated as to be offensive to the inmates of neighbouring houses as in court 21.’

Court 21 (Marked B on Map 3.7) contained 2 Irish families that of Thomas Gallagan and of Ann Brennan.109 Greenhow’s wording could mean that either Court 20 or Court

108 Underlying Map © British Library
109 Court 21:

HI. Thomas Gallagan, 21 years, a labourer, his wife Catherine, 22 years, who was a charwoman, and his mother in law all from Mayo. Their infant son and a child both Coventrians completed the family (5 in household).
22, was responsible for the offensive odour in Court 21. **Court 22** (Marked ‘B’ on Map 3.7) contained 4 Irish families, that of Patrick Burne, Martin Byrne, Michael Gallagan and Edward Clarke. The dominant Galligan presence in this (and Court 21), and their Burne/Byrne relationship together with the Mayo/Roscommon origin is apparent. The familial strength of the Galligan/Gallegin household, a contingent that arrived in Coventry circa 1850 and whose tough members frequently caught the attention of the police is shown in the 1851 census (Table 3.8; Appendix 4). By 1881 there was no Irish presence in the Court.

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**H4.** Ann Brennan, 50 years, who was a widow and a marine store dealer, with her 3 children all from Mayo (4 in household).

**Court 22:**

**H1.** Patrick Burne, 50 years, a labourer, his wife (most likely a Galligan), Mary 40 years, 4 children, the eldest 12 years, all born in Coventry, and 3 lodgers - Richard Galligan, 61 years, a widower, Mark Galligan, 21 years, and Michael 18 years, all labourers from Mayo (9 in household).

**H2.** Martin Byrne, 45 years and his wife Bridget, 40 years, a housekeeper, both from Mayo and John Gallagher a grandson, 2 years, born in Coventry (3 in household).

**H3.** Michael Gallagan, 40 years, a labourer, his wife Ellen, 30 years, both from Mayo and 3 children, the eldest 5 years, all born in Coventry, niece Mary Gallagan, 22 years, from Mayo and her 2 year old Coventrian son Thomas (7 in household).

**H6.** Edward Clarke, 45 years, a labourer, his wife Hannah, 40 years, a housekeeper and son Edward 17 years, a watchmaker and gilder, all from Roscommon (3 in household).

The labouring unskilled occupations of the recent arrivals is clear but Edward Clarke’s son working as a watchmaker and gilder and Ann Brennan’s 2 daughters aged 18 years and 16 years who both worked as silk fillers, most likely in Hart’s ribbon manufactory that was further up Much Park Street, show that Irish could quickly align with the established occupations of the city. RG9/2202.21-24.8-13 ED10.

Ten years earlier Edward Clarke, then described as a hawker, and family were resident in Much Park Street. So too was Patrick Burn who had left Castlebar in 1837, while in 1851 James Galegin, 20 years, a labourer and wife Hannah, 30 years, headed a household of 14 which included 12 lodgers from Ireland, 10 of whom were called Galegin. HO107/2067.210.24 ED 11; HO107/2067.249-250.16-18 ED 12

In 1871 in H4 of Court 22 was resident James Davitt a 42 year old widower from Cork with his 5 local- born children ranging in age from 14 to 7. The Husselby family still resided at H5. These were the only families left in the Court, amounting to 11 persons of whom 1 was Irish-born and 6 Irishcom. The Burne and Galligan families so prominent a decade earlier had left.

As for Court 21, in 1871 Michael Galligan/Gahagan and his family who was residing in Court 22 had now moved into H8 and were the only Irish therein. In 1874 four boys including Michael Gahagan’s son William were defendants in court charged with behaving in a disorderly manner and using bad language. They were accused of making a great noise and kicking the doors of houses fronting Much Park Street. They had to reappear with their fathers, and were then reprimanded and told to keep the peace for three months. Perhaps his father did not provide William with examples of good behaviour since in July 1874 Michael was charged and pleaded guilty to fighting in New Buildings. (Coventry Standard 23rd January 1874 and 31st July 1874; RG10/3175.76-77.15-17 ED 6).
Map 3.7 Irishcom in Much Park Street area 1861
Note how courts marked A, B and C contained no Irishcom in 1881.
Images taken from within courtyards are extremely rare. This image of Court 17 Much Park Street looks north. Though undated it appears little altered from the publication of Map 3.7 in 1888. The five court houses are to the right and regrettably not shown but according to the map are of varying size and have no back doors. Visible is the rickety condition of the buildings, actual length of the entrance, common water tap, common outdoor toilet in left foreground together with the unsightly refuse placed along the wall. Table 3.17 shows the Irishcom who resided in the court in 1861 and 1871.

St. Johns Street

Greenhow expressed concern over the ventilation, condition and location of privies in Courts 4, 5 and 22, which did not contain Irishcom. Otherwise he was satisfied with what he saw as a narrow street that contained 16 courts. Interest in Court 13 of this street is prompted by the concentration of Irishcom within, the availability of 2 images and plan showing the layout and piecemeal development of the court. The easterly end of the street where the court was located could be seen as more within the Irish ambit of Much Park Street. Table 3.18 shows the Irishcom occupancy of the court with the presence of a lodging house an attracting factor. The street was devoid of Irish in 1881
Figure 3.6 (Left) H2C13 St. Johns Street. Figure 3.6A (Right) H14C13 St. Johns Street – a court within a court. Marked ‘C’ on Map 3.7.  

The woman in Figure 3.6 appears to be standing at the corner of House 2. The girl in the white dress in Figure 3.6A is standing in front of House 14.

Figure 3.7
Plan of Court 13 St. Johns Street 1851 with dates of developments. Showing Irishcom in 1861.

113 Alcock, Housing the Urban Poor, p. 56
Greyfriars Lane
Greenhow did not refer to this most central narrow lane that ran north into the High Street and contained 12 courts. With adjacent Warwick Lane it was popular with Irish, containing 120 Irishcom in 1851 and 96 Irishcom in 1861. Though some who gave Ireland as their birthplace were undoubtedly from Mayo, not one of those who proffered a county stated they were from Mayo in 1861. In that year fourteen household heads described themselves as labourers. Though still found in 1881, Irishcom representation had thinned in many of the courts. In the 1850s a number of Irish incidents e.g. overcrowding, were reported from the area and are noted in Appendix 4.114 The area had an unsavoury reputation and was called a ‘back slum’.115

114 See Appendix 4 in particular: 28th September 1849, 25th April 1851, 19th August 1853, 26th May 1854, 6th August 1858, and 5th July 1859.
115 A disturbance in Greyfriars Lane that involved a fatality prompted the Coventry Standard 18th November 1864 to comment that the vicinity of Greyfriars Lane was a sink of iniquity. ‘Sometimes the ordinary level of crime in the lane is passed, and its customary drunkenness, debauchery, riot, and robbery, lead to crimes still more awful…. A more repulsive neighbourhood than this lane can hardly be conceived. One may imagine that showy gin palaces which characters frequent may have a certain amount of attraction for the depraved. But the miserable holes of public-houses in the lane - what must the people be who are attracted to them? It seems to be a custom for the landlords of these houses, or at all events some of them, to hold other dens near, which houses are used for the vilest of purposes. Many of these are in filthy yards; they do not appear to have been built for houses; but with respect to size, comfort, ventilation and dirt, they seem rather to partake of the characteristics of the pigstye. There are front ways and back ways; ways from one house to another; tortuous windings and mazes in yards; low passages through which you have to creep; and in short plenty of facilities for easily baffling any one not conversant with the locality.’ There was no mention of Irish or blame attached to them for the reputation of the vicinity.
Map 3.8. Irishcom in Greyfriars Lane 1861.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{116}Underlying Map © British Library
Map 3.8A. Irishcom in Greyfriars Lane 1881.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{117} Underlying Map © British Library
Well Street
Greenhow did not express concern over any particular court and was relaxed about the conditions in Well Street which had benefitted from the municipal improvements in the 1850s. He reported: ‘Runs parallel to the Radford Brook which, so recently as two years ago, received the soil from nearly all the privies on side of the street’. However in the Herald 17th November 1871 William Henry Green of the Pheasant Inn, 27 Well Street, just at the edge of Figure 3.8 (the large entrance to the right is the opening to Pheasant Yard), was prosecuted for keeping pigs. Likewise prosecuted for keeping pigs was Mary Ann Sheppard licensee of the Wagon and Horses, 7 Well Street. Meetings of the Land League were held in both of these pubs in the 1880s suggesting the street had some recognition as being an ‘Irish’ one. Table 3.19 shows the occupancy and movement in and out over over forty years for what Mulkern called an ‘infamous’ court. The Times 30th June 1880 told that John Grogan of that court was bound to the peace for 3 months after Elizabeth Dingley complained that he threatened to “shiver her head and pull her heart out”. The residence of the ‘well known’ Grogan and Harrity families in the 1870s and 1880s is to be noted, as is in 1891 the sole presence of one Irishcom family identified through the presence of Irish-born Elizabeth Conroy. Thomas Hennessey referred to in Chapters 4 and 5 (Appendix 2) was a substantive shoemaker and later licensee of the Wagon & Horses in Well Street. Thomas Kelly, a boot manufacturer, lived with his wife Elizabeth and family at 45 Well Street (Their residence marked by the only ’6’ on north side of Well Street shown in Map 3.9A). In 1882 a report in the Herald under the title ‘The mysterious death in Well- Street’ outlined that following Elizabeth’s death an anonymous letter had been received by the police saying her death was due to gross neglect. This prompted an inquest at which some insights into the circumstances of a migrant family emerge. They left Ireland after 1863 and Eliza who had been in Hatton Lunatic Asylum four years earlier had relapsed into insanity a year after leaving the asylum. A doctor told the inquest that while she looked emaciated it was impossible to say that her death was due to neglect or starvation. Her daughter said her father was kind to her mother. She said her mother had meat and gruel and the neighbours brought her broth. On the evening of her death she had bread, butter and tea. The Deputy Coroner told Kelly that the jury felt his conduct required censure. He had had shown no unkindness to the deceased but he was in the

118 Meetings were also held at other venues in the city
119 Mulkern, Irish and Public Disorder in Coventry, p. 135
habit of drinking and had neglected to provide proper medical attention for his spouse.

Figure 3.8 Well Street. ‘C’ on Map 3.9A marks position of the camera.

It is indeed fortunate that this evocative and relevant image has survived. It looks east along Well Street towards the Bishop Street/Burgess/Hale Street intersection. John Speed’s ‘The Ground Plott of Coventre’ shows buildings along this street in 1610; the first floor timber overhangs of some buildings indicate they date back towards that time. The two women are walking on the south side towards Bond Street. The style of dress suggests a late nineteenth century scene. They are perfectly placed to pinpoint, with the nose of the dog, the entrance to Court 8 (See Table 3.19). It could be suggested that these women knew little of what lay behind the entrance. Map 3.9 indicates it was the entrance to what Mulkern called the ‘infamous’ court, where censuses noted 27 houses. In 1861 there were 32 Irishcom residing but a decade later not one of that group remained in the Court. In 1871 it contained 19 Irishcom. A remark by Superintendent Skermer in the Herald 17th September 1859 that ‘the boys in this neighbourhood were exceedingly troublesome and often required a beating to keep them in order’ tells that it was not a tranquil area.

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120 Coventry Herald 15th and 22nd September 1882
Hill Street

This street was not selected by Greenhow. It serves as an example of an ‘ordinary’ street; one that did not come to attention in official reports where concern was raised about the poor condition of certain street and lanes. The settlement of the Irish in this street is explored in Appendix 3 where the frequent movement of families is to be observed. Interestingly it has for mention, six of the Dublin weavers found in the 1841 census shown in Table A.1.1: Brooks, Dwyer, Elston, Fleetwood, Hare and Harris.
3.5 Crime

Appendix 4 provides a comprehensive round-up of the nature and extent of ‘Irish’ crime in the city. Most Irish lived in streets that encircled the town centre and so they were more likely to be noticed by the police, if they walked home in an intoxicated, boisterous mood on late-night, deserted streets. Apart from street inebriation the characteristic reasons why the Irish appeared before the courts were because they participated in alcohol fuelled fights, among themselves, or less frequently were embroiled in altercations between themselves and those that were termed the ‘English’. Usually one or two policemen handled these incidents which were normally classed as petty crime. Police were not usually confronted by a group, although the presence of a ‘mob’ might be sensed in the background at a scene of trouble. Coventry was not a saintly city and since the law was enforced for even very minor offences, newspapers had plenty of material for their accounts about persons in front of the bench. Within this reportage the colourfully overwritten ‘Irish’ crimes caught attention, especially in the febrile post-Famine twenty years. Without an indicator in a report, such as the word ‘Irish’, an Irish associated surname, faux-Irish brogue, sticks or pokers, many of these incidents would not have stood out from the generality of crime in the city.

Roberts noted how quarrelling could be actuated in slum conditions. He wrote of the tedium of the back streets:

‘On the light evenings after a day’s work many men, even if they had the desire, possessed no means of occupying body or mind. Ignorance and poverty combined to breed, for the most part, tedium, a dumb accidie of the back streets to which only brawling brought relief.’

It must have also found its alleviation in public houses. The Irish brought with them a fondness for alcohol. The Herald 7th April 1837 related the findings of George Nicholls, Poor Law Commissioner, regarding the condition of Ireland. See Appendix 15. He also wrote:

‘Another characteristic of the Irish, is their intemperance. Drunkenness appears to be much more common than in England…I understand their potatoe diet renders the Irish people more easily affected by the spirit than others – it may possibly increase their love for it. I have been everywhere assured that the vice of drunkenness is increasing…’

121 On 6th December 1873 according to the Coventry Standard five boys were charged with playing tip-cap, while the same newspaper on 17th January 1873 reported John Moran was summoned for not having a dog license.
122 Robert, Roberts. The Classic Slum, (Harmondsworth 1974) p. 49
123 Report of George Nicholls on Poor Laws, Ireland, PP 1837 LVI p. 5
Heinrick in 1872 remarked ‘drink is the crime and curse of Irishmen in this country. It is the stigma which, of all others, is the most fatal to their character’.124 Labouring was a thirst inducing activity and with approximately 250 public houses in the town, alcohol was readily available. Best remarked drinking places became social centres where both sexes could forget or not notice their hard existence. 125 Drinking soothed frustrations and lifted the mood of exile lament but it also lessened self-command and unleashed their resentments and grudges.

Allowance could be made for the unstable behaviour of some Irish due to effects of the basic conditions in which they lived locally, the primitive ones they had earlier endured in Ireland, together with the trauma of the Famine years. There were many migrant men in a young age cohort noted as more prone to perpetrate violence. 126 Also some Irish had plainly become alcoholics and unable to escape the toxic consequences of their addiction. Nevertheless it is obvious from the accounts detailed in Appendix 4, that some Irish had little social grace and were deviant, hot-tempered, excitable, uncouth bullies who only required alcohol or a taunt to turn belligerent and violent. They had the capacity to take deep offence at perceived slights and could use physical force in redress. The very machismo, defiant, tough reputation that was seen as disgraceful by city folk, perhaps perversely within an Irish circle of labourers, with few social attributes, was accorded a revered status. Ignored and without status in wider society, some Irish men created for themselves an ‘important’ reputation in Irish company through their labouring strength, capacity to drink, or willingness to settle scores with their fists.

Irish women could be as violent as their menfolk and a number were habitual drunkards.127 Excessive drinking was frowned on by respectable society. The Standard 3rd February 1877 reprinted a hard-hitting pastoral from Ullathorne on the evils of visiting what he called ‘vile resorts’ that sell drink. He proclaimed: ‘Let the Catholic man respect himself, and also the Catholic woman. Let them consider what they are,

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124 O’Day, Survey of the Irish, pp. 28, 29
125 Best, Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75, p. 242
126 ‘Young male syndrome’ - The propensity of males in their mid-to late teens and twenties, and particularly unmarried and unemployed, to engage in violent altercations to resolve seemingly trivial matters. (APA Dictionary of Psychology).
127 Bridget Lynes was fortunate in 1856 that there were no witnesses to her use of a metal jug during a violent assault that Patrick Grogan said she made on him. Thus the case was dismissed. Patrick was from Kerry and not a member of the less than angelic Grogan clan from Mayo. Bridget’s true colours were revealed in print in 1875 when she was charged with violently assaulting her 12 year old daughter Rose. It transpired this was her fifth appearance in court, that she was a powerfully-built woman and was very violent when drunk, having been committed to prison for eight weeks, seven months earlier for stabbing her son with a toasting fork. (Coventry Standard 4th July 1856 and 21st May 1875).
and for what they are responsible. Let them shun the public-house as they would a pestilence.’

The Church was aware of the hardship caused to families by drink. Mary Ryan was charged with creating a breach of the peace in Ironmonger Row in 1875. She had caused a commotion for several hours outside the Pilgrim Inn (Figure 3.2) because the landlord refused her entry to confront her husband who had continued drinking within. She complained her husband had left her and the children without food. In the same year James Harvey appeared drunk in court to answer a charge by his wife that he had assaulted her.

The Irish may have signalled their ethnicity through group drunken behaviour and being so identified were at risk, in such a volatile state, of rising to taunts mischievously made by locals about the Irish. The Standard 12th September 1845 told how Peter Burke was charged by John Laton with assaulting him on the Burges (Table 3.2).

‘Burke and some other of his countrymen came brandishing their sticks about, and seemed disposed to strike any one that came in their way. Burke struck him and knocked him down… Burke, whose face bore evident marks of having been roughly treated, said himself and companions had been hooted after, and very ill-used, by a number of persons in Broad Gate and Cross Cheaping…’

It is to be remembered many Irish did not come to the attention of the police at all. A counterpoint to the notorious revelry of the early 1860s is mention of the renown of Armagh-born James Murray, who died in 1863 and who was responsible for designing the Coventry Corn Exchange Building (Appendix 2; Figure 3.10). The sequential outline in Appendix 4 of Irish crime may leave an appearance that Irish misconduct was disproportionately greater than that of other city dwellers. However Irish ‘rows’ apart, mention of Irish crime paralleled that of city crime, was predictable in type and recurrence, was petty in nature and usually involved crimes of theft. Few cases required sending to the Warwickshire Quarter Assizes.

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128 Coventry Standard 13th August 1875. Mary Ryan was a 50 year old widow in 1881 residing in H11C4 Palmer Lane which was accessed behind the Pilgrim Inn. Though born in Coventry there was evidence of an Irish association: her lodger was an Irish-born hawker Bridget Killen.

129 Coventry Standard 29th October 1875

130 Swift, Crime and the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain, p. 20. He remarked that ‘Countless Irish were essentially law-abiding and faced the day-to-day difficulties and uncertainties of life in the Victorian city without coming into formal contact with the law’.

131 In the county prison opened in Warwick in 1860 there were recorded in the 1861 census 186 prisoners of whom 8 were Irish-born. RG9/2226.117 St. Mary: ED Prison.
There was no indication the Irish were treated more harshly than locals by the magistrates as Appendix 4 shows. A fine (probably more punitive than nowadays realised) was frequently imposed with a failure to pay warranting imprisonment for up to a month. Repeat offenders could be imprisoned but on occasions a promise by an accused Irish person that they would not reoffend could merit a lenient response, though it may be suspected the magistrates were not entirely convinced of the bona fides of such asservation. As the years unfolded it became clear that migrant serial offenders on alcohol charges were viewed to be acting as habitual drunkards rather than as Irish with a clichéd penchant for alcohol.

The police did not seem to have an anti-Irish agenda or unduly enforce those aspects of the law that brought them into contention with the Irish community as Swift observed as having occurred in Wolverhampton.\(^\text{132}\) Neither was there evidence of any bad faith that was shown by the Birmingham Police during the Park Street riots.\(^\text{133}\) The fact that the Irish did not seem to complain that they were being singled out for police harassment because of their background must have informally aided inclusion.\(^\text{134}\) John MacDermott from Callan Co. Kilkenny was a police constable in 1851, a detective-sergeant in 1863 and in 1869 at 60 years, he was Inspector of Police. In 1841 two Irish-born women were married to police constables while in 1891 one woman was so married. Probably more irritating to the Irish was the conduct of the Inspector of Nuisances, who keenly brought cases of overcrowding before the magistrates. That said the Irish were probably cautious of the police who were the agents of another nationality.

There was no collective menace by the Irish. What was sensed by the reporter on 16\(^{th}\) August 1850 in the *Herald* when Michael McKeogh was referred to as, ‘a

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<td>24</td>
<td>Farm labourer</td>
<td>Castlebar</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Farm labourer</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>Hawker</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Farm labourer</td>
<td>Kells, Co Meath</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Farm labourer</td>
<td>Roscommon</td>
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\(^{132}\) Swift, ‘Another Stafford Street Row’, pp. 184-187  
\(^{134}\) The police were capable of harassment. Amos Turville, a licensed victualler in Spon Street wrote to the *Coventry Standard* 21\(^{st}\) May 1875 saying at the beginning of his letter: ‘I have for a long time past been subject to a police surveillance and espionage which has become simply intolerable.’
prominent member of the notorious garrison of low Irish, about 40 or 50 of whom are crowded in a tenement or two in Leicester-street’ did not endure. A crowd might be mentioned as present on occasions but it may have been comprised of curious bystanders. There were no Irish riots and Swift’s observation seems appropriate to Coventry. ‘The relative absence of disturbances involving the Irish [e.g. in Coventry, Chester and Leicester] signifies a measured degree of accommodation into local society’. Swift distinguished generally between intra-communal brawling which he said was not of particular interest to magistrates or police unless it reached the public domain, sectarian violence, and inter-communal disorder. Only the first type featured in Coventry while it was spared the remainder.

In the 1870s there was less mentioning of an Irish background in newspapers. This may have been due to reduced number of fresh migrants, but also to the fact that as the settled migrants grew older, the caution of old age set in; there was a mature realisation that wild behaviour was increasingly out of place and brought discredit on them and their families. Though some such as James Harvey remained incorrigible, others may have been worn down by the repeated attention of the police, court fines and prison-time levied. As the years progressed, pointing out an Irish background in newsprint seemed an increasingly irrelevant detail in describing people who had lived for years in the city. Many were no longer easily identified as Irish, since an Irish suggesting patronymic would now belong to many persons, who had Irish parentage but had been born and resident all their lives in Coventry. This was the situation reflected in the Times 4th July 1877 report where Edward Hogan and David Farrell were ordered by the magistrates to enter in a bond of £10 and £5 respectively and to keep the peace for three months after they were accused of breaching it the previous Saturday. Edward was an 18 years old, Coventry-born shoemaker in 1871. He resided with Michael Hogan who was a 47 year old shoemaker from Cork, living with his 54 year old wife Sarah from Newry at 35 New Buildings. Again the Standard 5th December 1873 recorded that Patsy Ryan, 13 years and William Moran, 14 years, (both born in Coventry of Irish parents) were involved in a gang of 16 to 18 lads who struck boys and girls with sticks as they walked through the streets. One of the boys had used a rough hawthorn stick to assault a girl. The magistrates told the defendants who were found guilty that they

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135 Swift, Behaving Badly? p. 112
136 Swift, Crime and the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain, pp. 168, 169; Appendix 4 records only one instance on 6th August 1858 where a policeman referred in an openly disparaging manner to an Irishman.
137 RG10/3180.8.10 ED 10; The same living arrangement applied in 1881. RG11/3072.39.10 ED 10. David Farrell was not found.
138 It is assumed that ‘Patsy’ referred to William who was son of Thomas Ryan, 40 years, an Irish-born labourer in 4 Spon Street. RG10/3182.51.12 ED 25
were determined to end this ‘uproarious and disorderly conduct on the part of boys’. No reference was made to an Irish background and whether these boys were part of an ‘Irish gang’, or fitted in with a local gang. Whether it was mischief, or had an Irish antagonistic second generation aspect to it remains unknown. Nevertheless Irish background could still be mentioned, as when the Standard 20th June 1873 reported that ‘Five Irishmen’ Michael Needham, Austin Ryan, Michael Coney, James Gill and Patrick Mortimer were charged with being drunk and riotous in Spon Street. Mortimer was lodging with Ryan’s family (Details on Mortimer Appendix 2; Table 3.14). A witness said he had to run to get away from the Irishmen, who appeared to be assaulting everyone with whom they came in contact. The defendants’ solicitor said the prisoners were insulted by some lads and this led to the disturbance. Another witness said the Irishmen seemed to be drunk and were going along the street talking loudly with each other. He heard one or two persons calling after the Irishmen and insulting them.
Chapter 4

National & Religious Identity

The previous chapter outlined aspects of the socio-cultural behaviour that identified migrants in the post-Famine years. This chapter considers how ‘Irish Catholic’ migrants and their children’s generation conveyed their identity. It concerns itself with how they expressed their relationship to Ireland and towards Catholicism. Swift noted that in mid-century these were two of the elements that negatively singled out the Irish as ‘outcasts’.¹ Both were particularly fused in the Irish mind according to Jackson. (Tables 4.1, 4.2 and Appendix 6 provide detail for mid-century of Irish- Catholic marriages, and Irish declarations in the census of Catholicity).² Negative notions of ‘Catholics’ and the ‘Irish’ were separately established constructs of British national identity, according to Hickman. She also saw them as concurrent and intersected. She further observed that a political identity accompanied religious affirmation in Britain.³

Identity has many semblances, especially for succeeding generations, as outlined in Appendix 19, but it is necessary in the chapter to channel its expression into these two streams. Panayi pointed to the inevitability of this particular approach, which he said has been a long held practice in Irish migrant studies where consideration of identity has been based on migrants treated as a block, centred on homeland, and organised around politics and religion. He blamed the paucity of nineteenth century personal accounts for absence of an individually based treatment of identity.⁴

Irish civic identity could be expressed by the nostalgic enjoyment of Irish heritage found in song, dance and story. Identity could also be expressed by sensibility to the interests of people on the island of Ireland, particularly where it concerned a yearning to alter Ireland’s problematic relationship with Britain. This was referred to as ‘the cause’ which, given the appropriate period involved, sought, emancipation, Union repeal, ‘justice’, land reform, or self-government. In this regard an expression of identity might take either an anodyne or more concerted form. In the former Irish persons could share

¹ Swift, Behaving Badly? p. 113. He mentioned all four ‘Poverty, Ethnicity, Religion and Politics’. He stated migrant experience was more complicated and diverse than is suggested by mention of these four fundamentals.
² Jackson, Irish in Britain, p. 137. He was referring to Catholic religion.
⁴ Panayi, Immigration History of Britain, Multicultural Racism since 1800, pp. 137, 139, 140. He remarked in 2014 that recent social-science approach has been to view migrant identity as centred on the individual. This applies especially to second and later generations whose identity might have been shaped by surroundings and so may have a dual identity. However while this approach is feasible in modern investigations, it is more difficult to pursue nineteenth century identity on an individual basis because of the paucity of personal story.
with others of like mind their sense of national distinctiveness through concurring that it was desirable progress should be made on Ireland’s affairs. Disclosing that longing, may have been the limit of their embodiment of national identity. In the latter case expression took a more concerted form, perhaps with an acrimonious edge, by campaigning for the right of Ireland to be perceived as a culturally integral territory entitled to self-rule. Those who championed this idea, imbued with grievance at the manner in which Irish people had been treated by the British establishment, saw it as their patriotic duty to espouse Irish nationalist ideology. They believed all those of Irish association had an obligation to do likewise. For them it was important to have large numbers of Irish identifying themselves as supporters not only to gain political leverage but to demonstrate the organised extent of interest in the cause. However, strong advocacy for the legitimacy of Ireland’s claim, while heightening public consciousness of its value, also brought into the open the oppositional resolve of those who did not agree with nationalist demands.

This chapter will explore the degree of interest the Coventry Irish maintained in the Irish question, and in the extent of its collective expression, if it helped to sustain a community bond. It will be seek out what attitudes the host population held on the notion of a self-governing Ireland, and what sort of reception the locals gave to those Irish expressing themselves in its favour. Two avenues of expression: party politics and the Land League, are explored but they were not totally separate strands as ‘well-known Irishmen’ could be mentioned in connection with either. The Catholic authority’s facilitation of a sustained Irish identity, through the extent of its approval of Irish nationalism, which was seen by activists as ‘short of sympathy’ will be raised. Its encouragement of Irish identity and support for those who expressed their Irish distinctness in the enjoyment of Irish cultural heritage will be reviewed. Collective enjoyment later in the century was facilitated by the Catholic Church making available its schoolrooms. However in so doing it modulated Irish cultural expression to suit Catholic taste and regulated the usefulness of cultural heritage as a means by which nationalist ideology could be propagated.

Catholicism was the common mark of lasting separate identity that many of the migrants and their descendants possessed and shared in practice. Along with the nature of the Church’s promotion of an ethnic identity, the effect of its social and moral moulding of migrant identity will be raised. Intertwined in this topic about the extent of the endorsement the Church wished to bestow on the Irish was the degree of dignity that

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5 Comment of P. O’Donnell. See Appendix 9.
the Church institution was in a position to publicly command and thence offer to its Irish adherents. The Church itself was treading charily (but on occasions provocatively) along a narrow path towards public acceptance. For much of the century when the Church faced disdain, this involved corresponding scorn for its Irish members. The generally assumed harmony between the Catholic Irish and the Catholic priesthood may not have been complete. In early years of arrival Irish Catholics may have been locally tolerated rather than liked by the Church. This may have been due to their distinctive form of Catholic religious worship which Ullathorne referred to as a ‘deep Irish faith’, their migrant neediness, their embarrassing local reputation for alcohol-fuelled impropriety, and a broader reputation for rebelliousness. In later times the general Catholic Irish support for Liberalism with, on balance, its greater kindness to Ireland, may have been privately less than welcomed by a Church aware of the programme of secular education provision Liberals espoused. Church acknowledgement of general Irish support for Liberals may have been also less than forthcoming from the clergy, because it might have drawn undeserved criticism on them from the Unionists who were influential and well-positioned the city. There did exist a subtle link between the Church and the Irish. The Church armed it adherents with a notion of certainty and rightness that was unshakeable no matter how powerful the opposition. This quality of constancy ingrained in many Irish, when applied to the desire for self-rule made for an indomitable spirit.

In general deliberation of migrant identity the stock response is to refer to that of the Irish Catholic, but there was also Irish who did not possess a Catholic national identity, and Irish with a unionist outlook who saw no advantage in subverting the political relationship between the two islands.

4.1 Nationalism

Swift observed that ‘the majority of Irish immigrants had the broad political objective of redefining in some way Ireland’s constitutional relationship with Britain’. This nationalist objective was according to him ‘outside the range of objectives

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7 The Tory approach to control of school management may have appealed more to the clergy. Arthur Kekewich the second Conservative candidate for Coventry in the 1880 election gave his view of Board Schools supplanting voluntary schools: ‘[It] is as unfair for the English Churchman, as for the Protestant Dissenter, or the Roman Catholic; and I shall be extremely sorry to see the day - I hope it is far distant - when, for instance, the Roman Catholic cannot send his child to the school where he thinks he may be virtuously and properly educated, and is obliged to send him to one which he thinks, and which may be and in fact is Godless’. (*Coventry Times* 17th March 1880)
accepted as legitimate by British public opinion”. In the case of Coventry the opportunity to identify in a common purpose to further a separatist ambition arose in different guises over the century. There was the early century movement for repeal of the Union, the Fenian offensive and the exertion for Home Rule later in the century. However it was not until after the 1867 franchise extension that the Irish in Coventry were able to be interpreted as showing common purpose by signalling their support for political arrangements that favoured self-rule in Ireland.

**Repeal of the Union**

There is meagre mention of specifically Irish locals advocating in the city for political or social change during the early part of the century. A short report was published in the *Poor Mans Guardian* 2nd March 1833 which referred to the Coventry Irish Anti-Union Association statement that ‘we the members … view with horror and disgust the conduct of the present administration in endeavouring to pass insurrection and gagging laws for Ireland’. No more is known of this Association. It may have related to some local reformers being annoyed at Edward Ellice the Coventry Whig MP for having voted in favour of an Irish Coercive Bill and who was seeking re-election in April.9

In 1843 there is a solitary reference to local Irish interest in Union repeal but the tendentious nature of the account lessens it evidential value.

‘Mr Bairstow, a chartist, delivered an oration “on repeal” on Monday last, on Grey-friars green. His object appeared to be, to amalgamate “Repeal and Chartism.” But few of the Irishmen in Coventry attended; and the meeting was a flat affair. Socialism and Chartism were never very rampant here, but just now they are at a very low ebb: the horrible doctrines of the former we trust ere long will be extinct.’10

The Irish in Coventry were not singled out for mention as attending the city meeting in 1844 at which O Connell spoke (Appendix 8). It is suggested the meeting hosted by the Mayor saw itself as being organized to seek in broad terms ‘redress of grievances’ found in a ‘suffering’ Ireland, and to protest at O Connell’s impending imprisonment, rather than to demand Union Repeal. Ullathorne’s attendance at the meeting - along with Dissenting clerics, and Radical notables - may be seen in this light, and as an opportunity for them to see the Catholic orator, rather than as supporting a specific demand for Union repeal.

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8 Swift, Outcast Irish in the British Victorian City, pp. 269, 270
9 *Coventry Herald* 12th April 1833
10 *Coventry Standard* 30th June 1843
The Herald 23rd February 1866 saw the Fenians as ‘men of the most dangerous class. They are Irishmen imbued with American notions, thoroughly reckless’. Yet it was thoughtful as to what was the root cause of their activity saying:

‘We defy anyone who looks impartially at this question to do other than come to the conclusion that as a nation we have, in great measure, ourselves to thank for the condition of Ireland… We have not considered their wants from their standpoint; we have not looked at their difficulties by the light of their experience. On the other hand we have too often pooh-poohed their petitions, have time after time treated them as aliens rather than as citizens of the same nation with ourselves; we have forced laws upon them, to which they had the greatest objection, and above all, have forced a religion upon them to which they have the greatest dislike’.

At the start of an eventful year the Herald 4th January 1867 wrote what would prove only half true: ‘the Fenian madness has been put down; but the causes which lead to periodic conspiracy and rebellion are not removed’. Within the year on 29th November 1867 the Herald would outline in great detail the grim circumstances of the recent executions of the Fenians in Manchester. The editorial in the same edition was uneasy and said in a lengthy consideration that there would be opposing views for a period as to ‘whether justice has been dispensed with an even hand, or vengeance has consigned her victims to the scaffold’. It outlined a view that the executed men had not set out to murder but to carry out what they saw as a patriotic and praiseworthy action in freeing Kelly and Deasy and so there was a political aspect to their behaviour which might have justified tenderness towards the prisoners. It noted that the year 1867 was the first time during Victoria’s reign that the scaffold was used for what could be seen as political purposes. It concluded:

‘the fact that three lives have been taken for one, - that two men have been executed whose lives at least would not have been forfeited but for the rash act of a companion – and we cannot wonder that the national conscience should be uneasy’.

The paper also mentioned a funeral procession in Birmingham where five thousand Irishmen wearing green ribbons assembled in Nechell’s Green cemetery to hear a Catholic service for the dead. The close description of the merciless trauma in Manchester must surely have evoked the sympathy of many of the Herald’s Irish

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11 The Irish-American Fenian leaders Thomas Kelly and Timothy Deasy were freed from a prison van in an ambush and spirited away to the U.S.A. During the ambush Sergeant Charles Brett who was escorting the prisoners was shot dead. William Allen, Michael Larkin and Michael O’Brien were found guilty of his murder and executed.

12 Coventry Herald 29th November 1867
readers and a formed mental association with Fenians’ aims, if not their methods. However unlike Birmingham there appears to have been no public gesture of commiseration in Coventry. This was seen as a time of alienation for the Irish in Britain, in contrast to their later century participation in politics, however it cannot be discovered if that sense of alienation was then present in Coventry.

The Standard 20th December 1867 excoriated the Fenians following the Clerkenwell explosion. They were seen as wishing to create terror throughout the United Kingdom, and viewed as similar to ‘determined ruffians whose fierce passions and seared consciences make them regardless of human life’. The horror of the ensuing carnage was graphically described. While it then, in a covering sentence stated, that those who sought “Justice to Ireland” did not necessarily agree with the fiendish methods of the Fenians, it seized the opportunity to bitterly criticise those who sought the pacification of Ireland through reform. The paper in so doing left in the air a tainting insinuation associating them with Fenian violence and of stimulating Fenianism. The end objectives of those seeking reform were according to the Standard the same as the aims of Fenians and their contributions only encouraged the Fenians. It referred to ‘Englishmen who call themselves Protestant’ who called for the disestablishment of the Church in Ireland that now ‘affect to be struck with pious horror, because the Fenians are going to work in a rougher way to accomplish the object, in which both they and such Englishmen concur’.13 It did not resist the opportunity either to turn-in an attack on the Catholic Church. In a separate piece in the same edition headed ‘Fenian Alarms’ it said:

‘Although spared any open Fenian demonstration, Coventry has participated in the general shock given to the inhabitants of this law-loving country, by the miscreants called Fenians in London and elsewhere. If the feeling on the subject is as strong in other parts of the country as in our old city (of which there can be no doubt), the time is at an end when there can be half measures with those who perpetrate these dastardly outrages, or even sympathise with their perpetrators. Public opinion here is that Fenianism is not a patriotic movement whether mistaken or not on the part of Irish people… There was an alarm on Tuesday about an attack said to be contemplated in Coventry, but we hope it was as groundless as it proved to be premature.’14

13 Coventry Standard 20th December 1867
14 Ibid. Two months earlier as the Coventry Times 9th October 1867 reported there had also been some alarm:
‘The Fenians in Coventry - There has been a rumour in this City within the last few days that parties of Fenians were lurking about, and that a descent upon our volunteer depot was meditated. Whether there was any foundation for this, other than the general excitement which pervades all classes of the community, and disposes people to see mountains in molehills we cannot tell, but measures were at once quietly taken to secure the City against any emeute of the kind suggested.’
This alarm was a reference to a note which was left in a pillar box stating the Fenians would attempt to blow up St. Mary’s Hall and St. Michael’s and Holy Trinity Churches.\textsuperscript{15} Although the letter was regarded as a hoax, it was considered wise in the light of the Clerkenwell explosion to increase the number of watchmen in the vicinity. The \textit{Herald} informed on 20\textsuperscript{th} December 1867 that ‘The police are armed with the six-chambered Colt’s revolver, which they carry loaded…’ The paper advised that in order for their readers to form an impression of the ‘fearful nature and devastating effect of the terrible explosion’ in Clerkenwell, it was issuing a supplement showing sketches of the prison layout and the scene following the explosion. It editorialised that no one could have sympathy for the ‘desperadoes of the wildest and most reckless type’ involved in the ‘diabolical outrage in Clerkenwell’.

The \textit{Standard} 4\textsuperscript{th} January 1868 reported that following the call of the magistrates over 2,000 special constables had been sworn in by the deadline date with many hundreds more prepared to make themselves available beyond it. It said; ‘The feeling is general, that the fiendish atrocities of the Fenians must be stamped out at once’. The \textit{Birmingham Daily Gazette} 9\textsuperscript{th} January 1868 told of considerable alarm following the discovery on 3\textsuperscript{rd} January of a second letter warning of an attack on Coventry property, found in the letter box of F. Carter, a silk manufacturer in Little Park Street. Police Chief Superintendent Norris privately met the magistrates and the view was taken ‘that as there are a large number of Irish-men who have not tendered themselves as special constables’, while 2,000 English had done so, the detail in the letter could not be ignored. So the police with revolvers would continue to patrol in the threatened areas. It was said the ‘unparalleled distress’ that was presently in the city ‘may have something to do with the disaffection’.\textsuperscript{16}

Particularly after the general revulsion of Clerkenwell it would not have been wise for Irish people to openly show sympathy for the Fenian movement. A smaller Coventry grouping of Irish would have taken heed of the partial treatment meted out to the Brummagem-Irish during their riots, recounted in Appendix 6. There may have been genuine concern felt by the authorities in their enlisting of 2,000 special constables and in the arming of police, or it may have been a showy over-reaction or a bluff. It was exclusively a response by the authorities; the number enlisting as special constables was

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Coventry Herald} 20\textsuperscript{th} December 1867

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Birmingham Daily Gazette} 9\textsuperscript{th} January 1868. This reference to a large number of Irish-men who have not tendered themselves as constables may have been a ‘Birmingham’ view on the situation. There was no suggestion in Coventry newspapers that there were any symptoms of Fenianism lurking locally. There was never mention of Irish secret societies in Coventry, though by definition their presence would not be obvious.
large, but that apart there was no swell among the local people against the local Irish. The Fenian alarm quickly faded in the locality. The *Herald* 13th January 1871 reported that the Fenians were released from prison.

**British mainstream politics from 1870**

The widened franchise effective from 1868, gave Irish migrants a real entree to participation in the political process. In an incorporative manner it drew migrants into municipal preoccupations and into the decision making process whereby city folk together selected their politicians. It carried within it an opportunity for Irish migrants to act in common in support of Ireland’s cause, which when engaged in would have strengthened their feeling of mutuality. Support for Ireland through the Coventry political machine would only ever involve migrants acting in a propping up role for whichever of the two mainstream parties at the time they viewed as being most sympathetic. Reform increased the electorate to nearly 8,000 and in the matched support for Tory and Liberal candidates a small number of marginal votes could tilt the outcome. In 1874 the total Tory (Eaton/Thornton) vote was 7,451 whilst that of the Liberals (Carter/Jackson) was 7,461 giving a Liberal majority of 10.

While domestic issues featured at the hustings, the treatment of Ireland was frequently raised. However there was never a specific appeal to the Irish, by local candidates in Coventry, for support on the basis of the kindness of their Irish policy. Irish partisans saw in the situation of slender majorities the leverage that might exist - or that they could profess to exist - to promote Irish national interest. This could be effective if migrant voters could be marshalled to vote identically, according to the strategies of Irish self-rule protagonists.

Again decisions taken nationally by a party may have had distasteful consequences for the supporters of the party locally. Local Liberals always felt that in Coventry they had been wrong footed by Gladstone’s introduction of the Cobden Treaty which had - as they were constantly reminded for many years by opponents - disastrous consequences for the silk trade in Coventry. Local Irish who supported Liberalism

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17 Pistols and cutlasses were also issued to Leicester police in 1867 even though, according to Danaher, the city was not directly involved in the Fenian excitement. (Tom Barclay, *Memoirs and Medleys*, Unpaginated introduction by Nessan Danaher).

18 *Coventry Times* 7th April 1880. In 1868 the total Tory (Eaton/Hill) vote was 7,495 while that of the Liberals (Carter/Jackson) was 7,149 giving a Tory majority of 346.

19 A mischievous piece in the strongly Conservative *Dublin Evening Mail* as early as 1st August 1867, suggested that Coventry Catholic voters could be manipulated. It explained how the Coventry election was won. It had learnt from a reliable authority that the Whig whippers-in communicated with Archbishop Manning and Bishop Grant of Southwark through a Liberal Catholic peer. They ‘at once cooperated, and sent the order for the Coventry Romans to vote for the Liberal candidate’ which was enough to sway the vote in favour of Henry Jackson.
because in the wider scheme its attitude towards Ireland was more benign, may have felt it was a somewhat awkward stance to hold locally in the knowledge of city disappointment at the Liberals for ruining the silk trade. It may also have been troubling for local Irish to hear that the Liberals, who they supported in the city, could at government level turn to coercion in Ireland.

The disestablishment of the Irish church in 1869 evinced the underlying continuing resentment of the local Protestant clergy at Catholicism obtaining advantage, and also, unsurprisingly, their common outlook with Tory adherents. As with the Maynooth Grant any relief was seen as causing huge constitutional damage. Rev. Mr Baynes, Vicar of St. Michael’s, had justified his attendance at a Conservative Fete in the Bull-Field in June 1869 on the basis that the clergy had a duty to speak their minds about Gladstone’s action, which ‘not only struck at the root of the Protestant religion in Ireland but that it was doing precisely the same thing for them in England’. He said ‘there had been no movement within the past century which more directly tended to weaken the influence of the Church of the Reformation or strengthen the hands of the Pope of Rome’. Each of these remarks was followed by ‘Hear Hear’. Alexander Staveley Hill, MP present at the fete regarded Mr Gladstone’s Bill as committing sacrilege and desecration. The matter of disestablishment, while reminding that whenever issues involving questions on Irish or Catholic ecclesiastical prerogatives arose, historic posturing would reliably materialise, was beyond Coventry and did not find resonance as a local issue.

The Standard 25th March 1870 carried the London Times summary of Chichester Fortescue’s outline of the draconian provisions in the Irish Coercion Bill, or Peace Preservation Bill. The Standard quoted the Pall Mall Gazette which agreed with the measure, but felt it contained a number of weaknesses that would lessen its effectiveness, and thought it should have been introduced earlier. The Standard was in favour of the measure and took a certain glee from the fact that it was embarrassing for the Liberals to find themselves introducing coercion.

The 1880 Election

James Pinches (1837-1897), a watch finisher, who was from an old local Catholic family, was on good terms with the local clergy. He had been a Liberal for some years
prior to 1876, before becoming regarded a turncoat when he signed his name to a flysheet in 1876.\textsuperscript{24} The leaflet attempted to persuade Catholics to vote Conservative in the municipal election; it is mentioned later in relation to a disagreement between Father Moore and Rev Delf (Appendix 11). In 1880 he was once again favouring Liberals and urging Catholics to support that party. A report of a meeting in March 1880, of over 250 ‘English and Irish Catholic voters’, with Pinches as president, stated it was unanimously decided that ‘our Irish co-religionists will most efficiently promote the best interest of Ireland, by giving a general support to the Liberal Candidates at this election as the Liberal Party have ever been anxious to sweep away abuses, as proved by their action in the disestablishment of the Irish Church’. The meeting further tried to strengthen Catholic support for the Liberal Party by saying ‘Catholics of this city will best promote the true interests of their Church by giving an undivided support…to Liberal Candidates…who belong to that great party which achieved Catholic emancipation, and who are the true champions of Civil and Religious Liberty…’\textsuperscript{25} It was the only time the description ‘Irish Catholic’ was found; it was never used by the local clergy in such an Irish-English context. Given his Catholicity there was probably for Pinches the promotion primarily of Catholic rather than Liberal interests.\textsuperscript{26} He may not have been involved in a possible calculated Liberal tactic to get Irish votes by appealing to their ethno-religious fidelity. There was no further report that distinguished between English and Irish Catholics. A week later a meeting of the Catholic electors was held and it was decided that chairman James Pinches and vice-chairman J.P. Beever should meet Sir Henry Jackson and Mr Wills and congratulate them on behalf of the Catholic electors of Coventry. The MPs thanked them for their support for ‘the Liberal cause…whose efforts had secured so much of civil and religious liberty throughout the United Kingdom’.\textsuperscript{27} While J.P. Beever’s mother was Irish, he signed Fr Pereira’s address, with Pinches in 1891, with his identity shown as a ‘Catholic of Coventry’ (Appendix 6).

The 1881 Election

The course of the 1881 election, in which Parnell advised electors that they should not support the Liberal Candidate Kay-Shuttleworth, who had supported Coercion, even

\textsuperscript{24} Irish-born T. Hennessey was another who signed
\textsuperscript{25} Coventry Times 31\textsuperscript{st} March 1880
\textsuperscript{26} He appears a principled Catholic, that would likely prioritise Catholic interests. His Catholicity was not in doubt. A son was called William Bernard presumably after Ullathorne, while a daughter was called Charlotte Osburgh, the latter of the two names being that of a female saint the parish church was named after. He also formed part of the Coventry lay representation at St. Chads Cathedral, Birmingham for the for the funeral obsequies of Ullathorne on 26\textsuperscript{th} March 1889 Coventry Times 27\textsuperscript{th} March 1889.
\textsuperscript{27} Times 7\textsuperscript{th} April 1880
if it meant the Conservatives would take the seat, is outlined in Appendix 9. Henry Eaton, Conservative polled 4,011 votes, 443 more than his rival. Reference is made in Appendix 9 to the Daily Express reporting the ‘Irish party’ held a meeting. It is unclear in what sense ‘party’ was used and who was involved. It may have referred to a meeting of ‘Irish and Roman Catholic electors’ held in order to promote Kay-Shuttleworth. This was attended by Kay-Shuttleworth, his supporting Liberal politicians and a number of Catholics with a Catholic Young Men’s Society background. As in the previous year it is not clear who arranged the meeting but again James Pinches was in attendance and proposed a resolution pledging the meeting of Catholics to do all in its power to secure the return of Kay-Shuttleworth as member for Coventry. The question again raises itself as to Pinches’ motives; he did not assist the Parnell strategy to vote Conservative though some years earlier he had been content to persuade voters in a local election to vote Conservative.

The Land League was founded in 1879 and it was only a matter of time before a Branch would form in Coventry. That and the fact of the calling of an Election in 1881 where ‘English’ Catholic Pinches was steering the support of Irish Catholics towards the Liberals, which in that year was against the wish of Parnell, may have prompted local Irishmen to decide to command their own influence on voters. A branch of the Land League was formed in Coventry on 26th March 1881.

Coventry could be seen as a template of the new strategy where Irish migrants would vote to the advantage of Ireland. Liberals and Tories should henceforth realise that ingratitude would not be forgotten by the Irish. Charles S. Parnell appealed to the Irish electors of Great Britain in July 1881. He wrote in part:

‘There is scarcely a town in England in which the Irish exiles may not do something to advantage the Irish cause. Recent events have brought out this fact into the strongest relief. Thus at Coventry, with an electorate of some 9,000 voters, a few hundred Irish voters won the seat...Several of the Liberal members who were most ardent in the cause of coercion were men who would not be in Parliament were it not for the Irish electors, and the Liberal party generally ought to have remembered that to put them in power many an Irishman went without his dinner, and gave free half a day’s wage on the polling day. The Irish electors may have any day an opportunity of repaying the treacherous ingratitude of several

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28 He was eldest son of James Phillips Kay-Shuttleworth who wrote The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester in 1832.
29 Catholic Herald 11th March 1881
30 Perhaps prompted by the formation of a branch in Leicester in February 1881 (Northampton Mercury 19th February 1881). Decisions to form branches were being taken around Britain at this time as the following examples show. A Sheffield branch was formed circa October 1880 (Sheffield Daily Telegraph 2nd October 1880). In London a branch was opened circa November 1880 (Dundee Advertiser 23rd November 1880), in Birmingham circa December 1881 (Birmingham Mail 23rd January 1882) and in Wolverhampton prior to January 1882 (The Irishman 28th January 1882).
Liberal representatives as it deserves and this can only be done by the thorough organisation of the Irish voters.'

**The 1885 and 1886 Elections**

Following the Redistribution Act of 1884, Coventry would in future elect a single MP; in the general election of 1885 Henry Eaton was elected. He defeated the Liberal, Courtenay Warner, by 261 votes when according to the *Birmingham Daily Post* the Irish vote was cast against him. A letter read to a Liberal party meeting convened in June 1886 to ‘consider the political situation’ was a sign of change in the air. In it Warner told that he was opposed to Gladstone’s Home Rule initiative and as he thought ‘the majority of the Liberal Party in Coventry are at variance’ with him so he did not intend to go forward again. Their new candidate William Ballantine was defeated by Eaton in 1886 by 405 votes even though the Irish were supposed to have reversed their voted in favour of Ballantine. The paper suggested this was due to the presence of Liberal Unionism with some, who would have previously voted Liberal, now abstaining or voting Conservative.

**The 1887 Election**

Henry Eaton gave up his seat when he was elevated to the peerage as Baron Cheylesmore in 1887. In the election that followed in July his son Colonel Herbert Eaton narrowly failed to hold the seat losing it to Ballantine, Henry’s old rival from 1886. Appendix 9 contains the history of the July 1887 election. The question of Ireland permeated the hustings (Figure 4.2). The Liberals had the difficulty of avoiding being called hypocrites in complaining about Tory coercion, when earlier in 1870 and 1881 Gladstone had introduced similar restraint. Davis saw nationally in the 1880s, as a result of issues relating to Ireland, the arousal of ‘deep-seated conservative instincts’. Gladstone’s critics saw his Home Rule proposal as threat to the integrity of the Empire. Ballantine won by a mere 16 votes with the Irish National League making much of the national significance of the Coventry result, but particularly the League’s contribution to the success. Figure 4.3 illustrates how the result was seen as a victory for Home Rule by the nationalist *Freeman’s Journal*.

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31 *The Irishman* 2nd July 1881
32 *Coventry Herald* 18th June 1886
33 *Birmingham Daily Post* 11th July 1887
34 Davis, *Irish in Britain 1815-1914*, p. 205
35 Ibid., p. 215
36 *Coventry Herald* 8th July 1887
The 1892 Election

From the time of the election of 1887 Ballantine was aware of the danger he faced from the possibility of Liberal Unionists combining with the Tories against him. In July 1887 a private meeting of invited notables had been held to establish a Liberal Unionist organisation.37 Another private meeting similar in intent was held prior to the 1892 election.38 Before the election, there were visits by ‘heavy-hitters’ T.P. O’Connor and Joseph Chamberlain to appeal for support for their respective sides.39 Fr Rea and R Halpin (Appendix 2) attended to hear the former speak at the ‘Great Liberal Demonstration’, while Dr Denis McVeagh (Appendix 2) was present to hear the latter at the ‘Great Unionist Demonstration’; some further detail is found in Appendix 9.40

Ballantine who was referred to as ‘Separatist MP Ballantine’ remained under pressure in Coventry, but defeated Charles Murray by 143 votes. According to the Coventry Telegraph 5th July 1892 the claim was the Liberal Unionists were 300 strong; their alien alliance with the Conservatives had not pulled off a victory. The Birmingham Daily Post 5th July 1892 noted on election day that ‘Irish Nationalists were in evidence, and had a special committee room of their own in Well Street’. The Herald 17th February 1893 reported that Gladstone gave an indication of the Home Rule Bill to the House of Commons. A week later it told of the annual dinner of the Spon Street Ward Liberal association at which T. Hennessy and his neighbour W. Hogan were present (Appendix 2). Since Hennessy was treasurer of the local branch of the Land League in 1881, had attended the Coventry rally against the Irish Coercion Bill in 1887 (Appendix 9, The Land League - 22nd April 1887) and was a signatory to an address of gratitude to Fr Pereira in 1891, his presence represents a crossover between an Irish, Liberal and Catholic outlook.41

William Ballantine’s address to the meeting provides a useful indication of the progress towards achievement of home rule as would be understood by the Irish in Coventry in the 1890s. He said to applause ‘I think the face of things has changed. The Tories depended upon the divisions which they supposed existed in the Liberal party,

37 Ibid. 8th July 1887. Gulson was voted to the chair. In a perusal of the attendees Irish-born J. Deacon (Chapter 5) and Z. Binley (Appendix 2) were noted.
38 Coventry Herald 1st July 1892
39 Coventry Evening Telegraph 22nd June 1892; Coventry Herald 24th June 1892
40 Midland Daily Telegraph 25th June 1892.
41 Coventry Herald 24th February 1893. An indication of the later century sensing of class grouping in Coventry was contained in the remarks of the chairman who said Mr Ballantine MP, would ‘watch in the interest of the working classes’, matters arising in Parliament that affected the welfare of the people. Also O’Day cautions against assuming that the Church saw itself in the same three way, or two way relationship. He pointed out that nationally the Church thoroughly disliked the Liberal call for an end to denominational education. (Alan O’Day, The English Face of Irish Nationalism, (Dublin 1977) p. 110).
but to their consternation they found that never was the Liberal party more compact, more welded together in one body, and they found, in regard to the principal measure of the session, the Home Rule Bill the two wings of the Home Rule party equally in harmony with the Liberal party’. His speech, it is suggested, crystallised the most common assessment among those in Coventry who had a desire for Irish self-government, that given the revolutionary route had failed, the only practical way forward, would be through the joint parliamentary efforts of the Liberal and Irish parties. A stoic acceptance of the reality that they would have to support the Liberals, and that self-rule would take years to achieve reduced the impetus of whatever local nationalistic fervour might exist, and thus lessened its usefulness as an associative agent for the Irish community. By 1893 nationally what was making attainment so problematic was not merely the division in the Irish Party and the recalcitrance of the Tory establishment but the Liberal schism of 1886. Locally the Herald 7th July 1893 reported that J. Band, Secretary of the Coventry Liberal Unionist Association commented at a meeting on the work of the last eight years. He said it was in the 1892 election that real progress had been made and although they could not succeed without the Conservatives ‘they had the balance of power in their hands, and could place who they liked in parliament’. John Gulson then spoke and said the Liberal Unionists were accused of changing their principles, but they had not done so (Appendix 2).

‘The Liberal Unionists simply refused to be transferred as part of Mr Gladstone’s bargain with Mr. Parnell; they refused to be transferred in payment for the eighty votes which he bought from Mr. Parnell. That was the beginning of Liberal Unionism… He was very glad to find that there was a perfect understanding between the Liberal Unionists of Coventry and the Conservative party…[and that] they were willing to amalgamate their principles in opposition to the evil of Mr Gladstone’s proposals.’

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42 He was advertent to the earlier allusion to the working man. He said he noticed at the dinner two new magistrates and believed all were delighted at the appointment of a working man. He wished to see more working men acting as charity trustees in Coventry. He thought it was absurd and unjust that in town where the Liberals were in the majority the charities were run by a Tory clique. This observation would have been understood by Coventry Catholics because later in the year there was a public enquiry into the General Charities of Coventry opened by G.S.D. Murray, an Assistant Charity Commissioner. When he invited remarks on the proceedings from the audience, Fr Pereira said as far as he and his co-religionists were concerned, it was very difficult to get a fair share of the charities. ‘He had applied time after time, but he generally found that the list of the trustees were full. If politics and religion were to be represented on the trustees he certainly thought Catholics should be represented.’ (Coventry Herald 17th November 1893).

43 See T.A. Jenkins, The Liberal Ascendancy 1830-1886, (Houndmills, Basingstoke 1994)
The 1895 Election

In the 1895 election the Liberal Unionists voted with the Conservatives and Ballantine lost to Charles Murray by 351 votes. Murray who was seen as a stranger in 1892 had become well known in Coventry as he had come to reside in Allesley. Also the Unionist Party had thoroughly reorganised its organisation while that of the Gladstone Liberals was reputed not to have been in a satisfactory condition. Murray would hold the seat for the next decade. An Irish effort to mobilize for Ballantine in 1895 as happened in 1887 does not appear to have occurred. O’Day stated in general: ‘at the opening of the new century many Irish had lost their appetite for nationalist politics and the community as a whole, especially the enlarging British-born segment, was increasingly being absorbed into mainstream social and political attachments’. It must have depressed Irish-minded nationalists in Coventry that the size of ‘Coventry Irish vote’ could no longer hinder Tory local success and that Liberal Unionist sentiment was strengthening. Further, it must have galled them that the fervour of Birmingham radical, Joseph Chamberlain, had been employed not in the cause of Irish nationalism but to lead Liberal Unionists against Gladstone and to damage the Liberal Party which promised a domestic government for Ireland.

The Coventry Irish vote

Especially in the era of the single seat constituency for Coventry where under a simple majority system a candidate might win by the most slender margin, great play was made of Coventry continuing, or converting from its previous election choice. Much hung on the outcome since, although a local losing party’s solid support would emerge again at the next election outing, and even though it might have barely lost the current one, the reality meant that if it lost, it had no practical influence for a period. Consideration was given and credit taken for what had the ‘turned’ the margin in favour of a candidate. The presumption of the time, which may not have been totally correct, was that the ‘Irish vote’ served the single issue of Irish national yearning, and in size coincided with the number of Irish voters. It remains uncertain what the size of the ‘Coventry Irish vote’ was and how it related to the community. The vote was variously reckoned at 50, at 150, and in 1881 at 198, rising to 300 in the year 1887. Such a small

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44 Huddersfield Chronicle 20th July 1895 provided the General Election result for 1895: Charles James Murray, Unionist 4,975, Walter Ballantyne, Liberal 4,624, difference 351.

45 Birmingham Daily Post 5th March 1894; Ballantine was reported to have said after his defeat ‘every vote that constituted Mr Murray’s majority was bought, and he hoped his opponents had to pay dearly for it’. Ballantine left Coventry for the continent. (Leamington Spa Courier 20th July 1895).

number could only achieve propaganda importance when there was a slender winning margin that the Irish could claim was due to their tipping the ‘balance of power’. If the winner had a winning margin less than the capacity of the ‘Irish vote’ then the Irish could take credit for assisting the candidate to victory. Establishing the true size of the ‘Irish’ vote is not straightforward. The number of males, 21 years and above, in the 1881 census, totalled 235 Irishcom of whom 164 were Irish-born. For 1891 the corresponding amounts were 201 and 137.\footnote{The 1881 figures were reduced by 2 to take account of visiting travellers while those of 1891 were reduced by 1 to account of a visitor.} Not included in these totals were Coventry-born, adult males of Irish parentage, who had moved away from their parents but who still may have had a desire to further the welfare of Ireland. Apathy, infirmity and assimilation would reduce numbers of those so voting. All inmates of the workhouse and soldiers in the barracks may not have voted. Some may not have been registered to vote either through lack of concern or alienation, and others who were lodgers may not have established their entitlement to vote due to their likely mobility. Lodgers in order to vote were required to maintain settled status for twelve months and faced an off-putting condition that they had to re-register annually. O’Day concluded that nationally the Irish voted in numbers well below their theoretical strength.\footnote{O’Day, \textit{English Face of Irish Nationalism}, p. 111} It is unlikely then that the census totals truly relate to the number of Irish votes cast. Also a proportion, though probably small, would not have according to the advice of Parnell or Irish nationalists, as the ‘Coventry Irish Vote’ implied. The behaviour of Catholic Dr McVeagh showed that Irish-born of high social status could be Unionist in outlook.\footnote{References to McVeagh say he was a Unionist. However it is not clear whether he was a Tory or a Liberal Unionist. This is because the term Unionist was applied to members of both parties in Coventry newspapers. The Liberals felt the Tories called themselves Unionist for the purpose of acting as a decoy for the Liberal Unionists. (\textit{Coventry Herald} 8\textsuperscript{th} July 1892).} When Parnell advised local Irish electors to vote Tory some may have felt reluctant, and if they were ever going to so do, they would have to hold their noses.

The ‘Irish vote’ reportedly in Liberal Ballantine’s favour was not sufficient to ensure his election in 1886. A year later, based on a winning result for the same home-rule supporting candidate, nationalist proponents would claim the result reflected the primacy of Irish nationalist considerations in voters’ minds. The gratitude which Duffy (Appendix 2) expressed to the ‘Irish of Coventry’ and ‘people of Coventry’ for their support of Ballantine, may have naively or deliberately, both over-egged the power of the Coventry Irish vote and over- presumed native Coventrians had voted from an Irish perspective. Ballantine won by only 16 votes which was forgotten in a ‘winner takes all’
scenario, so his attitude to Irish affairs may not have been as widely shared locally as the words ‘people of Coventry’ may imply.

It is to be noted that the issue of Home Rule was treated in Coventry as a topic of real concern to all Coventry men and not solely pitched at ‘Irish’ voters, who were in any case assumed to be faithful followers of the Liberals after 1886. From what could be detected, few Irish became Liberal Unionists or were Conservatives either, with the exception of Dr McVeagh.

However, while Irish matters did feature prominently in the political realm, most ‘people of Coventry’ would have made their voting decision on more than the issue of Irish self-determination and would likely have chosen a candidate whose personality they liked and whose domestic manifesto they agreed with. These local considerations were significant in 1887, where voters’ distaste for Colonel Herbert Eaton’s perceived sense of entitlement to his Tory father’s vacated seat might have outweighed their distaste for the Irish home-rule stance of Ballantine. The issue of home-rule was prominent in the election addresses of candidates in 1892 but local National League lobbyists did not appear to have centre-stage participation in the contest campaign. While they asked for Irishmen to support Liberal Ballantine, in overall terms they appeared along with the Anti-Vaccinators, the Fair Traders, and the Trades Council as just another group seeking support for their chosen candidate.50

The strength of the vote in furthering the Irish cause may not have been as powerful as touted. O’Day argued that the Irish vote in Britain never lived up to the expectation of nationalists and was greatly overrated.51 Coventry’s role in the greater scheme of Irish advancement was light; it is notable that Parnell one of the colossi of Irish politics never publicly visited the city.52

Party politics, may have acted as a cohesive medium for local Irish with an interest in it. Elections provided junctures when local Irish had the opportunity to discuss what attitudes they shared, or felt they should hold in common, about the treatment of Ireland. That apart, the occasionality of polling, the uncertain effectiveness of voting for ‘English’ parties in the matter of Irish self-determination, scepticism on relevance of Westminster politics to migrant local viability and the dispiriting divisive emergence of Liberal Unionism, must also have lessened Irish political engrossment.

50 Coventry Herald 8th July 1892
51 O’Day, The political organization of the Irish in Britain, pp. 185, 186
52 O’Connell did address a meeting in the city but the fact that Coventry was a staging point on the Liverpool to London coach run may have been an unacknowledged factor in his decision to sojourn in the locality.
The ‘Coventry Irish Vote’ did not supply the community with the cohesion or force it implied.

Irish nationalist local activity

Land League and National League

In 1880 St. Patrick’s Day was celebrated by capacity-packed concert in the Corn Exchange with the proceeds given to the Irish Distress Fund. The great and good of Coventry had come to support the alleviation of distress. Concert patrons included the Mayor, the four candidates for the city, Dr McVeagh, and other influential gentlemen. The Coventry Handbell Ringers, The Rifle Volunteer Band in full dress uniform and a number of singers including Dr McVeagh entertained.

The *Dublin Weekly Nation* 1st May 1880 carried a report issued from Coventry, which had a cordial tinge tailored to the paper’s readership, complimenting the warm hand of friendship extended by their English brethren to the Irish residents who organised the concert. It stated: ‘Well may our ancient city feel proud to record in years to come the unity that existed in furthering the cause … [of ending famine]’. It revealed that the Messrs Hennessey, McDonnell and O’Donnell were the delegation from the Irish Distress Committee that gave the proceeds of £88. 5s. 8d. to the [Coventry] Lord Mayor for transmission to Dublin. These three men were also the founders of the Coventry Branch of the Irish Land League in March 1881.

A letter shows the organising of the concert was a proto-activity of the Land League (Appendix 9, 18th July 1885). Though an isolated occurrence, the concert has an important significance in indicating that there was a place in the social conscience of the city burghers for Ireland and its concert organising compatriots. It was a civility that might without the exposure of the concert otherwise remain undetected in the overall swirl of negativity on matters Irish. However public-spirited concern must have been blighted by news of the murder of Lord Frederick Cavendish and Thomas Burke in the Phoenix Park in Dublin. It filled Coventry with gloom according to the *Herald* 12th May 1882.

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53 MacRaild tell that ‘in 1883 the Land League gave way to the National League’. The Land League had been closely associated with Fenian operators, such as Davitt…and the change of name symbolized a new constitutional turn and cooperation between Davitt and Parnell. (MacRaild, *Irish Migrants 1750-1922*, pp. 144,145).

54 A meeting of Coventry Council had resolved on 27th January 1880 that a subscription list be opened in the city in answer to the appeal of the Lord Mayor of Dublin for the relief of distress in Ireland. The Mayor of Coventry who set up the appeal by placing subscription lists at the banks, in a remark reported on 11th February said the response had not been quite so liberal as he would have liked or as he expected. (*Coventry Times* 4th and 11th February 1880).

55 *Coventry Times* 24th March 1880

56 *Dublin Weekly Nation* 9th April 1881
‘The demand for the daily papers was far in excess of supply, and the reading rooms at the Free Library and the various clubs were crowded to excess. A special edition of the Herald had a large and rapid sale.’

The Liberal Association and the Conservative Association held emergency meetings and passed resolutions abhorring the crime. During the time of the funeral, shops in the city closed while the bells of St. Michael’s tolled for an hour. At a meeting of the City Council the Mayor in moving a proposal expressing horror at the Dublin murders remarked that never in memory was such closure seen in Coventry. Though these murders happened beyond Coventry, given the local reaction, it still must have been an uneasy period for those of its local Land League branch members. A branch meeting was held at which the murders were denounced. It would be 17 months later before the next meeting would appear to be held at which the Parnell Testimonial Fund was raised. The list (Figure 4.4) provides a keen sense of who contemporaries saw as their ‘Irish’ community.

During the 1880s League activities represented what may be described as the ‘cutting edge’ of nationalism and are outlined in detail in Appendix 9. At their first meeting in March 1881 they urged Irish people to ‘unite’ which would have had a cohesive effect on the Irish. They saw themselves as ‘Coventry Irishmen’. By 1885 the branch had become dormant, but its secretary P. McDonnell (Appendix 2) wrote a most informative letter mentioned above and shown in Appendix 9 that provided an assessment of: the state of the branch, what influenced the local Irish, and the distance kept from it by the clergy. His nationalist outlook assumed those of Irish origin had a ‘duty’ to interest themselves in promoting Ireland’s political affairs. That he did not detect this sufficiently (within his own keen standards) in Coventry caused a certain frustration to enter his evaluation. The underlying story in his letter reveals there was a lack of everyday obligation to Irish political affairs among the Irish in Coventry. It shows the Irish felt their interests were now being catered for by indigenous newspapers. If an Irish common purpose was sought out, in the degree of a drawing together around patriotic issues, it would now need the conscious reading of Irish newspapers or visits from speakers to drum up shared feeling. The letter was written in 1885 before Gladstone’s change of heart. The stance of the local clergy towards Irish nationalism was seen as unsupportive – even though two priests had Irish parentage.

The strength of the League’s feelings, found in a resolution passed at its meeting in April 1887 is apparent:

57 Coventry Herald 12th May and 19th May 1882
58 Perhaps this refers to Fr Rea and Fr McCabe. The latter may have been in Coventry in 1885.
‘That we, the Irishmen of Coventry, indignantly protest against the unnecessary and cowardly Coercion Bill which the Government in their savage hate for the Irish are directing against the leaders of the people who have the courage to stand up in defence of the national aspirations of the Irish race.’

In August 1889 it met to hear John Denvir, the National League general organiser, impress on them the necessity to register Irish voters. A year later it met to hear the same message from another visitor Joseph Nolan MP for North Louth. Meetings now seemed to occur less frequently and are only found mentioned in the Coventry press around the time of parliamentary elections when they encouraged Irishmen to register and vote. The departure of P. McDonnell, who had published details of meetings during the 1880s may account for the absence of knowledge of local League activity that may have taken place, but it is more likely that the calling of meetings was now on an infrequent and ad hoc basis. Members of the branch may have gathered on election day in 1892 as it was said ‘Irish Nationalists were in evidence, and had a special committee room of their own in Well Street’.

At the Land League’s enthusiastic meeting in February back in 1882, in the Wagon & Horses, John Killen was the pub-licensee, but by 1901 he was in the workhouse. James Duffy its secretary in 1882 was living in London in 1901, while John O’Donnell its then chairman could not be traced. P. McDonnell who was president or secretary of the branch on many occasions from 1881 had returned to Ireland in the later 1880s. The Land League appeared to have had a competent committee and within its own terms an inaugural membership of 60 may have been pleasing. Hickman pointed out that there is a difference between ethnic politics and ethnic consciousness. While the League helped to raise general ethnic awareness it did not generate more widespread activism and ensuing cohesion. After the initial flourish of activity, enthusiasm diminished and what remained was a clique of ‘point of reference’ ‘patriotic’ Irishmen in the city, e.g. to meet National League organisers on their occasional city visits. The bulk of its membership was confined to cordwainers, labourers and watchfinishers; its ability to reach a wider social spectrum may have been limited by the holding of some of its meetings in public houses. Its activities were not reported in local newspapers and were furnished only to Dublin based newspapers. The Phoenix Park murders shocked Coventrians; thus identification with local active nationalist promotion that possessed a

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59 Dublin Weekly Nation 16th April 1887
60 Coventry Times 14th August 1889
61 Coventry Herald 29th August 1890
62 Birmingham Daily Post 5th July 1892
63 There appears to have been a temporary revival of interest in August/September 1885.
sharpish edge may have not been widely popular among those with a migrant background. The National League’s assistance to the Liberal party after Gladstone’s turnabout on home-rule dulled its own importance, while the Church’s sufferance of the Liberal home-rule path gave the middle-classes an opportunity to now express their views respectably.

The Herald 22nd April 1887 reported that an open air demonstration against the Irish Coercion Bill was attended by more than one thousand, when held in Pool Meadow, under the auspices of the Liberal Association. Its president Joseph Cash was in the chair, and attendees listed were MPs, Reverends, Councillors, local notables, T. Hennessey and W. McGowran. Present too was Fr Rea and Fr McCabe from St. Osburg’s. It intrigues as to the native and Irish congregational balance of that assembly, and indeed if the gathering was actually of the size mentioned. But in the city matrix of local National League activists, Liberals and Catholic Church members, it appeared the Liberals had come to represent the forward reasoning of many Irish. Pelling observed the ordinary working-class population spent little time on the niceties of religious doctrine as it was too preoccupied with the needs of day-to-day living. A similar preoccupation by the Irish working-class may have limited its involvement in pursuing nationalist concerns.64 Their distraction from Irish designs can be detected in P. McDonnell’s letter, where he referred to the popularity among his countrymen of ‘rags’ that on them acted as incorporating agents of British culture.65 The wider second and third generations of Irish would appear to express their understanding of commonality, under indirect Catholic auspices, through activity in the schoolroom at St. Osburg’s.

4.2 Catholicism

The standing of Catholicism nationally has attracted the scholarly attention of Norman, Wolffe, Paz and Bossy.66 They describe a national antagonism that was according to O’Day ‘deeply ingrained’ and more evident at particular times and in certain places.67 It attributed to the Catholic Church the identity of Other. Coupled with a long held despisal of its dogma there was in the nineteenth century a new resentment at its expansion and at the rather triumphant and self-entitled manner in which it did so. Considered in this section will be the extent of this pervasive antagonism in Coventry and how it affected the confidence and functioning of the local Church. Again,

64 Henry Pelling, Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain, (London 1968) p. 19
65 Busteed, Resistance and Respectability, p. 61
66 Norman, Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England; Wolffe, Protestant Crusade in Great Britain; Paz, Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England; Bossy, English Catholic Community; See also: Gilley, English Catholic Attitudes, pp. 100-119; Gilley, Roman Catholicism, pp. 147-167
67 O’Day, Varieties of anti-Irish behaviour, p. 31
nationally the Catholic Church had its own doctrinal and organisational aims to advance, which involved, according to Hickman, migrant incorporation and denationalisation. It implemented both distinctness and conformity. The former in separate schooling and marriage arrangements which engendered distinctiveness; the latter through: advocating social discipline, English cultural disposition, loyalty, and silence on Irish nationalist aspirations, which furthered closeness to the host population. The nature of the attitudes and resources of the local mission that gave it confidence to disarm antagonism and to act as an agent of Church policy with the ensuing mix of implications for the Irish are discussed. It will be asked, if for Coventry, Gilley’s observation applied that: ‘the form of the Irish community in England was simply taken to be the Church’? The number of lapsed Catholics relates to this but more pertinent is cognisance of Herson’s caution, on noting the diversity of Irish migrants in Stafford, where identity was a contested and evolving phenomenon, to seeing the Irish and Catholic as interchangeable labels. The aptness of the application to Coventry of Gilley’s remark, that while the Church had no interest in so doing, paradoxically it facilitated the preservation of a type of Irish self-identity, is also considered.

Caution is exercised lest conclusions based on the experience of Catholicism in sub-national, high volume Irish settings, may be applied too readily as sufficiently comprehensive to fit Coventry’s domestic proceedings. As an example, Gilley cited Fielding’s observation that the Catholic Church appeared unable to surmount the English notion that poverty was disgraceful. It is true that the Catholic Church did not appear to conceptualise poverty as a social issue needing remediation, felt the poor brought much of the trouble on themselves with their wayward habits, and spoke against socialism. The Church too showed it had a mind that could concord with affluence by producing, when signalling its power, splendid spectacle at times of dedication of bishops, consecration of churches and celebrations for jubilees of inauguration. However in the day-to-day behaviour of the Benedictines in Coventry, for example, service to the poor was their watchword. The advance of the Coventry Church whether in building projects, or congregational growth, should not be regarded as an inevitable

68 Hickman, Alternative historiographies, p. 249
69 Herson, Divergent paths, p. 281
70 Sheridan Gilley, English Catholic Attitudes, p. 103. He stated that the Catholic Church preserved the self-identity of the migrants through their adherence to it, though it had little interest in so doing, and in fact did much through its schools and press, ostensibly designed to maintain Catholicity, to integrate the Irish.
71 Ibid., p. 105
72 See Appendix 6 regarding William Ullathorne, Notes on the Education Question
and abstract ‘corporate’ development, but should be credited to the drive and personality of particular priests.

Over the century some external issues found resonance in Coventry while others failed to gain traction. The city shared in the national passion over the merits of Catholic Emancipation (Appendix 10). In 1837 its newspapers reported and featured, in a local contretemp with the Catholic incumbent Thomas Cockshoot, which arose during a public meeting to oppose the introduction of a system of general education that precluded Scripture as its basis (Appendix 8; Figure 4.5). There was also local indignation by Established and Dissenting clerics over the Maynooth Grant affair in 1845 (Appendix 10). The ‘Second Spring’ is to be seen below in Ullathorne’s Coventry, but other oft quoted notable issues, that are represented by the Tractarian controversy, and the restoration of the Hierarchy, though milestones in nineteenth century Catholic advance, passed by Coventry Catholics lightly.\(^73\) It was in summary, to be a century over which the local Catholic Church developed, consolidated and achieved acceptance, particularly in the less splenetic later part of the century, to such a degree that its presence and activities had become accustomed constituents of city landscape and society. Its separate schools and place on the Education Board seemed deceptively ever part of the Coventry tableau. The evidence in Coventry would appear not to concur with O’Day’s general assertion that an anti-Catholic mentality ‘definitely did not begin to fade round 1870’.\(^74\) However there were still swipes by the Standard in the 1870s at what it saw as the pretensions of bishops such that of the Dr Vaughan, Bishop of Salford in 1873 who said among other comments during an address, that ‘Protestantism as an intellectual system is already a wreck’.\(^75\) In 1875 the Standard referred to Cardinal Manning’s position in English society. While he might be a prince of the Church in Catholic countries and might enjoy precedence over the nobility, it punctured the notion that he would receive similar preference in England, saying the noblemen of the House of Lords would ‘hardly be disposed to take their places behind a Roman Catholic prelate’. It observed:

‘Mgr. Manning has availed himself of every opportunity to obtain a place in the upper grades of society in England, and wishes to compel it to recognise his rank in a church which is in England properly speaking, only a Dissenting sect.’\(^76\)

However, locally the Church was forever anchoring itself. In 1877, for example, it shared in the concern for the moral interest of the people, by making common cause

\(^{73}\) Appendix 10 provides an indication of feeling at street level in 1850

\(^{74}\) O’Day, Varieties of anti-Irish behaviour, p. 37

\(^{75}\) Coventry Standard 10\(^{th}\) January 1873

\(^{76}\) Ibid. 23\(^{rd}\) April 1875
with other faith leaders, in a memorial to the Mayor regretting the holding of a Godiva Procession at the upcoming Great Fair.\textsuperscript{77}

The absence of overt display of Irish communal ethno-cultural identity until 1880, has meant the record of activity and public acceptance of the Catholic Church in Coventry, to which most Irish adhered, is the key information source relied on to convey a sense of Irish common conduct during this period. This record is centred mostly around the experiences of individual rectors.\textsuperscript{78} During Daniel O’Connell’s visit to Coventry in 1844, the parish priest was in open support of Liberal sponsored appeals for justice in Ireland. The 1850s, 1860s and 1870s were decades with little evidence of recognition by local Catholic clergy that the town’s Irish should be referred to under the appellation Irish. Later in the century the Church seemed focused on its own consolidations, with its view of its Irish adherents’ prime identity as now Catholic rather than Irish. The Church appeared more relaxed about support for issues relating to Ireland, once a democratic pathway to Irish self-determination was advanced by Gladstone. The failure to recognise the Irish for much of the century - publicly at least until the 1880s - as separately ethnic, was not because the Catholic clergy itself kept a low profile or the opportunity did not present itself to acknowledge the Irish presence. Clerical activity to bond parishioners through social outings, along with representation of the Church in civic matters was visible in the 1860s. Why the Irish were not directly alluded to in any reports, when in fact they would have comprised a solid part of the congregation and were merely left to be surmised as being a constituent of ‘the poor’ is unclear. When Fr Price, referred to in Appendix 11, visited Dublin to solicit funds in May 1856 for the Raglan Street school development he stated that nearly every Catholic in Coventry was either Irish or of Irish extraction. However it was one thing to promote

\textsuperscript{77} Coventry Standard 25\textsuperscript{th} May 1877. While a number of signatures identified themselves according to their denomination, Fr Moore signed simply as H.E. Moore, Hill Street. Perhaps his discreteness was an attempt to avoid possible, popular ill-will towards Catholics, and reduce the risk of them being singled out, on his disapproval of a Coventry tradition. Of course it may also be argued the location of the Benedictine priory was so well known that everyone would realise this was being referred to, merely on the mention of Hill Street. Dr McVeagh also signed.

According to the Coventry Herald 27\textsuperscript{th} September 1872 the same common cause with other clergy had been made in a memorial to the Licensing Committee of the Magistrates of Coventry requesting them to adhere to the shortened hours for the sale of intoxicating liquor outlined in a recent Licensing Act. H.E. Moore was noted as one of the managers of the Coventry Savings Bank between 1869 and March 1876 (Coventry Standard 5\textsuperscript{th} February 1869; Coventry Times 1\textsuperscript{st} March 1866).

\textsuperscript{78} A helpful point is the city territory was covered by one Catholic mission (with assistance from the Raglan Street school) until 1893. The coincidence of both, for the duration of this investigation, offers an administrative areal integrity which is a promoted feature of this study.
the significance of the Irish presence in Coventry while seeking contributions in Ireland but a different matter to make the same claims in Britain.\(^79\)

This lack of local acknowledgement of the impact of the Catholic Irish may be found in the following considerations. The Coventry clergy may not have relished becoming part of what Samuel referred to as the ‘national church of the Irish poor’.\(^80\) Ó Tuathaigh observed that many British Catholics were ‘decidedly uncomfortable’ to find Irish Catholics, who were different in culture and class, in their midst.\(^81\) The degree of such discomfort in Coventry, or if such unease was shared by the local clergy, is not detectable, but it may have existed. In not acknowledging the Irish, the clergy may not have wished to publicise that a substantial section of the congregation of the new church opened in 1845 was to an extent comprised of poor labouring Irish families, some of whose members were regularly identified in the local papers as fighting, drunken Irish. Again esteem was not offered to the looked-down on ‘inhabitants of the slums’ (outside of religious reference to the virtuous state of being poor) who were in part Irish. The quoted words were used in a Birmingham newspaper to describe the people in the back streets and courts of Coventry that Colonel Eaton foraged among seeking votes before the parliamentary election in 1887.\(^82\)

The depth of Catholic loyalty to the State was a well-aired topic for much of the century. Suspicion of Rome still existed in 1874. In the Herald 25\(^{th}\) September of that year under a heading ‘English Roman Catholics’ it printed an article from the London Times that considered the validity of ‘the boast of Roman Catholics that they are “Englishmen if you please, but Catholics first”’.\(^83\) It stated:

‘when with his eyes open, a man has accepted the principles proclaimed by Roman Catholicism at the present day, he has done much more than accept a new creed; he has in some of the most important matters of life placed himself under the complete control of a priesthood, and has submitted his conscience to a potentate who ostentatiously anathematizes the principles on which the English State has for at least three centuries been founded… It is bad enough that a man’s conscience should be the slave of any authority at all, but when that authority is an

\(^79\) Dublin Weekly Nation 10\(^{th}\) May 1856; Freemans Journal 6\(^{th}\) May 1856


\(^81\) Ó Tuathaigh, Irish in Britain: problems of integration, pp. 27, 28. He explained: ‘British Catholics were, by historical circumstances, an ultra-loyal minority, with (at least in England) a leadership drawn from aristocratic and intellectually patrician circles. In their long struggle to win acceptance as full political members of their state, loyalty and discretion (and, of course, tenacity) had been their invaluable weapons. Many of them found it extremely difficult to come to terms with the hordes of Irish Catholics who came among them during the nineteenth century. They found some of the transplanted forms of peasant piety embarrassing.’

\(^82\) Birmingham Daily Post 6\(^{th}\) July 1887

\(^83\) The Falkirk Herald 26\(^{th}\) September 1874 titled the piece from the Times as ‘The Unpatriotic Religion’. The Coventry Standard 17\(^{th}\) September 1875 reprinted a sharp attack on Cardinal Manning’s observations on Rationalism. (See Appendix 10).
Italian Prelate it is vain for him to claim the sympathies of Englishmen... in becoming a Roman Catholic a man puts something between himself and the national life of the country."\textsuperscript{84}

The local Catholic clergy were aware of the expedience of professing loyalty, as is confirmed by an address, outlined below, made in Coventry 1875 by Bishop Collier. Coventry clergy may have concluded that they should not risk giving any grounds for the charge of disloyalty to be levelled at them. Though priestly loyalty was questioned in terms of allegiance to the Pope in preference to the Crown, it would not have helped their protestations of loyalty by their drawing attention to the fact that part of their congregation was Irish. As a nationality the Irish were not believed to be irrefutably loyal to the Union.

Acknowledgement of the Irish may have been lacking because, unlike understated English devotion of the head, Irish expression of faith was emotional from the heart, and was not seen as the desired archetype deserving recognition.\textsuperscript{85} This absence of acknowledgement of the Irish may have been due to what Gilley detected generally as the preferential attitude of the clergy. ‘English Catholicism had its own separate agenda, of converting England rather than serving the immigrant Irish’\textsuperscript{86}. He elaborated:

‘There was no guarantee that the disease-stricken and demoralised horde among their hearers would ever become part of the renascent English Catholic Church; indeed they were a sad distraction from the new crusade for the conversion of England, and from the influx of wealthy converts to Rome from the storm-ridden and divided Church of England’.\textsuperscript{87}

At a local level this view would involve seeing the Coventrian clergy as wishing to act as a church serving local families who preserved the faith in the city over past decades, and as one that increased its congregation through attracting converts, more so than by a gratuitous influx of Irish. Ullathorne was particularly imbued with the notion of a missionary English church, but that the presence of Irish distracted him from conversions and led to a resentment expressed in ignoring the Irish, seems too harsh especially as the Irish when he was rector of Coventry until 1846 were not yet the needy Famine influx Irish.\textsuperscript{88} The attitude of Clarkson his immediate and short-stay successor is untold. The reasons for the failure of Pratt, who followed, to acknowledge the Irish in ethnic terms are unknown.

\textsuperscript{84} Coventry Standard 25th September 1874
\textsuperscript{85} Raphael Samuel, The Roman Catholic Church and the Irish Poor, in S. Gilley and R. Swift (eds.), The Irish in the Victorian City, (London 1985) p. 271
\textsuperscript{86} Gilley, English Catholic Attitudes, p. 100
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., p. 104
\textsuperscript{88} Champ, William Bernard Ullathorne, pp. 91-92
It is suggested the main reason for the lack of acknowledgement of the Irish, was that, imbued with the outlook of William Ullathorne, the parish was ‘English’ in manifestation. He was familiar with the Irish in the Antipodes (a card he played when appealing to an Irish audience) and had visited Ireland prior to his Coventry appointment, but he was an Englishman at heart. The parish’s nineteenth century key clergy were English born, although not Ambrose Pereira, but to adapt an Irish epigram ‘he was more English than the English themselves’. Ephrem Pratt, Ullathorne’s second successor, was like him, also from Yorkshire and there is no evidence he ever even visited Ireland. Benedictine in spirit there was no one in the mould of the secular Rev. T.M. McDonnell resident 1824-1841 at St. Peter’s church, Birmingham. St. Osburg’s having been opened in advance of the Famine arrivals, did not bear migrant ‘ownership’, was not dedicated to a saint familiar to people living in Ireland, nor was the building distinctly centred in an Irish locale. It was not a new mission of the type Samuel described in Holy Cross, Liverpool or in Camberwell, using a room or temporary chapel established in the heart of an Irish migrant concentration with their needs a priority. In contrast, the clergy may not have felt it wished to isolate the Irish as a group, thereby giving them a distinctiveness that would need special attention which in consequence might raise the ire, and prejudices of indigenous poor Catholics. There was widespread poverty in the Coventry of the 1860s. The best way forward in the circumstances was too regard all its adherents simply as Catholic, with, naturally, an English understanding of what being Catholic meant. It is also possible that in Coventry by the 1870s the Church may have discerned that being regarded as Irish, outside of St Patrick’s Day, was no longer of significance, to many of those of Irish extraction.

Later century acknowledgement of the Irish took a particular form. It did not evade Hickey’s notice that the availability of a schoolroom was important in bringing people together in Catholic surroundings. St. Osburg’s schoolroom played such a part in hosting entertainment evenings with a genteel Irish flavour later in the century, under the aegis of the Catholic Young Mens’ Society, whose composition and endeavours are

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89 Fr Ambrose Pereira was born in Calcutta but was educated at Stonyhurst and Downside.
90 See Alexander Peach, Poverty, Religion and Prejudice in Nineteenth Century Britain: The Catholic Irish in Birmingham p. 270; Judith F. Champ, Priesthood and Politics in the Nineteenth Century: The Turbulent Career of Thomas McDonnell, Recusant History, Vol. 18, (1987) pp. 289-303. According to Champ, McDonnell had no personal knowledge of Ireland in spite of his name. He was deeply admired by Daniel O’Connell. McDonnell was popular among the Irish of the city for his attachment to the Irish cause. His stay in Birmingham was turbulent; his political activities did not meet with the approval of all his fellow clerics who regarded him as a troublemaker.
91 There were churches named after St Patrick in Leicester, Bradford and Huddersfield.
92 Samuel, Roman Catholic Church and the Irish Poor, p. 271
related in Appendix 6. Social evenings organised by the Irish Social and Literary Society at the turn into the twentieth century were also convened in the schoolroom. St. Patrick’s Day functions which were also held there, usefully linked the Catholic Church, through its saint and bishop, to the sentiment of Irish people when celebrating their ethnicity in an impassioned state. The value of garnering the goodwill of the Irish through facilitating purely cultural events had been recognised by Ullathorne, who in 1869 drew the people away from the defiant nationalists of Birmingham by providing an entertainment on St. Patrick’s day.

Church acknowledgement of the Irish was only signified under this cultural embodiment. O’Day noted that the Church refused to be used as a ‘vehicle of Irish nationalist politics’ or to permit meetings of such a disposition to be held in its schools. The Herald 12th December 1873, under a heading ‘Dr Vaughan and the Home Rulers’ stated:

‘All Englishmen – and we should think in particular all English Catholics – will heartily approve the conduct of Dr Vaughan, titular Bishop of Salford, in refusing to authorise the use of Roman Catholic school-rooms, within his diocese, for the purpose of Home Rule meetings. To have done otherwise would have proclaimed the Romanist clergy of England, alone among Englishmen of character and education, approved the agitation for a dissolution of the Union which must ere long, dissolve the Empire; to brand the Roman Catholic laity of England with a stigma which they would have keenly felt and bitterly resented; and to associate Roman Catholic doctrine with political disaffection’.

This was a craftily written piece. In pointing out to the church, what would be read into their granting permission to use a classroom, it also gave a veiled warning that the Church must avoid association with protagonists of home rule or risk its loyalty being questioned. In this perspective, where to be seen in any way associated with the political concerns of Irish migrants was to be regarded as promoting them, the local clergy may have concluded that to be deemed giving even mild tribute to ‘Irish question’ devotees would needlessly raise unwanted suspicions about Coventry Catholic loyalty to all that was English. It is not known if the local classroom was sought or refused but it was never a venue for the local branch of the Land, or National League.

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94 An idea of the maximum size of these gatherings is provided by a notice in the Coventry Herald 3rd March 1893 which stated that Henry Norbert Birt applied to the city authority for a music license for St. Osburg’s School to accommodate 400.
95 Butler, Life of Bishop Ullathorne, p. 144
96 O’Day, Varieties of anti-Irish behaviour, p. 39
97 It is also to be noticed that the piece cunningly flattered the Catholic clergy as being educated Englishmen of character and so were obligated to behave as such.
98 T.P. O’Connor MP was recorded by the Tablet 28th May 1904 stating at a convention that in relation to the availability of Catholic schools, ‘he would remind the school managers that most of those schools had
Matters needed deft handling by the Church in the 1860s. The horrified public reaction to the violence of the Fenians meant the Coventry Catholic clergy would not risk the accusation of disloyalty through being seen associating itself with any forceful effort, or indeed any talk of Irish self-rule. Appeals elsewhere, for mercy to be shown to the Fenians sentenced to death, were interpreted by those demanding the punishment as offering sympathy, and such sympathy if gestured could be construed as support. Wilson referred to this labelling as the ‘old slur - that associating with Irish nationalism was rubbing shoulders with murderers’. The same was thought of those who attended ceremonies of remembrance for deceased Fenians. In the excoriation by the Standard 20th December 1867 of the Fenians, following the Clerkenwell explosion, it did not resist the opportunity to berate the Catholic Church and to introduce the disloyal chestnut of the Gunpowder Plot. It is suggested, if such self-rule sentiment existed among Coventry’s Irish, and be it said there is no evidence on the matter before 1880, it was tactically better for the Church to frame it as a passion of Irish in Birmingham or elsewhere, and to pretend it did not exist in Coventry. It could have been wiser for the local Church not to especially seek out the depth of Irish sympathy for self-rule, or to know at what point that sympathy might cross from expressing itself in parliamentary pleading to violence.

A strong Pastoral by Ullathorne condemning the Fenians was read from the altar in Birmingham in January 1869. Its contents, telling of the Church’s firm position, may also have been alluded to at Masses in Coventry, which was in his bishopric. A brief paragraph thundered, frightening those who did not obey the law of the State, that they were eternally damned by him which was a terrifying prospect for the age. In it his irritation is palpable that the people would be controlled by other than his Church:

been built with Irish money. (Hear, hear.) He thought it was a subject for indignation that schools so built should close their doors when Irishmen wished to gather within their walls to fight for the cause of the Irish people. (Cheers.) He trusted a more enlightened spirit was now reigning in high quarters in the Catholic Church in this country. (‘Hear, hear,’ and a voice, ‘Quite time’) He proposed as an amendment: ‘… that we make an earnest appeal to the head of the Catholic Church in Great Britain to facilitate the use of the Catholic schools for Irish meetings’.

99 The nature of the linkage that could be made between suspect loyalty and Roman Catholicism is seen in 1868. A deputation from the Orange Lodges in Birmingham met the mayor to offer the services of 300 active lodge members who would act together as a body of special constables. E.T. Burton said ‘with respect to the fact of all Englishmen being loyal, he never doubted it, but a large portion of the people had been tainted with Fenianism, and if Fenianism had been confined to Ireland there would be no call for the English Orangemen making a profession of their loyalty. The Fenian ranks were recruited from a particular class of the Queen’s subjects; and they were almost to a man recruited from people of the Roman Catholic persuasion’. (Birmingham Daily Gazette 14th January 1868).

100 A.N. Wilson, The Victorians, (London 2003) p. 532

101 A flavour of the chagrin of the Standard 20th December 1867 is found in Appendix 10

Birmingham Daily Post 6th February 1869
‘Thus they have not only broken the law, but have induced others to break the law, not only of the State, but also of the Church. They have not only deprived themselves, but they have deprived others also of their right to the sacraments, to the destruction of their soul. And their whole aim and effort is to bring as many souls as they can into the same condition. Knowing also that the Church is the ever watchful adversary of their proceedings, these persons have done their utmost to get the lead of the Irish Catholic people out of the hands of the clergy, and to hold it in their own.’

There may, although it is not obvious, have been some subdued anger by Irish people in Coventry at Ullathorne, in whose diocese Coventry fell, at his sharp dismissal of the Fenian philosophy. Neal remarked that the hangings in Manchester caused great resentment among the general Irish though most had no involvement in politics. It would take fifteen years, until 1884 before the Dublin Weekly Nation would report that a Coventry correspondent wrote: ‘A few patriotic Irishmen of this city made arrangements with the clergy of St. Osburg’s to offer up Masses for the souls of the intrepid three – Allen, Larkin, and O’Brien. – P McDonnell.’ In the light of P. McDonnell’s letter in 1885, in which he said ‘we are short of the sympathy of our local clergy’ this request for a Mass of remembrance may have been an attempt to put the clergy on the spot and elicit their feelings on Irish nationalism.

However it was easier at some times more than at others for the Church to appear comfortable in Irish political related settings. This was apparent in the late 1880s when the Church felt itself enjoying more popular respect nationally and was less challenged about its ultimate loyalty. Migrants through their local-born offspring, and time’s work of acculturation were providing the church with a growing, locally schooled, family based, regular congregation, and devoted lay functionaries - which was a phenomenon not enjoyed by other denominations. In those years, the significance of the Irish vote gave an uplifted standing to the Irish in Coventry and progress on Home-Rule was now more reassuringly tied to the democratic process. Catholic sponsored social activity with an Irish tinge was now acceptable, as was clerical attendance, like in O’Connell’s days, by two local priests at an already mentioned meeting in 1887, which was promoted by

103 Glasgow Herald 4th February 1869
105 Dublin Weekly Nation 13th December 1884. It is noticeable the request came from ‘patriotic Irishmen’ and not from the ‘National League’ though in all likelihood the ‘patriotic Irishmen’ were League members. The distinctive phrasing that avoided reference to the League may or may not have been deliberate. While there is no written mention in Coventry after 1867 of the Manchester executions it is clear that the incident was still in the minds of Coventry nationalists.
106 Dublin Weekly Nation 18th July 1885. Mention of the executed men as the ‘intrepid three’ may have been reserved for the paper’s audience with the request to the local clergy more finely couched.
the Liberals against coercion in Ireland. Given the attendance of Fr Rea and Fr McCabe from St. Osburg’s at such a meeting - which appears very much a one-off - the background of these two priests is of interest. Fr Richard Rea was born in Liverpool. His father John was a cooper, who like his mother Winifred was Irish-born. Fr McCabe was also born in Liverpool and it would appear that his grandfather was Alexander McCabe a shoemaker from Ireland.

The Coventry clergy’s attitude to Irish self-determination was probably guarded later in the century. In the city, home-rule was a topical issue at election rallies, as was the shock at the violent manner in which some Irish would pursue independence for Ireland. Some of their local parishoners were Unionist in outlook, as was a significant number of the men of influence city-wide, and their opinion had to be respected. The clergy were loyal and acutely conscious of the need to be seen as such, so could not place themselves in a compromising situation, where they could be accused by Unionists of wishing to threaten the unity of the Empire.

It is suggested the clergy believed the best strategy was keep distant from the issue of Irish self-rule. Yet they ministered to a congregation that contained those of Irish heritage whose sympathies could not be totally ignored. The relatively small numbers of Irish in Coventry helped keep the matter locally in a less pressurised perspective. Much of the time, and even during the Fenian excitement elsewhere, it was probably acceptable for the clergy to appear so busy that time was not to be found to entertain Irish national sentiment, or it was a sufficient tactic to appear oblivious to the relevance to clerics of nationalist spirit in a small midland city. Fr Moore, below, stood back from politics, using the stratagem of his knowing he could depend on the maturity of his congregation to make their own judgements. Irish secessionism may have been framed by the clergy as a worthy ideal of the future but that issues of the present time mattered more, and all attention was required for the immediate needs of the poor, the sick and elderly, or the educational needs of the young. By the 1880s it is suggested that the Church had created a coterie of ‘Catholic of Coventry’ type of Irishman as were

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107 RG9/2698.25.45 ED 5
108 HO107/555.9.11 ED 4
109 William Ballantine remarked in 1892 after winning the parliamentary seat for Coventry, that ranged against him was not only ‘the Tory party but the Dissentient Liberals, who had banded themselves together in an organised opposition, and who were comprised of men of influence and position and who were a stern and real factor in the city’. (Coventry Herald 8th July 1892)
found in the CYMS that did not embarrass the clergy by raising awkward questions with them on the place of Ireland in the Union.110

Apart from the disapproval of the Godiva procession in Fr Ullathorne’s time, the conspicuous building and steepling of the new church in mid-century, the pursuit of a place on the School Board from 1870, and its advocacy of denominational education, the Church avoided consciously raising local animus. It was happy to proclaim its loyalty to the monarchy.

As the century closed the Catholic Church had become more ‘established’ and ‘settled’ and its social interaction with the public more assured. With its own schools it was almost permanently represented on the Coventry Education Board since 1870 and confident Pereira’s concern for the proper administration of the Board’s remit impressed all and sundry. The irritating questions about loyalty and the authenticity of Church dogma seemed asked less often. The old respect it longed for seemed to be reappearing. At a special service in St. Osburg’s in July 1893 where the re-dedication of England to St Peter was marked locally, Fr Birt said in his address that: ‘The great distinctions held by the Roman Catholic Church 300 years ago were being restored to them’ while Fr Blundell observed such a re-dedication would have been impossible less than a hundred years ago.

‘Their Protestant fellow-countrymen would have prevented it… The doctrine of the infallibility had not then been declared, and there was some uncertainty about it. Now, happily, higher views of the truth prevailed.’

Many of its flock of Irish extraction would have melted into the working people of the city by this time. In the recent marriages column of the Times 4th September 1889 the marriage officiated by Rev A.F.A. Pereira between Albert Pinches and Catherine O’Brien was announced. This married couple, who were randomly chosen for investigation, showed in the 1891 census. Albert was a 27 year old, licensed victualler, at 40 Gilbert Street. The most suitable census match for Catherine O’Brien was the Birmingham-born daughter of Patrick O Brian, a labourer, and his wife Catherine both from Tipperary, who resided in a court off High Street, Birmingham in 1871. Pinches was from an English Catholic family in Coventry and may have been a nephew of recently mentioned James Pinches; the marriage showed that with a common religion second generation Irish could marry English people with ease.111

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110 Fielding reminded that most Nationalists were Catholics who revered the Catholic Faith. Given this, there was probably a line that Coventry Nationalists would not cross to challenge the local clergy to say where they stood on Irish self-government. (Steven Fielding, Class and Ethnicity, pp. 42, 43).

111 RG12/2455.61.7 ED 19; RG10/3134.72.15 ED 3; RG11/3018.46.45 ED 33. See also Thomas F. Burke in Appendix 12 for some interesting insights provided by another family selected at random.
It is suggested that in his stylish writing in 1936, Catholic Bishop David Mathew captured Catholic status in the later nineteenth century and his comments below on the majority, inferring improvement and stability, had relevance to Coventry. First addressing the standing of privileged Catholics he said:

‘A sense of security was induced by the shadow of Arundel, for the Catholic body fully shared in that illusion of social permanence which had gained in English life as the Queen’s reign lengthened. The golden contented jubilee of 1887 and the more consciously imperialistic celebrations ten years later enclosed a period of calm. Arundel and Cardiff Castle, Carlton and Allerton brought a suggestion of the Gothic. Memories of a Tennysonian past lingered in the minstrels’ galleries, and combined well with the footmen and the silver tea-trays and the formal dinner parties of a leisured present. There were already many Catholics in diplomacy, a considerable number in the services, and none among the new type of defaulting financier.’

He then continued with observations on the majority:

‘The great mass of the Catholics of the working class were now settled in the manufacturing towns and cities… toiling and not vocal [they] remained like their rich coreligionists in a state of stability… Catholics had benefited by the general improvement in the condition of the workers which was slowly developing…and there was a deep sense of solidarity. A vivid political interest in Home Rule united those of Irish origin and gave them a sympathy with the Liberals… The national prejudice against Popery was powerful throughout the Victorian age and the Catholics were further knit together by the self-sacrifice which was required of them and by their burdens. It was this generation which built so many of the schools. They would never refuse money for the ‘chapel’. Housing conditions were now rather better and employment, though badly paid, was constant.’

Perhaps Mathew revealed more than he realized in the double-tiered layout of his conclusion. Church perceptions were influenced by an ingrained English mentality that was riven by class distinction; where one social grouping felt innately superior to a class that it considered beneath it. Further the Church itself was openly hierarchical with lay folk at the base excluded from the cadre by their ignorance of Latin, or bewilderment at Church liturgical ritual. The classist symbolism was apparent when Cardinal Vaughan walked up the aisle from the entrance to the altar on the occasion of the dedication of the St. Mary and St. Benedict church in Raglan Street in November 1893. He walked under a canopy with one corner held up by Lord Braye, with the bearers of the other corners being Edward, Oswald and Bertram, who were members of the affluent, high

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society Petre Catholic family living in Whitley Abbey (Appendix 2). There was less obvious but nonetheless just as concrete status distinction elsewhere. Nuns that engaged in domestic service, could be thought of as lesser in standing than teaching nuns, all under the authority of the mother superior who was in turn under the direction of the local priest. With the presence of such social stratification perhaps accompanied by tacit condescension, and where the Irish would have been seen as lowly worshippers, the question raised earlier about why there was an absence of reports of acknowledgement of an Irish involvement in Coventry Catholic affairs may find an explanation in the rigidity of social class hierarchy and interaction.

Hickman wrote of a mid-century national strategy by the Church of ‘enhancing the respectability of Catholicism’ which was threatened by the ‘poverty, unruliness and political inclinations’ of the Irish working-class. In order to maintain Church respectability, she saw the Church as keen to bring sobriety and impose consistency in religious practice on the Irish which would not only have the effect of controlling the Irish but also of denationalising them. It is unlikely a deliberate strategy of transformation and incorporation was at work in Coventry but the markers of such an approach happening incidentally were present. Being a Catholic in the eyes of the clergy was the mark of privilege, superior to all other senses of identity. The Church spoke, as it saw it, for those who clung together with an understanding of the primacy of Catholic religious identity. Thus there was a lack of distinct positive reference to the Irish (modified later in the century as noted below). There was also a continuity of English-born rectors and the English-style liturgical ambience. The Church had an intendment of mission, that for some Catholic Irish raised a contradiction whereby their ethno-cultural identity was at risk through maintaining their religious allegiance. The Church’s incorporative thrust, even if unintentionally and incidentally applied in the case of Coventry, jarred with the separatist agenda it maintained and enforced by moral pressure on schooling and interfaith marriage. Nationally, Best saw the Catholic community ‘as close and segregated a denomination as any in Britain’ with Irish Catholics in England and Wales ‘enclosed in their own religious and social world’.

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113 Coventry Herald 24th November 1893. Edward Petre was also a Tory (as indeed was Vaughan). He had appealed in 1892 for Catholics to vote for Conservative Murray. A letter writer to the Coventry Evening Telegraph 2nd July 1892 was at a loss to explain why Petre would do so given Petre had sat at Murray’s election meeting listening to Chamberlain refer to ‘the ascendancy of the Irish priests – priests who have abused their high office by denouncing at the altar the men who were politically opposed to them, using the spiritual terrors of their Church in order to secure compliance with their views’. The correspondent writing to what he called ‘fellow-Catholics’, in referring to Petre as ‘an aristocratic Catholic’ introduced the notion of class division.

114 Hickman, Religion, Class and Identity, p. 108
spoke of ‘a quite deliberate cultivating [of] the sense of separateness’.\textsuperscript{115} This was true in Coventry where it insisted on Catholic young being educated separately and its responsibility to build schools to satisfy that requirement.\textsuperscript{116} Also, Coventry was in a Catholic bishopric where opposition to mixed marriage remained constant over the century.\textsuperscript{117} It created the circumstances where subsequent generations of the Irish-born were at a mental remove from the host population and prioritised their self-identity as Catholic.

For practical reasons the capability of the clergy in Coventry to constrain and socialise the Irish into ‘respectability’, may not have been as powerful, nor may it have been as active an ‘agent of assimilation’ as some historians believed to be the intention and function of the Church nationally.\textsuperscript{118} The reality was Coventry had at most only two or three monks ‘on mission’ residing in the priory. Such a low number may have meant their time was fully occupied in simply performing the religious ceremonies required for effectively two parishes. The challenging nature of their work, their health issues and humble monastic disposition may have combined to lessen any enthusiasm for acculturating the Irish. The monks had entered seminaries at a young age, and after years of spiritual development may have been less worldly as a result. Fr Edmund Moore was described in his obituary as ‘full of innocence, charity and simplicity…no man had fewer enemies’.\textsuperscript{119} Fr Ralph Pratt remarked that ‘Amongst the poor, he was a poor man himself’.\textsuperscript{120} All the while they had to maintain a steely resolve in the face of

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\item\textsuperscript{115} Best, \textit{Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75}, p. 207
\item\textsuperscript{116} Fielding stressed the importance to which the Church attached to existence of Catholics schools since they were seen as means by which Catholic culture could be maintained. (Steven Fielding, \textit{Class and Ethnicity}, p. 61).
\item\textsuperscript{117} The \textit{Standard} 16\textsuperscript{th} November 1855 reported that Rev. Thomas Tyson told his congregation in Sedgley, that he had received a letter from Bishop Ullathorne forbidding mixed-marriage. Coventry was also in his see. Tyson said (with little spirit of ecumenism) in relation to mixed marriage, he saw in his own congregation:
\begin{quote}
‘The baneful effects of it, in consequence of which the children are brought up like heathens…. How dreadful it is for those who troth their faith and home to each other, when they leave their door, one going one way, the other the other way, thinking the one is going to the devil, and the other thinking the other is going to the devil; and so they live on. All Protestants think of is their own gratifications, pleasures, and selfishness, and all that is bad.’
\end{quote}
Almost half a century later Ullathorne’s successor disapproved of mixed marriage, as strongly if less stridently, than Tyson. The \textit{Herald} 21\textsuperscript{st} October 1904 reported that Edward Ilsley, Catholic Bishop of Birmingham complained on his visitation to Nuneaton, that mixed-marriages were ‘one of the chief weaknesses’ of the town. He remarked that:
\begin{quote}
‘One of the greatest evils of such mixed marriages was the disadvantage under which the children laboured. In such marriages the stronger will prevailed and children were often sent to other than Catholic schools.’
\end{quote}
\item\textsuperscript{118} Bossy, \textit{English Catholic Community}, p. 309
\item\textsuperscript{119} \textit{The Downside Review}, Vol. 18, 1899 p. 180
\item\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Coventry Times} 30\textsuperscript{th} April 1862
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
indirect sniping and condescension from inimical preachers and the Standard.\textsuperscript{121} They faced tiring duties day after day, including regular visits to the workhouse. Practical projects they undertook, e.g. building a school, must have caused stress and left debts to worry about for years afterwards. Fr Pereira was told by the ‘Catholics of Coventry’ in an address read at a concert to celebrate his silver jubilee in 1891 that ‘a heavy task devolved upon [him] of freeing from debt the church which [he had] striven to make a yet worthier home for God and His children’.\textsuperscript{122} The clergy had their own health problems. Fr Pratt died at 73 years, five years after leaving Coventry in 1870. Fr Moore showed signs of consumption as a young man.\textsuperscript{123} Fr Richard Rea mentioned above, as attending the rally in 1887 against coercion, had diabetes and died of pneumonia in January 1915 aged 63. He had been in charge of the new St. Mary mission since 1893 and a piece in the Standard following his death stated that his years there were of ‘unceasing and laborious work for the pastor, who has found it very difficult to keep pace with the demands of his large and ever-growing parish’.\textsuperscript{124} His great friend Fr McCabe, who attended the same meeting on coercion, served for some years in Coventry before settling in Wooton Wawen, died a year later, also aged 63. Like Fr Rea who engaged in ‘unceasing and laborious work’ it was said of Fr Moore that he was pre-occupied with ‘religious duties, and…visiting the sick and the poor’.\textsuperscript{125} The Church through it teachings provided spiritual enrichment and encouraged families to live righteous lives. It also provided school places, and an appropriate ceremony at those life-journey milestones, from birth to burial, and thus gave structure and stability to the lives of the Irish. Within this pastoral context they met the Irish and that was the largely the extent of their support.

\textsuperscript{121} While ‘innocent’ in spirit they were learned and capable of defending and representing the position of the Church locally. They had parochial experience; some clerics had served elsewhere, such as Pratt, in Liverpool before arriving in Coventry; others had been assistants in Coventry for some years before becoming rector. The import of the role of assistants in relation to the Irish may not be duly discerned. This is due to their being upstaged by the more often recorded work of the rector, their relatively short stays in Coventry, and the inability in some cases of not being able to find other than their semi-potted biographical details. Two assistants might be mentioned as examples of ones that may have had an appeal to the Irish. Dom Michael Placid Sinnott (1803-1896) was from Co. Wexford and thus had a familiarity with Ireland (Figure 4.16). Dom John Placid O’Brien (1826-1898) born in Liverpool with an Irish name and presumably an Irish background, was described as a ‘man of infinite jest and irrepressible gaiety’ and who was a fine singer. When he resided in Coventry from 1852-53 his personality may have chimed with the Irish who had a fondness for celebrating.


http://www.ourladysparbold.org.uk/about/the-history/priests-and-people/ Accessed 12th February 2019

\textsuperscript{122} Coventry Herald 29\textsuperscript{th} May 1891

\textsuperscript{123} The Downside Review, Vol. 18, 1899 p. 178

\textsuperscript{124} Coventry Standard 15\textsuperscript{th} January 1915

\textsuperscript{125} The Downside Review, Vol. 18, 1899 p. 179
The Benedictine Mission

Benedictine monks served Coventry in the nineteenth century. The Benedictine temper - largeness of spirit - would also become available to Coventry at diocesan level when William Ullathorne became Bishop of Birmingham within a few years of his departure from Coventry in 1846. The monks that served Coventry were attached to Downside Abbey, Bath; or Douai Abbey, Reading; or Ampleforth Abbey, Yorkshire. From Ullathorne onwards with the exception of Athanasius Clarkson, Coventry was a mission of Downside. While many monks came and went from Coventry notably in the 1890s, three clerics acting as curates or rectors: Fr Pratt 1850-1870, Fr Moore 1859-1891 and Fr Pereira 1870-1884, provided after Fr William Ullathorne 1841-1846 strong parochial continuity. Pratt, Moore and Pereira were resident for long periods which meant they had mature familiarity with the city; and it with them. A number of priests had served as assistant rectors before taking over the reins themselves as shown in Table 4.3. They developed and oversaw the parish infrastructure and set the standing of Catholicism as a denomination to be respected in the city. It would appear little specific consideration was given to the ‘Irish’ as a ethnic group. Yet they were close in a certain respect to the Irish because the confessional provided the clergy with a unique insight into the deepest thoughts of the Catholic Irish community, albeit of the pious. They followed the Rule of St. Benedict that sought poverty and humility, which would have meant they were on an approachable level to the Irish and attuned to their poverty. Fr Pratt said of himself and Coventry in 1862 that ‘he was only a poor man coming from a very poor place’. They were not key characters in the daily lives of the Irish in the sense that they were not recorded as being called on to intervene in Irish rows.

In 1841 William Bernard Ullathorne (1806-1889), a Benedictine monk, became parish priest of Coventry (See Appendix 2). On arrival in Coventry he decided to build a new church. This was to replace the inadequate Church of St. Mary and St. Laurence which had been in use since 1806 and which was catering for a congregation said to have numbered 300-400 in 1838. There appears to be no evidence of any explanation that the congregation might have been lately swelled by pre-Famine Irish

126 Benedictines could claim an intermittent association with Coventry as far back as 1043 when they occupied the city’s first monastery. (Walters, Story of Coventry, p. 16).
127 Coventry Times 30th April 1862
128 There is one instance found where a priest intervened to plead for a parishioner. This was in 1877 when a lad called John Kennedy was before the court for stabbing a boy. Kennedy’s aunt said he was in her charge, and he attended St. Osburg’s School. Fr Pereira then made a communication to the bench which was inaudible to reporters. The Mayor said it was a serious charge and remanded Kennedy in custody in order to consider what to do with him.
129 Champ, William Bernard Ullathorne, p. 90
130 Reginald Hugh Kiernan, The Story of the Archdiocese of Birmingham, (West Bromwich 1951) p. 28
arrivals and that such increase prompted the provision of a larger church; the impression has been left to linger by Ullathorne that conversions were largely responsible for the increased flock (Table 4.4). Since the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 a more assertive open display of clerical activity and greater priestly self-assurance was to be seen in the Midlands. St. Marys’ Church in Derby was completed in 1839. Bishop Thomas Walsh replaced the small church of St. Chad with a cathedral sized building in Birmingham in 1839, while in 1841 Robert Wilson commenced building Nottingham Cathedral; all were designed by Pugin. While these churches, through architecture and decoration, were ostensibly designed to give a heightened experience to worship they were also tangible statements of revival, presence and growth in municipalities. Though not on the scale of the churches designed by Pugin, Ullathorne’s plan for St. Osburg’s was still considered too large and elaborate for its congregation in which there were ‘no respectable people’. Designed by Charles Hansom (1817-1888), Town surveyor of Coventry, in continental Gothic style of the 13th and 14th centuries, the foundation stone was laid in 1843 and the parchment enclosed with it recorded the Catholic congregation of Coventry as 1,000. He raised some funds by ‘concentrating on districts where Irish labourers had congregated. They, mindful no doubt of his efforts on behalf of their banished countrymen in the Australian penal settlements, responded with generosity’. He also went around England on begging tours. Perhaps Ullathorne’s quietly styled church at the then edge of Coventry did not make a lasting physical overstatement of Catholic self-importance in Coventry that would have stirred the resentment of bigots who were forceful in 1860s Birmingham and Wolverhampton. That is not to say it was an unimposing church; with steeple added in 1854, its solid presence displayed an immutable denotation of Catholicism in Coventry (Figure 4.6). At the laying of the foundation stone for the new church in 1843, at its dedication in 1845 and at Ullathorne’s consecration therein as a bishop in 1846 there was much ceremony. These spectacles reassured the faithful of the confidence of the Hierarchy in the rightful place of Catholicism in local society. Butler tells:

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131 See below where Ullathorne referred to Coventrian Catholics in 1865 as ‘an English people of converts’.
132 Butler, Life of Bishop Ullathorne, p. 127
133 Her Religious Children, Life of Mother Hallahan, p. 82. According to Champ the reason he did not invite Pugin to design the church was most likely due to cost as he could not risk Pugin’s notorious extravagance in the poor conditions of Coventry. (Champ, William Bernard Ullathorne, p. 115).
135 Butler, Life of Bishop Ullathorne, p. 126
‘On the following day all the bishops of England assisted at the solemn opening, which was attended by many of the Catholic gentry of that and the neighbouring counties. In the afternoon a great entertainment was given to the bishops and the visitors in the old Catholic Guild Hall, which was filled with guests.’

Catholic development may not have drawn as much criticism as it might have, since it was not uniquely expansionist in Coventry. In the evangelical climate of the decade the Church of England opened St. Peter’s church in Hillfields in 1841 and also St. Thomas’ church in Albany Road in 1849. The local Established Church may have been concerned more, about the large swathe of population who did not attend church, and the growth of Dissenting congregations at its expense, than Roman Catholicism whose numbers were mainly heightened by poor Irish immigrants.

In 1844, it will be recalled, Ullathorne attended the O’Connell meeting in Coventry. His presence offers an opportunity to: hear his support for the alleviation of injustice in Ireland and who he blamed for it; his standing among Coventry men of affairs and; allowing for the heightened passion of the meeting, his popularity in the city. It was reported that: ‘Dr Ullathorne…ascended the platform and was received with great cheering and the waving of handkerchiefs by the ladies in the gallery’. Ullathorne said: ‘To imprison such a man, under the idea of destroying his influence would be futile’. Ullathorne adverted to the miserable condition of Ireland which he attributed to ‘the injustice and misgovernment of which long it had been a victim’.

This was a period of renewed Church confidence that was referred to in 1852 by Newman as a ‘Second Spring’. The *Morning Post* 30th August 1844 reporting on the consecration of the Catholic Cathedral in Nottingham, 41 miles from Coventry, wrote of spectacle of the occasion which seemed eager to recreate a prominence found before the Reformation. An excerpt in Appendix 6 illustrates the confident flaunt; a scaled version of this assertiveness could be seen in Coventry. In 1845 Ullathorne invited Fr Albert Gentili who gave a series of missions throughout Britain, to preach in Coventry. He had already visited Coventry in 1843. Ullathorne arranged for the Gentili mission to occur during the Godiva festival which he felt was profane. Gentili asked those attending the church, to pray that it would rain heavily to spoil the shameful Godiva display. As a counter measure he organised processions, to which crowds thronged each evening, around the church in which a statue of Our Lady was carried while hymns were sung.

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136 Ibid., p. 127
137 *Coventry Herald* 22nd March 1844. At this time O’Connell faced a year in prison having been found guilty in Dublin on conspiracy charges.
138 The *Herald* 4th August 1843 contained an advertisement confidently placed at the top of the front page that two sermons would be preached by him in Hill Street in aid of the Catholic schools on 13th August.
To the Catholic Irish the presence of a new church offered a comforting sanctuary in which support and a sense of belonging abided; a place where their belief was validated and celebrated. That it was run even for a short time by a priest who had close contact with transported Irish, who had visited Ireland, and was assisted by Margaret Hallahan who had Irish parents would have offered further reassurance. It is known that throughout Ullathorne’s life he despised excessive drinking which he saw as a social evil that degraded not only the imbibing person but the family also. He may have preached strongly in Coventry against alcohol abuse and advocated determined self-control. This advocacy of temperance may have been to the benefit of his Irish listeners but it may have also alienated some from attending his church. He preached to large congregations in the evening in the new church, but they were not all Irish. He was receiving converts at the rate of one hundred per annum on his departure from the city. In Ullathorne’s 1868 account of earlier life in Coventry he appeared busy in the financing, design, building and dedication of a new church but he elaborated little on his pastoral work from 1842-1846. It is suggested that he was at 36 years, a young, widely travelled, administratively experienced, quietly ambitious priest in a hurry, who in the outlook of the time did not regard the alleviation of poverty as a greater priority than getting a new church built. However even if there was much assistance offered to the Irish and the poor, it is the nature of such pastoral social care that it is done quietly and would not find itself recorded with such attention as might the opening of a new church. Lay organisations such as the St. Vincent Society or the CYMS were creations of the following decade.

He referred to Coventrian Catholics after a return visit to Coventry in 1865 as ‘poor people’ with ‘their simple faith’, who were ‘an English people of converts, and yet they have the deep Irish faith, together with the English quality of good works’. Heimann reassured that while the mention of simplicity may sound patronising to modern ears ‘praise for the piety of the poor was no disparagement, but was meant approvingly, even reverentially’. In Ullathorne’s description it is not entirely clear how the attributes of the congregation related to each other; while he referred to the congregation’s ‘deep Irish faith’ (his only use of the word ‘Irish’ in a Coventry context)

[139] Champ, William Bernard Ullathorne, pp. 93-94
[140] Butler, Life of Bishop Ullathorne, pp. 128-141
[141] The first meeting of the Brothers of St Vincent de Paul was held on 21st April 1856. (Souvenir of the Golden Jubilee of St. Osburg’s Conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, 17th August 1907).
[142] Butler, Life of Bishop Ullathorne, pp. 133-134. ‘Simple’ has a variety of meanings such as: not involved or complicated; easy to understand; plain; unadorned; unaffected or unpretentious; sincere; of humble condition; ordinary or straightforward.
he seems more interested in upholding its Englishness. He recalled in 1869 that in Coventry he found a:

‘Good and pious flock...few of them gave me real trouble, and they were so much of one class, the industrious weavers and watchmakers, that they were like one family...It was long a pleasure to me whenever I have gone to Coventry to look from the pulpit on the old faces; but alas! how many of them have disappeared. Those whom death spared have been scattered by the loss of the Coventry trade, after going through years of suffering and destitution...I had the invaluable aid of Mother Margaret, whose influence over the people was a spiritual power that was always growing. My four years and a half at Coventry were the happiest and most fruitful years of my life and I left it with extreme regret.' 144

The absence of any gesture of acknowledgement of Irish involvement in his old parish may have been due to a belief that Irish members of the congregation were increasingly fusing in matters religious with the English ‘majority’. The omission may have arisen because he did not wish to single the Irish out for mention and risk either embarrassing them or the Church. He was certainly aware of the Midland Irish and identified them as a group in 1857 when he wrote Notes on the Education Question considered in Appendix 6. 145 Then he did so and saw them as the desperate poor. Perhaps as time passed it was no longer mannerly to mention the Irish, as in the act of doing so, the poverty struck origins of many Irish parishioners would be recalled. That it was these lowly migrants that gave numerical strength to the Church was not something to be wilfully exposed to public attention. The migrants with a belief, which he saw as a ‘simple faith’ at a remove from doctrinal, liturgical and theological considerations, garnered less prestige than high profile conversions of intellectuals, including that of John Henry Newman in 1845, who resided in Birmingham. Ullathorne wrote his autobiographical draft in the aftermath of the Murphy Riots and Fenian excitements. Birmingham was a centre of Fenianism with the guns provided to the Manchester Martyrs sourced there. In his Advent pastoral of 1868 he strongly condemned Fenianism publicly, regarding it as a secret society whose members were banned by the Church from taking the sacraments. He deeply upset many Irish who had sympathies with the movement and whose feelings were raw after the executions of the Manchester Martyrs. 146 In this light he may have believed it would appear divisive of him to unnecessarily identify parishioners as Irish or English in his autobiography. Perhaps the simplest explanation is that he overlooked the Irish because they had not yet arrived in Coventry in Famine related numbers before his ministry ended there in 1846. Norman’s

144 Ullathorne, From cabin-boy to archbishop, pp. 220-221
145 William Ullathorne, Notes on the Education Question, (London 1857)
146 Butler, Life of Bishop Ullathorne, pp. 141-144
succinct sentence may offer the fullest explanation of his perception of the Irish when he said of Ullathorne: ‘He was very English’.  

Ullathorne’s consecration in St. Osburg’s as a bishop in June 1846 provided another display of Catholic confidence. He left the city during the same month. His departure then, in terms of this study, is to be regretted because if he had remained in Coventry during those years of trauma he may have written more expansively about the local Irish.

Gilley points out the migrants ‘hardly figure in English nineteenth-century ecclesiastical archives as the Irish. They are usually the poor’. That the numerical boost of the Irish migrants to Church buoyancy was not prominently credited is seen in Kiernan’s account of the Archdiocese of Birmingham (that included Coventry) where there is but a fleeting remark in one sentence about Irish immigrants contributing along with conversions to a growth in numbers. This phenomenon was noted by Murphy who observed a curious reluctance to acknowledge the Irish influence on the revival of the English church. He gave as an example that in Nottingham Cathedral: a History of Catholic Nottingham the author Canon Cummins devoted a mere eight lines to the Irish.

The strength of Church attendance in relation to the size of the Irish-born in Coventry, and its comparison with that found in a selection of other municipalities is shown in Table 4.5. The comparison is merely indicative of the Catholic/Irish Catholic balance as it does not take account of local-born children of the Irish, those Catholic Irish who did not make public worship on the day, and Non-Catholic Irish. It is to be noticed the Birmingham morning attendance was a little over one third of the Irish-born in that city, while the attendance in Coventry was substantially higher as a percentage of its Irish-born. Compared to Leicester, Nottingham and York where the total Catholic worship attendance as a percentage of Irish-born was approximately 70.0% the Coventry percentage at 129.0% appears high. It is to be observed that the

148 The Coventry Herald 10th September 1847 recorded that Ullathorne had returned to give two sermons in St. Osburg’s on the previous Sunday. The collections taken afterwards on behalf of the schools had raised over £22.
149 Gilley, English Catholic Attitudes, p. 105
150 Kiernan, Story of the Archdiocese of Birmingham, p. 42
151 Murphy, Irish in Nottingham, p. 87
152 Appendix 6 provides comment on the Table and compares Catholic attendance in Coventry with that of other denominations.
rounded nature of the Fr Pratt’s Coventry figures when compared with the selection above suggest that it may have been an estimate and that it was too liberal.  

The long presence of Ralph Ephram Pratt (1802-1875) in the city allowed him to become recognised as a stable part of Coventry society which brought increased acceptance for the Church he represented in the polite and influential section of that society. He attended many civic functions over the years and his accustomed presence of showing Catholic interest and involvement in city life helped to create mutual trust between the Catholic Church and the city populace. It remains a paradox that over the years while a newspaper in one issue might rail against the believed deviancy of the Catholic Church, in another issue its representation in Coventry by Fr Pratt, if referred to, would be in kindly terms. The Standard 21st June 1867 recorded that Fr Pratt was among the county grandees and municipal notables of Coventry and nearby towns, at an elaborate, ceremonial civic opening of the Coventry Industrial and Art Exhibition. Following a luncheon in the Corn Exchange, Earl Granville took the opportunity, while responding to a toast to his health, to include in his laudatory remarks about Coventry the following observation which drew loud applause:  

‘What I have seen here tonight goes to my very heart, for I consider it forms one of the most touching examples I remember of the perfect good feeling between the clergymen of that Church to which I belong and the clergy of other Protestant churches dissenting from that Episcopal Church, and at the same time a Roman Catholic priest respected and beloved by you all.’  

This remark by Lord Granville was more than throwaway bonhomie by one of the Liberal elite. It was made in 1867, seventeen years after Pratt’s arrival in Coventry and three years before he retired to Downside. Over the years he had made his presence known in a variety of social contexts. The Standard 5th October 1855 reported that the annual meeting of the Coventry Institute was held in St. Mary’s Hall, attended by ‘many of most influential citizens’. The Mayor, Sir Joseph Paxton MP, the High Sheriff of the County, and a number of clergymen, aldermen and names synonymous with civic affairs and local business, such as Bray, Caldicott, Gulson, Herbert, Pears, Ratcliff, Soden, and Vale comprised the list of attendees. Fr Pratt was called to move one of the resolutions. That he was asked, and the relaxed, cultivated, modest manner in which he moved the motion, indicated how socially acceptable and comfortable he was in the presence of these city gentlemen. A list of occasions when Pratt was seen in a

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153 The Study Area Irish-born figure was 894 and if this was applied it would reduce the 129% to 100%. See Appendix 6 (3) for returns of other denominations at worship on 30th March 1851.
154 Concurrent with this ceremony, riots were occurring in Birmingham; the nature of the reference to the riots on the occasion of the ceremony was noted earlier.
155 Standard 21st June 1867
complimentary light and deemed part of the fabric of the city is found in Appendix 6 while some personal details are found in Appendix 2. He left Coventry in 1870 and when he died in 1875 it was said of him:

‘He was well known and universally beloved and respected, not only by the members of the church to which he belonged, but by the inhabitants of the city generally.’

Thomas Cuthbert Smith (1815-1884) took the rectorship on the departure of Pratt but shortly after in 1872 he was succeeded by Henry Edmund Moore (1824-99). He had arrived as an assistant many years earlier in 1859 and remained as rector until 1891. Fr Antonio Francisco Pereira (1839-1923) came as an assistant to Coventry in 1870 where he remained, apart from a five year break in the 1880s, for twenty-six years (Appendix 2 for details on Smith, Moore and Pereira). He was rector for the final five years before his departure in 1896. The Herald 29th May 1891 reported a presentation to the Rev. Fr Pereira by the Catholics of Coventry to mark the 25th anniversary of his ordination. The address was given by Dr McVeagh who told Fr Pereira of the ‘esteem, gratitude, and affection... won by your zealous, untiring, and self-sacrificing labours among your flock during the last 25 years’. The address reminded Fr Pereira of his work in collecting funds for the erection of schools in Hill Street, his renovation of St. Osburg’s, his service as a twice elected member of the School board, and that he was ‘a bold and unflinching champion of the rights of denominational education whenever these have been assailed by the supporters of unsectarian (sic) schools’. The census provides an indication of the background of the men who signed the address as the ‘Catholics of Coventry’ (Appendix 6). There was no ‘Irish’ reference in the anniversary address. The Irish influence among these ‘active’ or lay ‘executive’ Catholics, if defined by birthplace appeared moderate. While some, such as Doran or Beever may have possessed an Irish background, only four signatories were Irish-born, and at an average age of 60.2 years, older too than the average age of the 23 signatories which was 45.2 years. In making this presentation, they would have defined themselves primarily as, Catholics associating with other Catholics in common endeavour, rather than as part of an Irish scheme. As this listing of ‘Catholics of Coventry’ suggests, these Irish by background or birth, lacked numerical heft, within the prominent Catholic circle, to be able should they ever imagine as necessary, to drive a proposal particularly relevant to the Irish for espousal by the Catholic fraternity. In reality, only Denis McVeagh’s social

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156 Coventry Herald 11th June 1875
157 Ibid. 29th May 1891
158 Ibid. 29th May 1891
esteem and mature years would have given him the stature to sway opinion in the direction of his view. Apart from Thomas Hennessey, who was a committee member of the Land League, the remainder on the list were not mentioned over the years as directly involved in the League. Only Thomas Hennessey and J. Randle were listed as attending the Liberal promoted, Irish Coercion Bill, meeting in Pool Meadow on 16th April 1887.

The Education Act of 1870 led to the setting up of the Coventry School Board. The Herald 2nd December 1870 reported on the triennial election of the eleven members of the Coventry School Board. Topping the poll was John Gulson, Liberal Association with 4,162 votes, followed by William Lynes, Conservative with 3,854 votes and then Edward Petre who represented the ‘Roman Catholic element’ with 3,700 votes. The paper referred to him as a cultured gentleman whose ‘co-religionists could have found no better exponent of their principles’. In the Herald 16th December 1870, Rev E.H. Delf, a Dissenting minister in West Orchard Chapel gave a discourse on the ‘The Future Education of Coventry’. In it he complained that in Coventry the cumulative voting system used to elect the School Board had given an unfair advantage to minorities such as English Roman Catholics. He saw them in ‘perfect drill’ and moving ‘as one man in obedience to their priest’. Delf questioned why Roman Catholics wanted to be represented on the School Board and wondered could the reason be to prevent the Bible being used in supported schools, and -

‘…to watch the roll of children’s names lest one poor child, within ten degrees of relationship to a Roman Catholic, should be swept out of the gutter into the Godless precincts of a rate-aided school’.

Petre, to most people’s surprise, lost his place on the Board by a mere fifteen votes in 1873. That this happened seemed a shock to all and the Catholic feeling may have been that a group comprising all, or any of the: ‘Liberals, Radicals, Dissenters led by Delf’ were to blame. That Liberalism which was friendly to Ireland could include under its banner Radicals and Dissenters not disposed to Catholic Church stipulations must have upset Irish Catholics. (Appendix 11). Fr Moore decided to present himself for election in 1876; again Delf was to the forefront with bitter complaint at Moore’s move which he articulated in an address to his congregation in West Orchard. Apart from

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159 The William Ryan mentioned in the address and the W. Ryan who was an official of the Land League were not references to the same person.
160 Coventry Herald 22nd April 1887
161 Ibid. 22nd April 1887
162 Ibid. 5th December 1873
163 Ibid. 24th November 1876. Moore’s letter to the Herald seeking votes was a model of tactfulness and showed a desire to avoid causing any controversy. In the adjoining column an address of E.H. Delf on the
the one Catholic electee, the Board, comprised of 11 members, reflected party political division, usually 5 Conservatives and 5 Liberals; with the former seen as Denominational and the latter Non-Denominational in outlook. In general, with the strong exception of Delf, all seemed content with the compromise arrangement which permitted Catholics having one seat of the Board.

H.E. Moore wrote a letter in response to Delf’s bitter address. While the letter contained typical politeness - that he bore no ill-will towards Delf, or wished to enter controversy - it then went on to take Delf firmly to task. The letter showed that the Priory clergy were quite erudite, humble but confident in their own principles, and were prepared to take issue with those disparaging the Church. It usefully revealed Moore’s political stance, his attitude to the leadership of Catholics - and by extension Catholic Irish in the decade after the Fenian ventures. He asked in his letter whether Mr. Delf was justified:

‘…in hooking into the question of the Coventry School Board election attacks against Catholics in general. Is not this, I ask, a sad instance of illiberality on the part of a Nonconformist Liberal’.

Moore continued:

‘Just at present the Catholics of Coventry are very much divided in their political opinion as to whether they should be Liberals or Conservatives. Let me tell Mr Delf, and all such Liberals as stand by him, that, if they wish to make every Catholic in Coventry abandon the Liberal ranks for the Conservatives, they are just doing that which will bring about the desired end. I am not myself one who takes an active part in politics; I leave the members of our congregation quite to themselves and their own judgement in these matters; but I would wish all Liberals to remember this, that, in every question we Catholics cling firmly together, and thereon willingly sink all political differences. Mr. Delf’s address, I know has justly roused a feeling of bitter indignation in the breasts of our people. It was said at the last municipal election, in a fly sheet signed by four members of our congregation (of which I knew nothing before publication), that Catholics have nothing to expect from Dissenters: and, indeed, are we not, now at least, much inclined to believe the truth of that assertion? Have we not, in Mr. Delf’s effusion, some proof of it.’

Education Question was published which showed deep resentment at the prospect of Fr Moore joining the Board. See Appendix 11. It is difficult to assess how current, influential or representative were Delf’s opinions, whether he was seen by contemporaries as speaking the mind, of everyman, or just, of a lone polemical preacher who was of the angry view that the Catholic Church was being advantaged by the State to the detriment of Nonconformists. Delf himself was well-known and reportedly popular, possessing a ‘brusque manner’ and a ‘strongly marked character’. It should be stressed that no reference could be found to him making any comment on the Irish. In fact he was around the platform with other notables in St. Mary’s Hall in March 1844 when O’Connell spoke about redressing Irish grievances. (Birmingham Mail 20th May 1882; Coventry Herald 26th May 1882).

164 Coventry Herald 1st December 1876

165 Appendix 11 explains the reference to a flysheet. Coventry Herald 1st December 1876
Delf also complained that Protestant children attended Catholic schools because education was offered by them at a cheaper rate while Catholic children did not attend Coventry day schools. It was not Fr Moore but Fr Pereira who wrote a strong reply on 7th December 1876.\textsuperscript{166} He said he visited three established schools in Coventry and found Catholics attended two of them, and so, chided Delf for not checking the facts, for rushing to print and making ‘slap-dash assertions.’ He challenged the ageing Delf to provide to the public, information on the fees in Delf’s school and in an overly direct fashion responded:

‘Of course it would be unreasonable in us to expect that same amount of infallibility from the rev gentleman when writing in a newspaper that we look for from him when speaking ‘ex-cathedra’ at West orchard Chapel on the “Present Aspects of the Education Question.” May I, however, be allowed to suggest to the rev gentleman to spend half-an-hour in meditation on that commandment of God which I believe is as equally binding on him as on the rest of the Christian world: “Thou shal’t not bear false witness against thy neighbour.”’

Delf replied on 13\textsuperscript{th} December 1876 that he was delighted the doctrine of infallibility had led to ‘the present complications of that church in nearly all the countries on the continent and will ultimately lead to its ruin’. He referred to ‘good old Fr Pratt whose removal from Coventry I never could understand, because his great liberality helped rather than hindered the interests of Roman Catholicism’.\textsuperscript{167} Fr Moore continued without contest in 1879 and 1882 on the Board until it went to election in 1885 when Fr Pereira took Moore’s place. The confidence of Pereira, and the increased standing and influence of him and the Church he represented, that was displayed at local official level is shown in March 1886 when the headmaster of Spon Street Boy’s School, J. Stringer was the subject of a complaint made to the Board by Pereira. Stringer was ordered by the Board to attend its next meeting to explain the allegations made by Pereira of rudeness towards him and for having marked the registers fifteen minutes late. At the next meeting, Stringer sent a letter profusely apologising for his discourtesy towards Pereira and promising to remedy the problem of untimely register marking. Pereira backed off saying that he would not press the matter further and that Stringer had been publicly ‘rapped on the knuckles, figuratively speaking’. He made some ameliorating remarks that they were all liable to make mistakes but that it was important that the regulations laid down for marking the registers be strictly adhered to. The Board adopted Pereira’s proposition that Stringer’s explanation and apology be accepted.\textsuperscript{168}

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\item \textsuperscript{166} Coventry Herald 8\textsuperscript{th} December 1876
\item \textsuperscript{167} Ibid. 13\textsuperscript{th} December 1876
\item \textsuperscript{168} Coventry Herald 5\textsuperscript{th} March 1886; 2\textsuperscript{nd} April 1886
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The Catholic Young Men’s Society

The society came into existence in Coventry on 28th February 1858. Apart from offering lay support to the clergy, the role of the society was to create fellowship among its members, and through its activities form a wider bond and shared experience among Catholics. While it fulfilled the latter, those Irish with social responsibility who had the potential to provide ethnic leadership were absorbed into a society driven by Catholic social objectives. Minutes of the first two years of the society fortunately survive and are outlined in Appendix 6.

With the exception of their entertainments in St. Mary’s Hall, where there may possibly have existed some catering for the preference of those of Irish background, in these years their picnics and schoolroom based activities had a British resonance. The involvement of land owning Catholics in the parish, the efforts and geniality of Fr Pratt, his pervasive presence or that of his assistant Fr Moore, and the existence of the St. Vincent Society all tell of an inclusive and active parish but no sense of any Irish cultural direction on proceedings.

Reports of CYMS activities published in the press contained signals of loyalty and openness as in 1863 when at the end of their penny reading evening God Save the Queen was rendered. Again in the same year a letter to the Herald telling of the success of an evening of readings it had organised, stated: ‘many of our Protestant and Dissenting friends favoured us by attending, and we hope they will continue to give us their support, as we do not intend making the movement sectarian’. Much of the social activity occurred in St. Osburg’s Schools. From the 1880s some of this around St. Patrick’s Day had an Irish flavour (Appendix 6). In the final decade, St. Patrick’s Day celebratory venues moved to locations in the city centre, perhaps due to larger numbers, or the absence of alcohol in the school, or because celebrations had become jamborees attended by ‘new’ Irish of the cycle trade. The St. Patrick’s Day demonstrations of Irish self-pride jar with the integrative trend suggested as occurring with the post-Famine arrivals. Cronin and Adair saw two forms to the celebration: self indulgent enjoyment or a promotion of Irish nationalism. It would appear that the former was the main motivating force; while the day was a marker of

169 First branch of the Catholic Young Men’s Society opened in Sheffield in 1854
170 It did create or maintain fellowship. For example executors of the will of John Rogers an original founding member who died in 1890 were Martin Tew, son of George Tew, and William McGowran - the latter two were early members in 1858-59. (England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1890 - 30th September).
171 Coventry Times 2nd December 1863
172 Coventry Herald 18th December 1863
Irish presence and provided a sense of group identity, the annual, transitory nature of the festival did not induce lasting community cohesion.\textsuperscript{173}

\textbf{Irish Social and Literary Society}

The Gaelic revival touched Coventry at the beginning of the twentieth century and appeared anchored to Catholic surroundings. The Irish Social and Literary Society, held its first meeting of 25\textsuperscript{th} January 1901 in St. Osburg’s school (Appendix 9). This and the meetings that followed seemed enthusiastic and cheerful gatherings where songs and recitations filled the school hall that was decorated with Irish motifs. The situation did not appear all that removed from the pleasant concerts held in the school under the auspices of the CYMS. The attendance of the McGowrans and Fr Campbell in St. Osburg’s hall suggested a comfortable accommodation of priests and active, favoured laity with those consciously seeking Irish cultural development. The relaxed approval of the Society may have lessened over time, as the assumed bond between the Catholic Church through the St. Osburg’s location and Irish with cultural renewal in mind, lessened when the Society changed locations for St. Patrick’s Day celebrations, to the Baths Assembly Hall where larger numbers could be accommodated. Appendix 9 outlines the Gaelic League’s articulation until March 1903.

\textbf{Easterly augmentation and later century Catholic advancement in Coventry}

Development especially after mid-century showed the importance which the Church attached to locally answering expanding religious demand, to offering education and controlling its provision. With St. Osburg’s sited west of the town centre, the opening in Raglan Street of a school, within which a classroom would be used for celebrating public Mass by 1863, was a planned initial response to the needs of Catholics east of the town centre.

Building commenced on a second boys’ school and a combined girls’ and infants’ school on land adjoining St. Osburg’s in 1875. The \textit{Herald} 9\textsuperscript{th} April 1875 recorded the ceremonial laying of the foundation stone for the new school for girls and infants, followed then by the stone for the new school for boys, beside St. Osburg’s. An address was given by Bishop Collier who had spent many years in Mauritius but had to return to Britain due to failing health where from 1872 he settled into a quiet routine at Hill Street Priory.\textsuperscript{174} He initially spoke about the importance of education and how popular education should comprise more than reading, writing and arithmetic. He skilfully developed this ideal into an exposition on loyalty as this report shows:

\textsuperscript{173} Mike Cronin and Daryl Adair, \textit{The Wearing of the Green}, (London 2002) p. 32
\textsuperscript{174} The \textit{Tablet} 29\textsuperscript{th} November 1890 p. 25. He resided in St. Osburg’s priory until 1890.
‘In these schools the children would be taught to do good to their neighbour, and besides this fundamental maxim they would be taught their duty to their Sovereign, to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God.” An unworthy attempt had been made, he said to designate the Catholics of this country as wanting in loyalty. This he declared was an unworthy slander. There was no class of Englishman that surpassed Roman Catholics in loyalty to their Sovereign; and, he asked, did not the Roman Catholics pay taxes as cheerfully as anyone else? Did not Roman Catholics soldiers fight the Queen’s battles as valiantly as any other soldiers; or did they know Roman Catholic soldiers to run away from the field of battle? Never; and he said that to stigmatise the Catholics of this country as an unloyal class was one of the foulest calumnies that was ever suggested to a vindictive mind, and he hoped and believed that the author of that calumny would regret it. But the attempt had failed, and it was now admitted that Catholics were as loyal as any other subjects of the realm, and they said ‘Long life to our gracious Queen; may happiness and prosperity attend her as long as we have the happiness of being under her benignant and just reign.”

At the inauguration of the schools in October 1875 Irish-born Canon Michael O’Sullivan, Vicar General of Birmingham delivered an address. His attitude, which must be presumed to resonate with Coventry clerics, was according to Herson, in referring to him in relation to Stafford, ‘one of furthering the interests of the English Church and the Irish had to fit in as best they could’. O’Sullivan exulted in the accomplishment of Catholics throughout England in building so many of their own schools through sacrifice, as exampled in Coventry. He observed that there were few Catholics in the upper and middle classes, most were poor ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’; they were not only poor they were unpopular also and had to contend with prejudice. His promotion of the ‘poor and unpopular’ line would have found an affinity with the Irish, but there was no acknowledgement of the Irish or their particular experience of poverty or prejudice. Neither were the children of the Irish who must have substantially contributed to enrolment figures given specific credit. While his words indicate that Catholics felt they received unfair treatment, the irony of his justification in the address for the separate education system that he was inaugurating, which would distance Catholics from the rest of the population, seemed lost to him. By 1877 the

175 Coventry Herald 9th April 1875
176 Coventry Standard 8th October 1875
177 Herson, Divergent paths, p. 287
178 O’Sullivan opened his address with an echo of Ullathorne’s observation in 1865 that ‘the greatest union existed between the pastors of the parish and their flock’. Though these may have been simply choice words suited to the occasion, they reveal that there was consciousness of the close relationship between the clergy and parishioners in the city. His empathetic promotion of the ‘poor and unpopular’ characterisation and of the merit of achievement made through sacrifice would have found a hearing in many Irish ears. However as Herson reveals Sullivan himself led a well-off life, and was capable of hobnobbing with the elite of Stafford. At the opening of the new Stafford church in 1862 where Herson says the poor Irish were not welcome Sullivan stated that ‘the real Catholic was not only a sincere friend to his faith but the sincerely loyal subject to his sovereign. Their motto was, first ‘to fear God’ and next ‘to honour the King’. Sullivan in his address gave as an example of prejudice the case of a young man
school had the capacity to educate 340 children. Within it the future cultural and faith outlook of local children of Irish background was given what was considered appropriate formation; they were inducted into British values while receiving an education shaped by Catholic principles.\textsuperscript{179} The educational standing of these Catholic schools in public opinion was, as noted in Appendix 6, important to the clergy.

Before 1863 St. Osburg’s was only venue for Catholic community worship in the city which meant that all Catholics, both Anglo and Irish gathered together and would have heard Mass simultaneously. They did not have, as in Birmingham, two Catholic churches, which allowed to the Irish, the option of selecting one where they were more comfortable gathering together as Irish (but with the attendant negative effect of socially isolating them from English Catholics). In that large city English Catholics favoured the new St. Chad’s cathedral while the Irish preferred St. Peters church.\textsuperscript{180} In Coventry St. Osburg’s was a smaller and more intimate edifice than a cathedral, so some mixing of congregation within it was inevitable, but there may have been subtle bias. The English born Benedictine priests trained as part of an ‘English’ mission may have pitched their devotions and sermons towards the tastes of the Non-Irish element of the congregation.\textsuperscript{181} Class and nationality may have influenced attendance at particular times for worship, or between those occupying free pews (sitting 600) other pews (sitting 200) and those who stood (1,000). An ‘English’ or ‘Irish’ venue of preference may have arisen from the early 1860s as there were two centres where Mass was celebrated in Coventry: St. Osburg’s, Hill Street and St. Mary’s Convent schoolroom, Raglan Street.

This westerly and easterly apportionment of the city for Masses, and the taking of numerical pressure off St. Osburg’s, was more physically formalised in 1893 when on 9\textsuperscript{th} February, on land adjoining Raglan Street school, building of the church of St. Mary and St. Benedict commenced which would then serve, under the direction of a resident Benedictine Placid Rea, the new parish of St. Mary created four years earlier (See Appendix 11; Figures 4.7 & 4.14). Cardinal Vaughan and many Benedictine clerics were in attendance at the august ceremonial opening on 21\textsuperscript{st} November 1893 for what

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\item The \textit{Coventry Standard} 16\textsuperscript{th} April 1877 reported Richard Gallogen, Palmer Lane was subject to a School Board prosecution for not sending his 10 year old child Ellen to school in October 1875 while a month later Austin Ryan from the same lane was fined 5s for not sending his child to school. \textit{Coventry Standard} 15\textsuperscript{th} October and 19\textsuperscript{th} November 1875.
\item MacRaild, \textit{Irish Migrants 1750-1922}, p. 84
\item Florid Romanism e.g. of processions in honour of Virgin Mary held when Ullathorne’s was incumbent, may have been regarded as distasteful by those of an English tradition who preferred quiet ceremony with less theatrical display.
\end{itemize}
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was a relatively modest sized church. See (Appendix 11). Nevertheless, although small, it marked permanence and growth; Vaughan took the opportunity to directly outline his views on religious education. It gave an insight into what troubled the Church and what would inform Fr Norbert Birt’s (Assistant 1892-1895) educational philosophy and his view of the appropriate Coventry arrangements for educating Catholics, towards the close of the century (Appendix 11; Figure 4.15). Catholic growth and permanence in this Protestant and Dissenting city was revealed by a serious census of worshippers on Sunday 4th December 1881 conducted by the Herald. It found that 503 attended one morning Mass, 258 another, with 464 attending evening worship in St. Osburg’s. Adding to these congregations was an attendance of 216 who attended morning Mass in St. Mary’s Convent making a total of 1,441. Kiernan stated that in 1884 Coventry had 2,600 Catholics.

Later in the century the old order was changing: Gordon died in 1880, Delf in 1882, while Sibree passed away in 1887. The priests were seen as interested partners in social care during that decade. Fr Moore was listed among notables that included Sir H.M. Jackson MP and Mayor Alderman Banks that attended the annual meeting of the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital. In 1886 E. Adkins, Chairman of the Coventry Board of Guardians, provided entertainment in the Workhouse. Invited guests included the Mayor, five city councillors, Fr Pereira and the Protestant chaplain Rev C. Patterson. As part of an enjoyable programme Mr Horatio Lane showed on screen a series of views of Irish scenery while later T.P. Carney gave Irish impersonations. Catholic support was countenanced in the arts. The Herald 7th October 1887 noted the Coventry Musical Society was under ‘the patronage of W. Ballantine, M.P., the Mayor [Alderman Tomson], E. Petre and Lady Gwendeline Petre, the Right Rev. Fr Moore, the Revds. J. Butter and G. Cuffe, and many of the leading inhabitants of the city and neighbourhood’. However, Norman’s words prompt caution in making an assessment that is too conclusive about the prevalence of an all round tolerance, in his saying that while educated opinion was increasingly tolerant, among working-men ‘no comparable

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182 Coventry Herald 24th November 1893; Simpson, Centenary Memorial of St. Osburg’s, p. 38
183 Coventry Herald 4th December 1881. The Church of England total was 9,916.
184 Kiernan, Story of the Archdiocese of Birmingham, p. 42
185 Gordon lived in retirement in Kenilworth and was buried in Coventry. There seems to have been little interest by 1880 in the subject matter of his expounding in the early 1840s. Following his death the most substantial account of his life was written in the Coventry Herald 30th April 1880. The only allusion it contained to his lectures on Protestantism, that included criticism of the Catholic Church almost four decades earlier, was the following sentence: Mr. Gordon published several volumes of discourses and lectures, besides pamphlets and contributions to periodical literature.
186 Coventry Times 28th November 1877. After recording the initials of first names and then surnames of all prominent men at the meeting the list concluded ‘and a number of ladies’.
187 The Tablet 16th January 1886
change seemed apparent’. On 9th May 1885 the ‘Escaped Nun’ Edith O’Gorman spoke in the Corn Exchange about her experiences as a nun in New Jersey. It was reported:

‘There was a numerous assembly, largely composed of Roman Catholics, who groaned, hissed, and whistled when the lecturer made her appearance…These were received with counter cheers by the Protestant section.’

The disruption continued and the meeting had to be abandoned. There was earlier mention of William McGowran who was a licensed victualler and who represented Bishop Street on the City Council. Another licensed victualler also elected to the Town Council, for Gosford Street Ward in 1875 was independent John Kelly. Like McGowran this achievement is noteworthy in terms of adjustment and acceptance by the broad community. The Standard stated that Kelly had been objected to because he was a Catholic which it described as ‘a despicable piece of intolerance’. The Herald saw the affair as a Conservative conspiracy:

‘[The] most unscrupulous misrepresentations were made by the Conservatives with the view of damaging the Liberal candidates, and particularly Mr Edwards [Liberal]. It was falsely said that he had refused to stand with Mr. Kelly because he was a Roman Catholic. Messrs Philips [Conservative] and Kelly were therefore elected. It may be observed that Mr Kelly although hitherto known as a Liberal, must now be described as a Conservative. The events of the past week or two have disgusted Mr Kelly with the Liberal party, to which he therefore ceased to belong.’

Such mischief making in order to embarrass a candidate was common during elections. In 1887 it was still thrown at Ballantine that many would not vote for him because of the Liberal government’s Cobden Treaty in 1860 that devastated the Coventry silk industry over a quarter of a century earlier.

188 Norman, Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England, p. 20
190 See Chapter 4 Tables and Appendix 6 (2). John’s father was called Patrick. There were two men called Patrick Kelly in 1851. John’s father was the Patrick married to Ann, however the following, may or not apply, to John’s father: A Patrick Kelly was Vice-President of the CYMS on its founding in 1858. He would have known William McGowran who was on the founding committee from then. A Patrick Kelly was landlord of the Beehive public house in Tower Street from 1861-1865 and a Patrick Kelly died in January 1868. John Kelly was first elected in 1872. In 1875 votes cast in the Gosford Street Ward were: Philips 722; Kelly 713; Edwards 692; Wilks 655. According to the newspaper there was more than the usual amount of excitement and drunkenness. (Birmingham Daily Post 2nd November 1875). Interestingly, while the Banbury Guardian 4th November 1875 gave a similar report, the words ‘and drunkenness’ were omitted. Walters, Story of Coventry, p. 200 said the council was dominated by ‘the publicans, butchers, shopkeepers and professional men who had controlled civic life since municipal reform in the 1830s.’
191 Coventry Standard 29th October 1875
192 Coventry Herald 5th November 1875
193 Birmingham Daily Post 4th July 1887
There was no allusion to Kelly’s Irish heritage; there was probably little need to, given the knowledge that he was a Roman Catholic and also answered to a popular Irish surname, so what weight it silently had in influencing the voters is unclear. It would appear that in mischief making calling someone a Roman Catholic was more damaging than referring to an Irish background. Kelly was said to possess a sturdy independence which was not to the taste of Liberals. Also it is suggested Kelly, who was a licensed victualler, might have aligned with the Conservatives because the strong Licensed Victuallers’ lobby in Coventry favoured the Conservatives, having not forgiven Gladstone and Bruce for the Licensing Act of 1872.

To conclude this section on Catholicism, Table 4.6 is placed for perusal, which shows in the case of the Kelly family opportunity was available and socio-economic progress attainable to the families of first wave migrants. The Patrick Kelly family had arrived ‘early’ - by 1831 - in Coventry, and perhaps if they entered the city twenty years later, the family trajectory would have been more prosaic. Their children were buffeted like all Coventrians by the changing economic fortunes of Coventry and their grandchildren by 1911 were aligned with the skills of other city workers. However the constancy of Catholic allegiance remains firm throughout the Table. Outwardly the only hint of Irish origination was by then the surname. The Table 4.6 displays some quintessential details of the migrant journey. John Kelly was born in Coventry in 1831 of parents who were Dublin-born weavers. He was a weaver himself but the collapse of 1861 was responsible for him becoming license holder of the Mechanics Arms between 1861 and 1869. By 1861 he was not visible to normal enumeration page workable search criteria that determine the ‘Irish’ as those born in Ireland or their co-resident children. He and his family are only detected in 1871 because his widowed mother had come to reside with him. He had enough experience and capital to take on the license of the more central Cross Keys in Earl Street. His Coventry birth facilitated his marriage to another Coventrian; He was a Conservative councillor and his daughter was a boarder in St. Joseph’s whose practices were graphically recorded by Hannah Lynch (Appendix 11). One of his sons Walter was elected in 1925 Abbot President of the English Benedictine Congregation.

The *Leamington Spa Courier* 21st November 1913 recorded that Dr McVeagh died at 90 years, in Twyford Abbey near Willesden which was a nursing home run by the Alexian Brothers - and was buried in Kenilworth where he had resided after leaving

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194 *Coventry Standard* 5th November 1875
Coventry some years earlier.\textsuperscript{196} He was described as a Unionist and an ardent Roman Catholic. His longevity brought him into the twentieth century where his death symbolised the completion of what Denvir called the ‘dying out’ of the Irish-born.\textsuperscript{197}

A contingent of Coventry notables and a large clerical presence were recorded at his funeral, among them was the Rev Walter Kelly from Douay, Woolhampton, whose Irish-born grandparents were, as just noted, weavers in Coventry. Like McVeagh, Kelly had moved beyond Coventry but his presence at the funeral, unwittingly marked the significance of McVeagh and Kelly in that spot, representing together two generations, where although the fulcrum of identity remained Catholic, the lever had swung from them being recognised as Irish to being considered as emanants of Coventry.

\textsuperscript{196} He was still in Coventry in 1901 according to the census of that year, aged 73 and residing at 22 Queens Road RG13/2907.147.17 ED 17

\textsuperscript{197} Denvir, \textit{Irish in Britain}, p. 454
Chapter 5

Irish household structure, Irish community attributes and its spatial expression in years of heightened arrival 1841-1861

This chapter is framed around the years of heavy post-Famine ingress, when what Ó Tuathaigh described as ‘culture distance’ prevailed between the Irish and the host society.¹ According to Lowe, this period with its high Irish-born volumes was critical in the formation of the Irish as a community.² It was that part of the century when an Irish presence in Coventry was most discernible by volume, age-profile, behaviour, residential density and location. These middle decades also define a period when the Irish, in pronounced numbers, had to come to terms with a city whose housing and infrastructure was in its most unimproved state, and whose economic momentum was to falter because of unmodernised industrial production and continued industrial conflict. The chapter sets out to establish the demographic structure, occupational standing and spatial expression of the Irish ‘community’ for this period using the three census returns available between 1841 and 1861. In order to ascertain how these findings might relate to the wider setting, expansive household data on the indigenous Coventry population has also been extracted for one census, that of 1851. In some cases where the clearest comparison is sought with Irish data the term Host is applied to Coventry population figures which have been adjusted by deduction of Irish within.

The findings in this chapter for 1841-61 are best read in conjunction with those of Chapter 6 that expound on the years 1871-1901. This approach acknowledges what Swift refers to as the ‘multigenerational phenomenon’ that was migrant settlement.³ By following such an approach, what is described in this chapter relating to the Irish demographic mid-century attributes, will be understood as the features of an abnormal, pressurised, period of the century when many migrants were unsettled and transient, but which did not represent its totality. The extent of Irish transience in Coventry at this time is evident from Table 5.2 which refers only to Irish-born males, since Irish-born women changed their name on marriage and thus lost their facility to be identified on an on-going basis. It illustrates that only 136 (30.8%) of the 441 noted in 1851 could be located in 1861, and that while 202 had entered during the same period there was a striking exit of 305 from Coventry making for a net loss of 23.6%. The following decade shows continued numerical deterioration of Irish-born, with a gain of 117 not compensating for an exodus of 229, resulting in a net loss of 33.1%.

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¹ Ó’Tuathaigh, Irish in Britain: problems of integration, p. 23
² Lowe, Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire, p. 2
³ Swift, Identifying the Irish in Victorian Britain, p. 7
It is arguable whether the census year of 1871, which features in the next chapter and which is the commencing year of Fitzpatrick’s noted elucidation on the second-generation: ‘A curious middle place’, might more appropriately book-end the period of this chapter. Irish anti-social behaviour of a type seen in the 1850s was also recorded in Coventry during the 1860s, and the inclusive effects of compulsory school attendance, albeit under Catholic patronage, commenced in 1870. However the year 1861 marked an abrupt change in the fortune of the city due to the catastrophic collapse of the silk industry that left Coventry for some years thereafter with an economy and a population in decline. The hurt economy and shaken social foundation caused many Irish labourers to leave. Those that remained had to find work and some turned to labouring work offered by concerns integral to the city, such as the Corporation or Gas Works which furthered their integration and commitment to the city.

Coventry abruptly fell into the type of town identified by Fitzpatrick that was no longer an attractive choice for young migrants because it offered lacklustre employment opportunity. Thenceforth for two decades Coventry was in a diminished condition and that element of its Irish population, remaining after the exodus portrayed for Irish-born males in Table 5.2, would experience the fate stated by Fitzpatrick as likely to occur to populace of such stagnant towns, i.e. it would likely be older and settled. However any arranging of material into chapters covering periods of time, that causes a break in the narration of the migrant continuum of experience, whether in 1861 or 1871, is less than optimal. To assist in the formation of an overview, the layout of Tables where feasible, is presented in an 1841-1901 panorama.

**Analytical framework**

**Components of these households**

Information is encountered in enumeration pages in a household arrangement. Most of these households were sub-arranged under the prevailing social construct of a married couple (male as head) with their children. It is thus necessary to employ and use to best advantage this martial based layout as a format in establishing the dimensions of Irish in the city. Hibernicism was mainly conveyed to children in family settings. It is to be construed that the strongest presence of ethnic belonging may be visualised and transmitted where both parents were Irish-born, themselves of Irish-born parents. Conversely and much rarer, as in the case of Mayor John Gulson, where an Irish-born wife was of Anglo-Irish stock and was married to an English man rooted in the urbane

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4 Fitzpatrick, A curious middle place, pp. 11-59
5 Ibid., p. 14
traditions of Britain, then what Herson described as ‘Catholic Celtic’ Irish sense of
identity, must have been faint.\textsuperscript{6} O’Day noted that ethnic loyalty had the potential to be
eroded though intermarriage.\textsuperscript{7} Consequently, where relevant Tables, are designed with a
layout to allow assessment of the probability, given the patriarchal outlook of the century,
that within the range of Irish Households there might be different levels of ‘Irishness’
according to birthplace, and its balance between the head and spouse. Further, a benefit
of studying the Irish in family units is that a review of spousal pairings, and the changing
balance over the years, between the extent of endogenous and exogenous marriage, should
offer insight into the nature of movement of Irish into the broader community.

Families did not retain their completeness; the harsh living circumstances made
fatal inroads early in life, so that on average for this period 19.4\% of all Irish Households
had solitary heads; half of whom were widows.\textsuperscript{8} Fractured families might be anticipated
to feature more prominently later in the century as the normal cycle of life took its toll,
but they were also noticeably manifest in early post-Famine years.

It may be unwittingly assumed from the ‘point in time’ nature of the census that
family size was fixed at census enumeration with a sense of migrant families in lock-step
stages of family procreation. While there was a certain synchronicity noticeable in the
post-Famine years of migrants in the same stages of raising their children, the period to
1901 was filled with a mix of families in various stages of reproductive commencement,
continuance and completion.

After the main family was recorded on a census enumerator’s page, if the household
contained kin, lodgers, visitors or servants, then these were listed and could appear as
separate types or in a variety of combinations. This was a time when the responsibility of
a family to give shelter to kin, or the necessity to receive income from lodgers, meant as
shown in Chapter 3 that households could swell in size, well beyond

\textsuperscript{6} Herson, \textit{Divergent paths}, p. 6. The Foster family mentioned in relation to Map 3.4A in Chapter 3 as
residing in New Buildings provides another example where disposition to Irish culture may have been
slight. In 1871 William H. Foster born in Warwick in 1828 appears in Leamington as a Militia Sergeant
with his wife Susanna, born in Ireland in 1843, and a family that included 2 Irish-born sons, William and
Robert. In 1881 he resided as an Instructor of Volunteers, with Susanna and his other Non-Irish-born
children, in New Buildings, Coventry with William no longer present and Robert now described as born in
Leamington. In 1891 William H. was listed as a Retired Soldier, and Susanna as born in Fermoy
indicating that he had met her while stationed in its barracks. They were settled at 111 Vine Street,
Coventry with 4 of his children. He died in 1895 and she in 1920. Details of his soldering credentials and
countries where he served are recorded by Ian Woolley, \textit{A Victorian Resting Place - Coventry’s London
Road Cemetery}, (Coventry 2015) p.51. RG10/3193.140.36 ED 6; RG11/3072.48.27 ED 10;
RG12/2454.36.66 ED 12; England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and
Administrations), 1921 p. 286

\textsuperscript{7} O’Day, \textit{Varieties of anti-Irish behaviour}, p. 29

\textsuperscript{8} Reference to widows is for 1851 and 1861.
the capacity of what was in many cases cramped, dilapidated accommodation. Consideration will be given to the size of these households and the size of families therein over the period. After examining the traits of the household head including, social class as indicated by occupation, the focus will move outside a household setting to consider the age, birthplace and occupation of the Irish as individuals and will also express these characteristics in terms of the relationship between the Irish-born and Irishcom.

**The type and number of households**

In order to tease out the community mass into more instructional categories, in both chapters the Irish are arranged within a three-part delineation of: Irish Households, English Households containing Irish, and Institutions. The third category included, e.g. large hotels with numerous guests and servants, too unwieldy in numbers to process. All such institutional type social units are excluded from all household based calculation and exploration, but are listed and considered further in Appendix 7. Irish Households which are first to be scrutinized reached their zenith in 1861 when 319 such households were identified. An appreciable number of English households containing Irish-born was discovered; this household arrangement reached its maximum of 107 in 1851. With regard to these households, the character of their heads and the nature of their relationship to the Irish who lived under their headship households, are to be examined. They would have given cause for some Irish-born to show a diffuse pattern of residence. O’Day observed that the ‘considerable Irish presence in middle class districts …can be accounted for by live-in domestics’ but other Irish-born were marked in such districts because these households also contained Irish-born: children, lodgers, and kin.⁹

**The total number of Irish and Irishcom in these households**

Table 5.1 sets out the combined number of Irish-born in both types of households for this period. The number rose from a base of 434 in 1841 by a substantial 81.6% over the decade to 1851 but then fell 10.0% by 1861. The Irishcom rose by 60.6% to 1851 and continued to rise, if by a more modest 4.2% to 1861. However by 1861 the Irishcom figure remained ascendant more so by the greater contribution to it of local-born Irish rather than that of Irish-born. Only for 1851 and the consequence of a high number of inward Irish-born, with a ratio of 1:0.8, could the number of Irish-born outweigh local-born Irish.

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⁹ O’Day, Varieties of anti-Irish behaviour, p. 29. In studies, e.g. of Lancashire towns by Lowe, that embody their ‘community’ by using only the members of selected Irish-born headed households, the import of Irish-born in English households can be overlooked. (Lowe, Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire, p. 48).
Table 5.3 provides the type and volume of Irish Households, the ‘type’ totals being individual to each census. This is so because when the death of a spouse occurs, the affected family that had featured until the demise in the married section of the Table may well continue to exist, but in the next census will feature under a solo-headed ‘type’ of display. The peak of household formation was reached in 1861 when 319 household heads were noted. Over three-quarters (77.7%) of these were partnered families. The corresponding partnered percentages for 1841 and 1851, at 85.1% and 81.0% respectively largely matched. The latter percentage compared favourably with Coventry households which stood at 74.7% in 1851.\(^\text{10}\)

The most homogenous marriage arrangement i.e. of Irish-born to Irish-born accounted for a 40.3% of Irishcom pairing in 1841, 41.2% in 1851, with an uplift to 48.0% in 1861. This uplift was made possible, by the greater presence in the 1850s, following the post-Famine ingress of Irish-born young single migrants at a life-stage disposed to finding partners. This was at the expense of Irish-born male marriages to Non-Irish-born females (styled as Irishcom on marriage) which dipped to 29.0%, below the average for the three censuses of 31.6%. While this average was low, in some respects it was rather impressive as a mark of early integration since Irish-born men in these years were transient in disposition, may have been engaged in outdoor labour where opportunity to relate to Non-Irish-born women may have been limited, and where in this period the cultural divide was wide. Finally, on average over the three censuses a quarter (24.6%) of marriages of those in Irish Households was of Non-Irish-born men (styled as Irishcom on marriage) to Irish-born women. Taken together in 1851, the 72 occasions of Irish-born males in marriage to Non-Irish-born females and the 56 occasions of Non-Irish-born men in marriage to Irish-born women represented 51.8% of unions in Irish Households. That half of marriages were mixed and that a similar percentage for intermarriage prevailed before the Famine ingress, shows that in Coventry there was no historical unequivocal exclusiveness displayed by the converse communities towards each other. It is to be acknowledged that this conclusion rests on those who did marry. There may have been a swathe of the population suspicious and disliking of any involvement with Irish, and also although recorded as British-born in the census, some of those who did marry Irish may have been second generation Irish-born, which may have facilitated such unions.

\(^{10}\) Coventry figures here include English households that contained Irish. The scale involved in comparison should be noted there being in 1851 in total 5,772 Coventry households and 220 Irish households.
Family sizes (where the size figure is the comprisal of parent(s) and their resident children) were small with the average size of these families in this period at 3.8 and not remarkably higher than the Coventry Host in 1851 with an average of 3.64 (Table 5.4). Family size 2 (at 22.3% in 1861), followed in the same year by size 3 at 21.3%, was the most common Irish Household family size. Across the three decades the percentage of family units at sizes 3 and 4 rose, with the latter in 1861 reaching 17.2%. If an Irish family with 7 members is taken as a large sized unit, there were of such: 13 (6.9%), 16 (5.9%) and 9 (2.8%) respectively over the three consecutive censuses. In percentage terms, the 5.9 for family size 7 almost matched in 1851 the Coventry Host figure of 5.3.

These results indicate little variation between pre- and post-Famine average size, but they may be affected by the fact that some post-Famine young Irish families may not have reached family completions in a way that those settled in 1841 might have, and that a capping mechanism operated whereby some children on reaching adulthood moved away from residing with parents. It emerges that while there were some large families, with some entertaining large households that drew attention to themselves, as was shown in Chapter 3, there was not in general, gross difference between the Irish and native results. However contemporaries may not have been convinced of this fact given the Irish had a stereotyped reputation for overcrowding. Average ‘coupled-parent’ family unit size over the three decades was 3.9. When birthplace combinations were examined the outcome for 1841 was: Irish-born/Irish-born pairings had the highest average size of 4.5, Irish-born/Irishcom pairings 4.4 while the Irishcom/Irish-born pairings were smallest with 3.6. The year 1851 saw the same type of pairing sizes, while the averages for 1861 were 4.3, 3.7 and 3.9 respectively.

When household size was ascertained, it showed an average size of 4.8 over the three censuses, although it reached upward to 5.0 in 1851. When pairings were addressed, across the censuses the Irish-born/Irish-born pairings averaged 5.6 with 1851 showing a post-Famine rise to 6.2 while Irishcom/Irish-born pairings retained the lowest average across the censuses, at 4.5. In matching the Coventry Household average of 4.5 shown in Table 5.5, these households where an Irish-born was wife to a Non-Irish-born were akin to city norms.

Referring to the relationship between the sizes of Irish families and size of Irish households, there was a remarkable consistency in the degree to which they matched the manner Coventry families equated with Coventry household sizes. With cognisance taken of the different scales involved e.g. 42 Irish Households and 1,193 Coventry
households at unit size 4, Table 5.6 illustrates in 1851 embodiment was at a rate above 50% rate for both Irish families and Coventry households. This percentage related to units of 2 and higher; at family size 3, 5, 7 and 8 there was slightly less Irish fulfilment compared to Coventry households.

If the second tier in each column of the cross-tabulation is inspected, i.e. where 1 extra person resided with the family, there is a slightly lower representation of Irish, due to less individual servants residing with them. However at tier 3, i.e. where two extra persons resided with the family, Irish families with a maximum of 3, 4, or 5 members had a higher percentage of family/household coincidence, which means Irish families were more likely than Coventry households to have a second extra person in residence.

The Irish Household families contained children, yet to marry, who at the most fundamental level gave volume to the community, prompted families to set down roots, but also on whose balance, between that of Irish-born or local-born (Irish associated children implied and going forward), may have influenced the perpetuation of a strong Irish identity. Local-born children would have from birth experienced local cultural norms and the relatively more incorporating effect of familiarity with, and belonging in local surroundings. The peak number of 94 Irish-born children, as might be anticipated was recorded in 1851, a result of the ingress of recent years wherein some families had moved as a whole from Ireland (See Table 5.7). What is striking throughout the three censuses is the large number of local-born children, already existent in 1841, and the great disparity between that large number and the number of Irish-born children. The question as to how many and how long Irish-born headed Irish Household families were ‘settled’ in Coventry is given some answer if the age of their first Coventry-born child is assessed.

In setting out the age of the eldest-Irish-born, Table 5.8 using the best mode of enquiry that provides for exactitude, focuses on Irish-born married heads, with their co-resident unmarried children. It regards settlement of ten years as of long-term and highlights the range where a first Coventry birth occurred between 10 and 20 years earlier. Beyond that findings are problematic since grown children will likely have vacated the family home. It reveals that 43.6% of these households in 1841 had resided in the city between 10 and 20 years, 43.0% for 1851, and a lesser 25.4% for 1861. The record for 1841 discloses Irish settlement establishing in the city from the late 1820s.

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11 ‘Child’ refers to a son or daughter of any age. The classification divide at 18 may hide the fact that, as occurred in 1861, approx. 10.0% of these co-residing children were between 30 years and 45 years old (10 out of 105 ‘children’).

12 The Table relies on the birth of a child to derive a result, thus necessarily seeks information from those in a family setting. However those in such an arrangement would be more inclined to settle and findings may not have wider application to the unmarried Irish-born who may have had a transient disposition.
The significance of the amount of long-term settlement should be seen in the light of Herson’s view that such term settlement offered stability to the community. However the Table also reveals that it was not an entirely long-rooted community either, in that many of the families under review, in 1861 notably 67.5%, had only arrived within the previous decade. The corresponding percentages of families who had been less that 10 years in the city in 1841 was 51.9% and in 1851 48.1%.13

In most cases married ‘children’ moved out of their parents dwelling. However there was a small number of occasions (4 in 1851; 13 in 1861) where mostly adult local-born-Irish ‘children’, who had formed relationships, lived as sub-families with parents. They lived as sons-in-law or daughters-in-law, perhaps supporting an elderly head, or requiring parental shelter; the latter were often females with offspring and apparently without a supportive partner.14 The extent and nature of these arrangements is shown in Table 5.9.15

**Lodgers and Kin**

A large array of combinations of lodgers, kin, and to a much lesser extent servants and visitors combined with families to form households. Table 5.10 displays the arrangement in 1861. There was some selectivity by type; those with servants or visitors did not take kin or lodgers. While Irish lodgers and Non-Irish lodgers could be found residing together, except in situations where a large numbers of lodgers suggested a serious household head commitment to lodger taking, there may be perceived a tendency to take solely either Irish lodgers or Non-Irish lodgers. With kin, a division may be observed between the degree of acceptance of Irish kin and Non-Irish kin. This may not have been deliberate preferment for one kin background over the other, but rather kin presenting as a unit on a family’s doorstep seeking shelter was more specifically Irish or specifically Non-Irish in composition.16

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13 The minimum length of stay which is regarded as the norm has been dictated by the ten year interval between census enumerations. Herson saw families in a state of ‘long-term settlement’ if an Irish-born member of a family could be located in two censuses, i.e. ten years. Evidence is not reliable beyond two decades as it is likely the majority of first-born local children will not be available to be counted as they will have vacated the residence of their parents. (Herson, Migration, ‘community’ or integretation? p. 160).

14 This may also have been an arrangement to support a widowed parent or aged parents; one of each of these types was noted in 1861.

15 For simplicity of display they were included as Irish kin in Table 5.10.

16 The Tables distinguish between Kin and Irish kin and similarly for other kinds of extra residents. Those regarded as Kin, but not as Irish kin, were local-born and had too distant a relationship with the Irish-born person, on whom the family relied for casting as an Irish household, to be treated otherwise. Those referred to as Irish kin could include persons born locally if an Irish link was apparent, such as a young local-born grandchild living with an Irish-born grandparent. If those entered were listed as lodgers but had the same surname as the head they were listed as kin, which was essential in 1841 where relationship to head guidance was not available. The relationship between kin and lodging arrangement (as indeed between kin and visitor) could be unclear and what one household might write as kin might be written as
Irish lodgers and Non-Irish lodgers are amalgamated, and similarly for kin, and then presented separately in Table 5.11. The purpose of such amalgamation is that an awareness of the weight of total lodging presence is relevant since they served to increase the numbers resident in *Irish Households* and assist the contemporary perception of excessive numbers in Irish dwellings. Also Non-Irish affiliate in *Irish Households* must have assisted in reducing cultural division. These people were responsible for a significant numerical contribution to household figures. All extra residents contributed 16.8% of the total residents in *Irish Households* in 1841, 24.5% in 1851 and 20.5% in 1861. The Non-Irish (kin 22, lodgers 63) of 1851 and the Non-Irish (kin 19, lodgers 80) of 1861 accounted for 6.2% and 6.8% respectively of total residents.

An impression lingers from some notable cases outlined in Chapter 3 that many Irish families were conjoined by substantial numbers of kin. This is disproved by the reveal of Table 5.11 where 83.8% of *Irish Households* in 1851 did not shelter any kin; a percentage that was remarkably consistent with that for Coventry Households. Likewise, for both, where 1 kin was accepted, a figure of 10.0% was shared. The average amount of kin, where kept, was 1.9 in 1851 and 1.7 in 1861; the former approaching the average available for 1851 of 1.6 for Coventry Households. Irish kin were mostly solo and are shown in Table 5.12.\(^{17}\)

It might be surmised that lodger taking was a post-Famine issue, but boarding was a practice of the times. It occurred pre-Famine and likewise occurred in the host society. In 1841, 43 (24.8%) of *Irish Households* contained lodgers, with results for the two subsequent censuses at 61 (22.5%) and 55 (17.2%). In 1851, 14.1% of Coventry households accepted lodgers which shows, that at mid-century Irish lodger taking at 22.5% was higher than the city norm.

A revert to Table 5.5 shows that in 1851 lodging was more commonly observed in *Irish households* sizes 3 to 7 while Table 5.11 discloses it was most apparent as a practice where there were dual Irish-born partners. In the case of 91 such partnerships, 27 households took lodgers. By 1861 the same number of households took lodgers but this was from an increased household base of 119 households, and represented an

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lodger by another. One can imagine an enumerator left with the task of describing the relationship of a large household of unhelpful residents resorting simply to describing most as lodgers. For lodgers when there was an occurrence, which was not very common of e.g. an Irish-born parenting a local-born child, such a lodging child was placed with the parent in the Irish lodger (IL) column.\(^{17}\) Kin could include mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, grand-children and in-laws. Not shown was an Irish-born married female with her child noted in 1851, nor in 1861 among Irish kin a married couple and 6 non-nuclear families that included 3 widows each with a child. Figures in this sentence do not include co-resident ‘Grown children’ of the type described in Table 5.9.
acceptance rate down from 29.7% to 22.9% in a decade. Intermarried couples were fewer in number and were less likely to take-in more than 1 or 2 lodgers.

While families of sizes 5, 6 and 7 in 1851 could keep between 6 and 10 lodgers, in general lodgers were accepted by low sized families who felt most comfortable with one, two or three lodgers. In the case of 52 solo heads in 1851, as noted, 17 took lodgers, but only 13 of 71 solo heads did so a decade later (an acceptance rate down from 32.7% to 18.6%). Individual heads i.e. widows, or those with small sized families were better placed to entertain lodgers; a large sized nuclear family would curtail the number of extra persons kept, as the family itself would occupy all available space in what were confined houses. In 1861 there were only two situations where lodgers, and then in each with only an individual lodger, resided with a family of size 7 or above, but in any case few families of that size existed.

Lowe noted that few single persons formed their own households and were usually the persons who became lodgers. This was true for the Irish in Coventry in 1851 where Table 5.12 shows the dominant category was the Irish-born unmarried male, aged 18 or more.\textsuperscript{18} It should be noticed that this peak year figure of 36 in 1851 was two and a half times the size of the corresponding female figure. Ten years later lodging pressure was dissipating and the number of Irish-born unmarried males had already halved to 18. There were also Irish nuclear lodging families: 11 were found in 1851 (3 of these were second lodging families in a household). Present too were Irish non-nuclear families: 10 were found (2 were second listed). The nuclear families were in the majority couples, while the non-nuclear families came in a vast range of permutations. There were e.g. widows with up to 3 children, females married without a husband present and up to six children, and widowers with up to two children. Only 3 nuclear lodging families were located in 1861 but the presence of 10 Irish non-nuclear lodging families in 1861 showed that for these fractured families lodging was a continuing and perhaps only means of finding shelter. Finally, what should not be overlooked is that Table 5.11 shows that lodging was not pervasive in Irish households as over three quarters did not engage in any form of lodger keeping.

\textit{English Households containing Irish}

An appreciable number of Irish as Table 5.13 discloses did not reside in Irish Households. This was particularly noticeable in 1851, when 152 Irish-born did so reside and which equalled 23.8% of Irish-born residing in Irish Households. By 1861 the

\textsuperscript{18} The figures in Table 5.12 refer to Irish lodgers; households could also contain lodgers as recorded in Table 5.11 that had no association with Ireland.
proportion not in *Irish Households* was more subdued at 13.8% (86). Perspective on these percentages can be gleaned from results for 1841 and 1901, years at either end of the investigation, when Irish-born living outside of *Irish households* had reached 37.8% and 44.1% respectively of Irish-born within.

It could be suggested that Irish residing in an *English Household containing Irish* and mixing with Non-Irish lodgers must have especially aided acceptance and acclimatisation. The nature of the relationship between the English household head and the resident Irish under his/her headship would be a determinant. To examine this, two illustrative Tables have been prepared. The first, Table 5.14 relates to 1861 and the second to 1881 which is considered in Chapter 6 as Table 6.5. In the former the emphasis is on the provision of detail and observations about the English head; in the latter the priority is to comment on the Irish in residence with these heads. The most significant co-resident Irish groups in relation to the head in 1861, with numbers in brackets, were children (19), lodgers (41) and servants (18) and were largely exclusive to each other. Looking first at the parent-child relationship, in most studies, such children, who Herson refers to as ‘accidentally Irish’, have been unwittingly pitched with little ado into Irish-born totals. Table 5.15 supplements Table 5.14 and elucidates on these Irish-born, who, with neither parent Irish-born, must have had few Irish cultural ties. They were most likely born to soldiers while on tour in Ireland, which was obvious in the case of the Chelsea pensioner in row 5. So too for the Collector of Inland Revenue whose wife and a son in row 10 were from Weedon Bec, which housed an army ordnance depot and barracks. The silk weaver in row 11 whose 4 year old daughter, Eliza Tatten was Irish-born, had a younger child born in the military town of Aldershot. The 1851 figure for such children at 10 was not as strong as the 19 of 1861 while the figure for 1841 again rested at 10.

English heads were also in relationships as employers with Irish-born servants. Only 2 *Irish Households* could keep a resident Irish-born servant in 1861 (although 22 other servants were kept), but 22 Irish-born could find places in English households headed by employers, manufacturers, victuallers, a proprietor of houses, a gentleman and an independent. Even though social distance remained, through such employment,

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19 It has been found possible for all the salient details regarding *English Households containing Irish* for 1861 and 1881 to be distilled into these Tables. The provision of such detail might appear insufficiently classified and dense at first view. In fact the rich texture compellingly and comprehensively informs on the individual interface between the English and Irish-born, who were their children, or lodgers or servants, for the whole city space. Such a package of information both defies and restrains Table abridgement.

20 Herson, *Divergent paths*, p. 218
Irish servants became accustomed to English lifestyle and mores which assisted integration. There was a further relationship; that of landlord and lodger. Lodging with English households was a relatively strong feature in 1851. Table 5.12 told of 36 ‘classic’ Irish-born single male lodgers of 18 years and over, who stayed in Irish Households in 1851, but that was exceeded at 41 by those who stayed in English households. Outside of stated lodging houses, or in families that operated lodging houses in all but name, where the number of Irish lodging might be expected to be raised, Irish were found in low numbers in households willing to take Irish lodgers.\(^{21}\) Perusal of Table 5.14 acquaints that 41 Irish-born lodged with English heads in 1861; the occupation of the heads showed a cross-section of standing, they were not a sub-proletarian class who alone might be thought willing to engage with the Irish. Landlords did not appear averse to offering accommodation to Irish at the maximum size level of a couple with 2 children, or a single parent with a child. Table 5.14 reveals that kin and visitors numbers of Irish-born in English households were of little significance by 1861.

**Birthplace**

An adequate 36.3% and 43.8% of Irish-born in Coventry supplied their county of origin for the two censuses of concern in this chapter, as shown in Table 5.16.\(^{22}\) With cognisance of the risk in drawing unequivocal conclusions without knowing the county origin of the remainder, the county of provenance yield from the censuses for Coventry may be addressed. Dublin for reasons outlined in Chapter 3 predominated with a 37.1% and 42.6% origination. Next in strength was Mayo which provided over a fifth of county respondents in 1851 and a lesser 13.6% in the following census. There were contributions from the western counties of Roscommon, Galway and Sligo, but that from the latter fell away in 1861. Beyond these and Cork, which had a noticeable showing of 8.8% in 1861, other counties were lightly represented, though in 1861

\(^{21}\) It might also be the case that frequency and length of stay with English heads may have been different to that with Irish heads.

\(^{22}\) The level at which county of birth was disclosed varied considerably between British cities and between censuses. In 1851 Finnegan noted 39.7% of the Irish-born in York recorded a county of birth, with 40.8% from Mayo, followed by Sligo 11.5%, Roscommon 9.1% and Dublin 7.7%. However in 1861 she stated only 12.0% provided a county of birth, of which Mayo at 32.2% was pre-eminent, but it was now followed by Dublin at 13.0%. (Finnegan, Irish in York, pp. 69, 94). Chinn noted 16.5% of Birmingham Irish-born provided a county and 50.0% of these came from Connacht. Roscommon donated 24.0% of the Birmingham total followed by Mayo with 13.5%. He also acknowledged that there was in the outer part of the city an established presence of persons born in Dublin and Cork (Chinn, ‘Sturdy Catholic emigrants’, pp. 63, 74). Herson stated that in relation to Stafford there were Irish county of origin census records for only 16.5% in 1851, and 17.5% in 1861, partly from which it could be adduced that 40.0% of the Stafford’s Irish came from Galway, Roscommon or Mayo (Herson, A small-town perspective, pp. 89, 100).
Tipperary and Antrim showed distinct increases. Within the slight scatter of remaining figures, it can be observed those counties in the north of Ireland: Derry, Donegal, Fermanagh, Monaghan and Tyrone, were little represented in Coventry.

A 3:1 ratio is apparent for 1851, in favour of ‘Irish’ children born in Coventry compared to those children born in Ireland and now resident in Coventry. This gap widened to 4.7:1 in the ratio for 1861 (Table 5.17). This ratio in favour of local-born would distend further to 4.9 if those born in the ‘Rest of Warwickshire’ figures were added to those of Coventry. Table 5.17 lays out further information on those British counties where the Irish-born of Coventry may have previously resided. In 1851 the mention of Cheshire and Derbyshire, while a reflection of a general dissipation from the north-west, is also due to movement from the silk towns of Macclesfield, Congleton and Derby. If pressed to see a movement trend in the slight figures, with the notable exception of London, generally it was in a southerly direction towards Coventry. These birthplace figures are deficient as a true measure of the pattern of Irish movement since such births arose in nuclear family arrangements while the actual preponderance of movement may have been undertaken by single persons. According to the birthplace of children, movement from Birmingham was not as significant as its proximity to Coventry might suggest. An aggregate figure for Manchester, Liverpool and Rest of Lancashire, and the figures for London show they featured as previous residential locations. One or two families could account for the total of any county. The raised figure for 1851 in Northamptonshire arose from a Dublin-born weaver moving from Kettering with his family, and a Clonmel-born wife moving with her husband and family from Northants.

Pressing non-comprehensive county of birth figures against Coventry enumeration districts in 1851 to see if there was clustering on the basis of county requires caution. However, presented to serve as an indication, they reveal that of the 214 (33.7%) in Irish Households who provided birthplace at county level, those from Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Sligo may be noticed south of the east-west axis that covers

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23 The small figures for some counties may be so overshadowed, by the large contributions made by Dublin and Mayo, that they appear of little worth, but these small numbers had purpose in broadening the mix of Irish backgrounds and occupations. For example in 1851 the 12 from Cork included an Anglican curate, a clerk, a tailor, a watchfinisher, 2 in shoemaking and 3 in weaving related activity.

24 These are volume percentages. For example the five recorded from Wicklow in 1851, comprised the family of coach painter Robert Ryan and wife, Rosina, and their same initialled children Richard, Rosina and Robert.

25 In the sense that persons from some counties may be more reluctant than others to disclose information, including county background, and if they were concentrated in an enumeration area it may affect its birthplace total. Those under 15 years of age were not included in the calculation that follows, as it was considered they would follow their parents’ decision in the matter of where to settle.
ground from Much Park Street to Warwick Lane. Mayo-born are noticeable in Leicester Street near the canal end of the town, but while Dublin-born are found right across the city noticeably in Upper Well Street and West Orchard they are barely represented in Leicester Street.

Irish-born in *English Households containing Irish* may have had cause to reside in an Enumeration Area for some distinctive reason that related to an English household, such as being employed as its servant, or most commonly because lodgings were on offer. Of these 152 Irish-born in 1851, 62 (40.7%) gave their birthplace at county level. Servants numbered 26, of whom 6 ventured their county: 5 Roscommon and 1 Dublin. Lodgers offering a county numbered 38, of whom 12 were Dubliners, 7 Mayo-born, and the remainder from a variety of counties. The mentioned Dubliners were very lightly scattered with no area emerging as especially preferred. Mayo-born lodgers are only found in Much Park Street and Warwick Lane; in the latter, two were lodging with a 38 year old hawker of hardware with a household of fourteen. A third was a 24 year old labourer who lodged with a 65 year old lodging house keeper with seven in the household.

*Age and gender balance*

The Coventry Host population in the three censuses presents a standard profile with the largest percentages in the young age cohorts and consistent reductions as age increased (See Table 5.18). Irish-born males did not follow the regular city trend for 1841. In that year their peak age grouping was 30-44 which reveals the in-movement of weavers to Coventry around 1830. Compared to the steadily reducing Coventry Host population age profile in 1851, the Irish-born presence was weak under 20 years but thereafter stronger till 55 years. This was largely due to post-Famine Irish-born, in their twenties and above, seeking work in the city; at 15.6%, the 20-24 age cohort constituted the largest percentage of all groupings. In 1861 the male peak grouping was from 30-44 but remained noticeably raised from age 50 years, showing the decennial advance into old age already of a section of the migrant body. Females followed the same trends but were slightly more prominent than males in the 20-29 age grouping in 1861, perhaps finding it easier to acquire employment and continue in Coventry than similar-aged males. Turning to Irishcom age profiles, these parallel, if less smoothly, those of the Coventry Host, over the three censuses and shows as a ‘community’, its age cohorts, in terms of stage of life outlook, were in the matching proportions to that of the larger population.
The age and sex structure Irish-born/Irishcom pyramid (Figure 5.1) vividly illustrates for 1841 the body of Irish-born were in the cohorts covering 20-44 years; those in these mid-cohorts, with males more prominent, were the weavers who had arrived in the period between 1825 and 1835. Since the majority of migrants were in their early twenties on arrival there were few Irish-born in the base cohorts; the Irish community found its broad base in local-born children of the Irish.

The constricted Irish-born base within the broad Irishcom bars is replicated in 1851 with the influx of young, 20-24 years old, Irish-born males apparent. The 1861 pyramid showed very few recently arrived young Irish-born, indeed there were no Irish-born boys under 5. The pyramids when taken together show the Irish-born were moving into older cohorts as the male ‘shoulder’ so prominent in 1841 at 44 years had made its way to 64 years by 1861.

The distribution by age of the Host population over the three decades was regular and it presents as the archetypal pyramid shape in Figure 5.2. Some elongation of bars in the vicinity of the 20-24 age cohort due to native inward migration of young work-seekers may be noticed. When the configuration for Irishcom is superimposed, for 1841, a variation by it from the Coventry norm is visible from the protrusion of bars beyond those of the Host population. This was a reflection of the ‘Irish weavers’ arrival’ which comprised a large number of Irishcom children and those in the 30-44 age cohorts. In 1851 there was a general matching of the two patterns, with the Irishcom that caused bars to protrude in 1841 still doing so, but now, to a lesser degree, and found in bars where they were ten years older. By 1861 compared to the Host profile, there were proportionally more of the Irishcom in the 40-64 cohorts and in the 0-9 cohorts.

There was gender imbalance among the Irish in these decades (Table 5.19). The Irish-born ratio was unbalanced in favour of males in 1841 and most particularly in 1851 (441 males/367 females), then there was a male slump in 1861 as shown in Table 5.19. However by 1861 the Irish-born ratio showed a correlation with Host population itself which favoured females over the decades.

The civil condition of the Irishcom according to age followed a predictable pattern as disclosed by Table 5.20. The age group with the largest percentage of unmarried for both genders was the 20-24 age grouping, followed by that of 25-34. In 1851, 65.5% of males 20 years and above were married with a percentage of 75.0% in 1861. For

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26 The patterns represent mutually exclusive quanta; also the pyramid bars emerged from the Y axis and were not stacked as in Figure 1. The disparate scales involved must be recognised where a male percentile point of Irishcom represents according to the decade selected, an appropriate figure on a range from 4 to 8 persons while for the host population it extends from 140 to 188 persons.
females the corresponding percentages were 72.0% and 66.2%. While the largest percentage of married men was in the 35-44 grouping the surrounding cohorts were well represented. The largest percentage of married females was in the younger 25-34 age grouping, though the 35-44 grouping did not lag far behind. Widowers as might be expected were prominent in the 55-64 age grouping and so too were widows, but the latter were also noticeably found in 1851 as young as 35 years. The harsh living conditions of the time made for 65 widows in 1861. The most comparable statistics between the Coventry Host and the Irish population are those for 1861 and overall these display but little disparity.

Moving along from these figures which represent the Irish *en masse*, to those dealing with *Irish Households* heads, it is to be seen from Table 5.21 that they were, with an average rate of 84.0% between 1841 and 1861 predominantly married. The age cohort in which the maximum percentage of male heads was found, at an average of 30.90% for the three censuses was 35-44, with average of 24.0% for 25-34 and 20.7% for 45-54.

In 1851 the percentage of all married *Irish Household* heads, at 84.6%, was higher than the 78.7% of married Coventry Host households. While male Coventry Host household married heads were slightly more prominent in the 25-34 age grouping than Irish heads both were similar in representation in the subsequent age ranges.

**Occupation and social classification**

Occupations were placed in five occupational groups and one residual group:

- **Class 1.** Professional, etc. occupations
- **Class 2.** Intermediate occupations
- **Class 3.** Skilled occupations
- **Class 4.** Partly skilled occupations
- **Class 5.** Unskilled occupations
- **Class X.** Residual: All young, scholars, unstated and indistinct entries.

The allocation of occupation to five class groups follows Armstrong’s work and is based on the General Register Office social classification scheme with adjustments suggested by Armstrong. He suggested Class X as a residual grouping for those stated: ‘at home’, ‘wife’, etc.

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Aspects of the application of this occupational categorization cause unease. The assignation to a particular class raised difficulty in some cases due to a lack of clarity in the description of occupation. Concern arose over the appropriateness of the recommended class placing with the esteem of a locality for its staple occupations not receiving sufficient attenuation in a tiering of classes in a national register. Overall, a particular class allocation based on the occupation stated may not have creditably outweighed a more socially defining labelling based on background, education, or street location. Such evaluation of status by local criteria existed in Coventry; according to Sheldon the fine gradations of the working-class social scale, in terms of poverty and respectability, were apparent to each neighbourhood’s occupants, even though its occupational make-up might be diverse. Using occupation as the sole index to attribute social class has limitations according to Armstrong, but perhaps more so in the case of the Irish, where their social ranking may have been contemporarily ascribed not merely on occupation but on less objective criteria. Any approach undertaken to infer status on the Irish using this classification must be grounded by an appreciation of the graphic living conditions outlined in Chapter 3.

28 There were further detailed recommendations that in essence follow:
1. All employers to be placed in Class 1 if more than 25 persons were engaged.
2. All those initially placed in Class 3 or 4 who employed at least one person who was not a family member to be upgraded to Class 2. This would ensure that proprietors involved in dealing, retailing or manufacture would rise. Where innkeepers, lodging-house keepers, eating-house keepers and publicans employed at least one non-family member, their initial placing in Class 3 would upgrade to Class 2.
3. All retired persons should be classified according to their previous occupation with apprentices assigned to the class appropriate to the occupation to which they aspired.

29 Before 1891 some occupation titles such as ‘brickmaker’ and ‘boot manufacturer’ did not disclose enough information to guide as to whether they described the status of an employer, or a senior, or a junior employee. Watchmaking was an occupational title that lacked the precision to confidently differentiate between an employer, a crafted worker and semi-skilled factory operative, and thus a correct class placement.

30 The four Sisters of Mercy in Gosford Terrace, and in Raglan Street were assigned to Class 1 in 1881 but their poverty as nuns was at variance from other house proprietors and landowners to be found in Class 1. Occupations involving dealing e.g. in clothes were specified as Class 3 but as engaged in by the Irish may have been closer to hawking type activity which was nominated as Class 5. There was the risk of some people applying a grandiose title to their occupation as did Mary Ford, 24 years, in Caldicott Yard, who styled herself in 1861 a silk manufacturer. In 1871 aged 36 she declared she was from Mayo and gave her occupation as silk picker. Apart from the possibility of overegged job descriptions, there must also have been occasions of modest titling. Arthur Ratcliff described himself simply as a brewer, yet had three servants. RG11/3071.96.26 ED 5

31 Nicola Sheldon, Families in the firing line: prosecutions for truancy in Coventry, 1874-1899 Local Population Studies, No 83 (Autumn 2009) p. 27

32 The suggestion that extra variables such as house sharing or location in a particular street might assist in capturing social class, falls when the irregular stock of housing in central Coventry, the difficulty of teasing out what degree of sharing the Irish engaged in due to ambiguity caused by the lack of consistency in how it was recorded and the complexity of areal social differentiation in the central Coventry.
Coventrians may not have enjoyed a standard of living extrapolated from the General Register office listing. The weaver Joseph Gutteridge wrote about the hardships he endured while Ullathorne’s gave a sobering account of the poor circumstances in which many were entrapped. In the main, city dwellers were not well-off and e.g. in relation to shoemakers, shoe binders, chimney sweeps, or dressmakers, who were assigned to Class 3; many were in modest circumstances. Possessed of a skill, they were accommodated within Class 3 on a par or below that of watchmakers whose revered skills conferred on these artificers greater esteem in the city. Even these watchmaking skills could have been for some, ostensible skills, according to Sheldon, since the industry consisted of an elaborate assembly process based on outworking where an individual performed a single task. There was such sub-division later in the century that there was ‘a lot of intra-occupational variations and insecure unemployment’. Joining weaving as a Class 3 activity were warping, winding and filling. However in homes, warping and winding was undertaken by females in the role of assisting the weaver and was seen as lesser skilled activity than weaving. In factories too women undertook these roles, and from the young ages of some of those involved would appear less skilled than suggested. Thus Class 3 appears bloated and according to a general comment by Hoppen ‘unhelpfully large’. Gradations can be identified within those involved in the weaving industry, within the watch industry and between both. The gradations were not fixed and altered according to the changing fortunes of the silk and watch trades. Ribbon, watch and cycle manufacture all had heydays and nadirs and class apportioning on occupation may fail to capture the effect of those exigencies on status. There were shifts in fortune due to the strike and slump of 1860-61 when many weavers who were in comfortable circumstances found themselves in severe need and were forced to sell their possessions. The changing nature of an occupation over a century may have affected its standing. It would appear that the occupations properly seen as skilled and synonymous with a particular class, and attained by an apprenticeship of seven years, could by later censuses, if not obsolete, through division

33 Chancellor, Master and Artisan, pp. 119-123, 177-180; Ullathorne, Notes on the Education Question, See Appendix 6.
34 Herson remarks that Staffordian shoemakers ‘were often poor and of relatively low status, even though they were nominally skilled workers’. (Herson, A small-town perspective, p. 95).
35 Sheldon, Families in the firing line, p. 29
36 Karl Theodore Hoppen, The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1886, (Oxford 1998) pp. 46, 49. Clerks were assigned to Class 3. His remark that white-collar workers felt themselves different from those who ‘laboured with their hands’ reminds when considering the wide content of Class 3 that it was not, in terms of social respectability, a monochrome category.
37 Searby, Relief of the Poor, p. 356
of labour and mechanisation, have required less skill in their performance and were more appropriate to a lower class.\textsuperscript{38}

In Irish studies, investigation into the nature of Class 1 and Class 2 groupings should be required as an enlightening counterbalance to the attention commanded by Irish volumes in other classes. Though acknowledged to exist, details on persons in these upmost categories, in other city studies of the Irish, have been lightly pursued, on the basis that they were difficult to distinguish from the host community, into which it was supposed they dissolved with little impediment. They also seemed to have been regarded as being too few in number to deserve specific attention when the circumstances of large volumes of Irish in unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled occupations commanded investigation. When categories of occupation are listed some occupations e.g. ‘auctioneer’, because of their scarcity risked being gathered under an uninformative catch all ‘Other Occupations’ heading. Thus brushed aside elsewhere by synoptic generalisation, as not quite part of the story, these occupations, should they here translate into higher social classes, are accorded greater acknowledgement and their circumstances amplified, to assess their contribution to the Irish in Coventry narrative.\textsuperscript{39}

Due to the provincial nature of Coventry the extent and role of the Irish-born in superior social position may then have enjoyed proportionately more acknowledgment and appreciation than might have been the case in larger scale municipalities. Investigation of the content of Class 1 and 2 should reveal the occupations and professions of the Irish-born, with their mechanisms and motives that gave penetration into the echelons of the host society that were imbued with what Hoppen referred to as ‘classic’ Victorianism.\textsuperscript{40} They may not in the process of establishing themselves ‘in the just estimation of society’ have acknowledged the significance of their Irish background

\textsuperscript{38} Searby explained that in the silk industry of 1838: ‘socially the first-hands shaded imperceptibly into the class of very small manufacturers; some 40 of the 70 masters, who kept in work fewer than 10 looms, each were first-hands who had decided to weave directly for the London wholesalers; these 40 owned only 121 looms between them. Men like these, moved back and forth between the positions of first-hand journeyman and independent manufacturer as the fortunes of the trade suggested, drawing upon small savings to buy silk’. (Searby, Weavers and freemen, pp. 196-197).

\textsuperscript{39} It is a class grouping where the religious background i.e. Protestant adherence, is likely to be more detectable since they may have left at that class level a more noticeable trail in sources due to their professional achievements being recorded. This opportunity to gain insight into the type of religious belief held by individuals leading modest lives in other class groupings is less available.

\textsuperscript{40} Hoppen, \textit{Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1886} p. 46. He referred to ‘classic’ Victorianism as a belief in respectability, merit, competition, money, hierarchy, privacy and success; Andrew Miles, \textit{Social Mobility in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century England}, (Houndmills, Basingstoke 1999) p. 138
but their achievements may nonetheless have signalled, if indirectly Irish attunement with respectability.  

**General findings**

The aggregation of all Irish-born and of all Irish-com by social class is supplied in Table 5.22. In order to focus on those actually occupied, once the residual Class X was established the relative proportions of the five active social classes was calculated. For Irish-born, Class 3 with 71.8% is most prominent in 1841. The censuses of 1851 and 1861 shared a very similar profile with Class 3 dominant at an average for them of 47.3%, and then followed by a strong average showing of 35.6% in Class 5. The influx of labourers following the 1841 census had doubled the Class 5 category by 1851.

Turning to the Irish-com their male percentage in Class X ranged from 31.6% to 41.3% reflecting the inclusion now of local-born children. The percentages in the five occupational classes when recalculated without Class X showed the same dominance of Classes 3 and 5 as was found for Irish-born. In 1841 Class 3 largely involving weaving commanded 72.3% of all occupied, while in 1851 and 1861 it commanded well over half. Representing labourers, hawkers, dealers in rags and errand boys, Class 5 was most obvious among the three censuses at 31.6% in 1851. Class 4 included agricultural labourers, gardeners, dyers’ labourers and watch finishers, and appeared squeezed between enlarged Classes 3 and 5.

There was a much higher percentage of Irish-born females than males in Class X, reflecting the numbers of women who remained at home. For some men, as was the case with successful watchmakers, it was a mark of their status that their wives did not work; thus wives enjoying a Class 2 or 3 status may be lost in the anonymity of Class X. Irish-born Sara Mara Richardson did not have an occupation listed in 1851 and was assignable to Class X; yet she was wife of Liverpool-born John, an architect in Class 1 and also had a servant. Unrecorded as well went the occupation of some at home who helped to wind for their weaving husbands. The recalculation in the Table around those active in various classes show the dominance of Class 3 particularly in 1841. Represented in this class were dressmakers, seamstresses and those with skill in the silk industry. Class 4 is also well represented in 1851 and 1861 by their average of 30.0% and included washerwomen, laundresses, and servants. Class 5 at 18.9% was more

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41 Andrew Miles, *Social Mobility in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century England*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke 1999) p. 138. Words quoted uttered by a John Brown who was keen to socially advance himself.

42 The Richardsons could not be located after 1851.
prominent for women in 1861 than in previous decades and this class was comprised largely of hawkers, charwomen or silk picker-ups.

Turning to Irishcom women the pattern followed that for Irish-born. Class X contained 72.4% of all those enumerated in 1841 and over 50.0% in 1851 and 1861. When the percentages were recalculated based on the five active classes, the share-outs between the classes broadly retained the same proportions as for Irish-born. There was when compared, some lift in Class 3 and fall in Class 4 in the Irishcom percentages suggesting the local-born-Irish women included in Irishcom figures had a more skilled status.

Most Irish silk weavers were assigned to Class 3. To provide insight on the extent of Irish engagement in the ribbon industry, the focus of discovery is here placed on the core activity of weaving, even though the industry included a wider involvement of areas such as e.g. winding and warping. Weaving was a specific activity capable of measurement and best represented the intercensal employment standing of the silk trade; Table 5.23 represents the findings. The full extent of the Irish in hand loom weaving cannot be ascertained since many census replies offered no further elucidation than ribbon weaver or silk weaver. It may be assumed that looms were all hand operated in 1841, an unknown mix of hand and engine powered were in use by 1851, though there was still handloom predominance, but by 1861 hand loom weaving was an almost obsolete description. Nor is there sufficient occupational title description to discover the degree of movement of Irish weavers into factory, or domestic but cooperative powered settings in the 1850s. The five members of one family of Thomas Doran in Bradford Street were alone in informatively stating they were ‘ribbon weavers at home’. The declining number of weavers in the silk industry after the collapse of 1860-61 is apparent.

There were a noticeable 19 Irish-born persons assigned to Class 1 in 1851 but this was an aberration as there were 12 lodging or visiting surveyors who were most likely involved in the preparation of an elaborate Board of Health Map of Coventry published in 1851.

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43 To be assigned to the Table ‘weaver’ must have been the pre-eminent word in the title, and not diminished by a multiple activity title such as weaver/warper or weaver/winder. Where ‘weaver’ was only mentioned it was assumed to be ribbon weaving, while coach lace weaving, plush weaving, cotton weaving, etc. were excluded.

44 A September 2003 press release from Coventry City Council stated: ‘Coventry Archives are delighted to extend an invitation to examine the beautifully illustrated ‘1851 Board of Health Map of Coventry’ which will be displayed in its entirety for the very first time! This historical document is a work of art in its own right. It is so huge that it will take up the whole of St. Mary’s Guildhall, is made-up of 26 individual, beautifully drawn and coloured maps. They show all aspects of Coventry in great detail, right
Irish-born heads of Irish Households

To marshal the data into a slimmer and thus more enlightening format and to exclude those, because of their local origin i.e. local-born men married to Irish-born wives, who possibly had an in situ advantage in establishing a social foothold, only the findings of those heads of Irish households who were born in Ireland have been selected for onward analysis in this chapter.45

Irish-born heads of Irish Households: Classes 1 and 2

Hoppen also stated that when the five occupation class system is applied to English towns, Class 1 emerged as something very close to the ‘exclusive’ middle class, while Classes 1 and 2 taken together approximate roughly to the larger ‘inclusive’ middle class.46 For 1851 as Table 5.24 discloses male heads of Irish households with 2.8% more than matched the Host Class 1 (1.9%) and with 8.4% matched in half Host Class 2 (17.8%). Irish deemed to belong to these classes are presented in Table 5.24 (continued through for later century decades in Table 6.12) with each person occupying an individual row of a Table across decadal columns.47 Most, as clerics, doctors, or shopkeepers were in constant contact with the populace and were well known across the city. Neither insular nor anti-social, by acting as exemplary models in their social role, even if not actively setting out to, they would help to counteract negative images of the Irish. However an incident concerning John Brownrigge Collison during his vicarial service in St. Michael’s showed this was not in all circumstances true and even a high status Established Church clergyman was not immune from being pejoratively reminded that his birthplace was in Ireland. (Appendix 2).

Dennis George Barnes (Appendix 2) was one of the few who made a consistent appearance across the early featured decades. Being a prominent auctioneer and furniture broker his locally focused business anchored him in the city and also made

down to individual trees! It will be presented for public viewing in St. Mary’s Guildhall on 28 September 2003 between 11am - 3pm; entry to this event is free.’ This map underlies the Figures shown in Chapter 3.

45 Classification utilising headship may fail to relay the economic strength of the household as it does not take into account the possible contribution of a working wife, children, or incidental lodgers. However it is the most practical and suitable method to refine a large volume of data for further scrutiny.

46 Hoppen, Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1886, pp. 37-49 ‘Exclusive’ = merchants, industrialists, bankers, professionals, rentiers. For Hoppen ‘Inclusive’ covered a social area whose boundary was difficult to establish at the lower edge i.e. between it and that occupied by manual workers. Towards the lower edge of the middle class he placed clerks, schoolteachers, and small retail operators.

47 The actual description of occupation given in each census may be a factor in accounting for variations in class placing. The Table includes those uplifted under Armstrong’s recommendations. Where a person is located in a subsequent census and has not dropped out of the qualifying Class they are provided with a ‘continuation’ row colour of the census year in which they commenced to aid their recognition across the decades.
him well-known to it. However he was no ambassador for ‘Irish’ distinctiveness. He remarked in 1871 that he was:

‘born in the army; of Irish extraction; religion a Protestant; in politics a Conservative of the Conservatives; born in 1803; a soldier when the Battle of Waterloo was fought; a member of their troop at the Crimea...’

He examples in the extreme, the risk inherent in referencing Irish-born totals, of assuming that a person born in Ireland (and indeed his father was also born in Ireland) shared the dominant social culture of those emanating from the island. Next door to Barnes in Smithford Street was the Post Office where Timothy Peters Glennan was a clerk in 1841. From 1844 until his death in 1865 as Postmaster, with his Coventry-born wife as chief clerk, he would have been widely known. Since he was also a city councillor his recognition would have been even greater. In adjoining Fleet Street, Zephaniah Binley (Appendix 2) an Irish-born son of a soldier from Monks Kirby operated as a chemist and druggist. He took a prominent part in city affairs over a long life but did not express any sympathies toward matters Irish. Like Barnes although born in Ireland he was English in cultural outlook.

Also present across the decades, if not endeared to the populace, was James Hart (Figure 5.1), the harsh and hubristic influential ribbon manufacturer, of whose Irish birth the city widely knew. Some names were of short stay and might appear in only one census. This was the fate of renowned Irish-born architect James Murray (Appendix 2) who died of tuberculosis in 1863 aged 32 years. Clerics such as John Collison who after some years appeared committed to the locality could leave abruptly. Others such as Thomas Breen from Roscrea, with his Bilton-born wife, licensee of the Queens Arms at 18 Burgess, noted in censuses between 1851 and 1871, might stay longer and appear settled but equally could move unexpectedly away from Coventry. Robert DeLessert, a Dublin dentist (Appendix 2) arrived in Coventry in mid-1859 but his engagement with the city ended on his death in 1890 at 55 years.

Retailing was an activity that could aid upward social mobility. A few doors away from Breen in Cross Cheaping in 1851 resided linen draper Job Deacon from Newton Barry, Wexford, who previously appears to have been a draper’s shop man in

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48 Coventry Standard 1st December 1871
49 Hart’s factory in West Orchard was known as ‘Paddy’s Folly’.
50 Thomas was a described as servant in Smithford Street on his marriage on April 27th 1844 to widow Catherine Potts. They had left Coventry by 1881 in his case to manage the Punch Bowl in Stanwell, Middlesex. They appear childless which may have been a consideration in their decision to leave but there also appears to have been a high turnover of licence holders in many public houses in Coventry. RG11/1329.124.8 ED 14; Warwickshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1839-1849.
Manchester. His central city presence must have lifted the view that the Irish engaged in selling were not all hawkers and marine store dealers. An even more remarkable advance that was achieved through dealing (and a strategic marriage) is seen in the progress of Ralph Smith, who was a 15 year apprentice painter to Irish-born James Connor in Coventry in 1841. When he died on 12 January 1883 at the age of 57, he was then described as having been a ‘dealer in fine arts, carver and gilder and clothier’. His store was in a prominent location in the High Street (Appendix 2).

John McDermot from Callan, Co. Kilkenny, with a London-born wife, was identified as a policeman in Coventry in 1851 and had by 1881 become Superintendent Inspector of Police. It must have been recognised from his example that an Irishman could competently hold a position of authority in the city as again was the case of Mark A Fenton, a most eminent Medical Officer of Health for the city in the 1880s (Appendix 2).

Each census revealed its own crop of Irish arrivals with that of 1861 being particularly memorable. It included Dubliner Denis McVeagh who in 1853 was appointed as a physician at the Provident Dispensary (Figure 4.9). Through his work there for over half a century, and through his sittings as Justice of the Peace for Coventry from 1882 he was widely known and was described by a contemporary as ‘held in high esteem socially’. He arrived in Coventry bringing with him high-class social status due to the standing of his profession, and well-connected marriage, but strengthened societal regard further, by long years of reputable service and by progressing to more elegant housing. His was a lifetime of conformity to local social norms, of endorsement of the Union and an espousal of the Coventry Catholic Church. He gestured to his Irish background later in the century by attending concerts of Irish parlour ballads in the Catholic schoolroom but it was only through this prism his sense of Irish identity was expressed; he was not an advocate or leader of the local Irish.

Those listed above could be said to have in part achieved success by modelling their behaviour around the enterprising or professional norms of the host society. Some appeared from evidence of birthplace of wife and family, and from residential and occupational details to be in almost every sense British. Ralph Smith seems to have adopted the social pretensions and affectations of English culture. He had become Ralph Smyth by 1871, and in that year his son was baptised in St. Michael’s with the

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51 He was remarried by 1871 to Foleshill-born Harriet after his Irish-born wife Kate died. He was a widower again in 1891 before he died in 1892 aged 74.
52 HO107/2067.606.15 ED 30; RG9/2204.23.21 ED 26; RG10/3175.21.8 ED 2; RG11/3069.25.7 ED 27.
53 The Tablet 29th November 1913. He was the first Catholic magistrate appointed in Coventry since the Reformation. (Coventry Herald 21st November 1913).
grandiose name Walter Chidley Coote Smyth. In particular the latter two, but many found in this class did not have names that suggested an Irish origin. Also as a facilitator of social progress, or as a mark of it, all were married to English-born women, had 'street' addresses and could if required change to residential locations deemed appropriate to their standing. The dentist, doctors and clerics had portable skills which facilitated their entry to the city and elevation therein. So too might the presence of a possible mentor be advantageous, such as the dentist’s uncle in Wolverhampton, or McVeagh’s possible recommendation of Fenton as a suitable hospital surgeon. This brief recount illustrates how diversified the experience of Irish-born might be in relation to Coventry. As emblems of Irish-born respectability members of this class may have exhibited to the local Irish the perception that success derived from involvement with and conformance to the native codes of behaviour.

This class contained influential commentators who reported about general concerns on poverty and health to particular fora; Binley to the Workhouse Board of Guardians, McVeagh to Provident Society meetings and Fenton to the City Council. Yet they did not perceive, or if so, openly identify any concerns about the living conditions of the Irish specifically, or of negativity towards, or exclusion of, the local-Irish because they were ‘Irish’. Fenton was exceptionally placed to comment if he was disposed to do so. Perhaps by 1874 when he took up his position the Irish were no longer viewed locally as people with a distinctive living pattern that warranted comment. These notables did not foster Irish local community uniqueness, or cohesiveness, though in the case of McVeagh he participated within a Catholic setting in the celebration of a genteel Irish culture. With the exception of McVeagh, as Anglicans they may in fact have felt distant from the Irish Catholic majority, and not conscious of the pain of disapproval, given O’Day’s view that in general anti-Irishness was directed only at Catholics. As strivers they may have disdained those Irish on the lower rungs of society as feckless and disassociated themselves as far as possible from the risk of being included in

54 Warwickshire, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1850-74. Chidley Coote did have an Irish connotation since it was that of the younger son (died 1668) of Sir Charles Coote, 1st Baronet of Castle Cuffe, Queens Co. where Ralph was born.
55 Kelly’s, Directories of Warwickshire, 1880 and 1884.
56 Fenton may have had his own early repute, since in later years he became a respected Medical Officer for the city. He resigned from Coventry Hospital to join McVeagh as a surgeon at the Coventry Provident Society in 1872. His initial appointment had been in Worcester; McVeagh had links with Kidderminster in Worcestershire.
57 O’Day, Varieties of anti-Irish behaviour, p. 27
society’s overarching disapproval of the Irish. The review relates here to the lifetime experience of the specified individuals in Table 5.24 Their British born children, especially females seemed to melt into the host society, as occurred to Robert De Lessert’s 5 daughters.

Irish-born weavers such as John Lamb (1791-1863) who arrived between 1836 and 1848, Patrick Doran (1819-1877) who arrived close to 1840, and John Barry (1815-1890) who had arrived by 1841 might appear in Class 2 (Table 5.26) in 1851 if they employed an apprentice, but they did not feature in the longer term. The domestic production system was in decline with production concentrating in factories where it became more feminised. Lamb had passed away by 1863 but the travails of his three sons tell of the plight that unfolded for a second generation in Coventry (Appendix 2). Initially all weavers, Peter left for Birmingham in 1862, his departure probably caused by the silk industry collapse, and found work there as a porter and later a stable cleaner. The other two moved to Hillfields where powered domestic weaving endeavoured to continue. By 1881 James seemed an inconsequential widowed lodger with his daughter’s family. His third son John, now referring to himself as a brewer, died relatively young at 56 in 1883. By then he was an isolated and tragic widower in Jordan Well, as his wife and his two children had already deceased him at young ages. This was the mundane denouement of John Lamb’s 1851 seemingly comfortable weaving family that could employ an apprentice and a servant. Health issues, the process of ageing and change in the type and manner of city production took their toll on the following generation; these sons suggest that the second generation lived inauspicious lives. Interestingly, perhaps because they appear to have been Anglican, and engaged in a local weaving activity, these Irish-born sons found English wives without difficulty. Turning to Doran, his apprentice and servant had both disappeared by 1861 while his son William B. shunned weaving to take up watchmaking. John Barry had fallen in class status by 1871, when he was no longer even a working as a weaver, and had become a messenger in a factory.

Shoemaking was a popular occupation with the Irish (Table 5.26). As a result of the upgrade rule, some cordwainers could appear in Class 2, as shown in Table 5.24. In 1861 Thomas Hennessey (1839-1902) and Michael Hogen (1821-1887) (both in Appendix 2) so featured. The former from Queens Co appears in 1861 in Coventry without background, at 22 years of age, employing 7 men and 4 boys. This status as an employer and his later life profile as a publican, and ‘Catholic of Coventry’ may outweigh the fact he had threatened a rival shoemaker in earlier years, as noted for
January 1862 in Appendix 4. Shoemaking appears a somewhat menial occupation that could involve the practice of buying old shoes to repair and sell on. and it. Hogan (employing two men) was also a ‘translator’ of shoes and particularly unsophisticated. He had previously lived in Birmingham and with his wife Sarah was in court on a number of occasions e.g. for causing a violent disturbance in Well Street in 1849. It was Sarah’s antics that drew out the only nineteenth century available description of Irish settlement in part of Well Street or elsewhere in Coventry, couched in the notorious terms of the nefarious London Irish rookery. The Standard 18th May 1849 wrote: ‘A number of Irish men and women, who are located in certain premises in Well Street, called the Coventry St. Giles, came to criminate each other for creating a breach of the peace last night; and Sarah, the wife of Michael Hogan…[was bound by the magistrates to keep the peace]’.

**Irish-born heads of Irish Households: Class 3**

Having looked at heads of Irish households who were born in Ireland and classified in Class 1 & 2, the circumstances of those found in Class 3 can now be examined. This was as revealed by Table 5.25 the numerically dominant Class. However the fundamental problem with this category is that it is too wide in its scope and should, if it were possible, have had finer distinction to characterise the large volume of people it contained who had skills but not necessarily ones held in equal regard. Table 5.25 reveals that Class 3 for both male heads of Coventry Host and Irish- born heads of Irish households showed a close similarity in degree of dominance. Irish- born female heads were too few to permit serious comparison with their Host equivalent. Like males they were noticeably dominant in Class 3 in 1841 where they would have assisted in the hand loom weaving activity of the household.

Table 5.26 is an exposition by occupation of all Irish Household heads found in Class 3 i.e. Irish-born and Non-Irish-born with delineation by marital status and gender.

Irish-born heads in Class 3 did not fare as well as Non-Irish-born males (i.e. married to Irish women). Non-Irish-born males showed a more raised presence in Class 3 as a proportion of all Non-Irish headed Irish households (70.2% in 1861) than did Irish-born heads in Class 3 in relation to all Irish-born heads (44.5% in 1861). Results

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58 Coventry Herald 4th May 1849; 18th May 1849; 2nd January 1857; Hogan was fined for being drunk according to the Coventry Standard 7th May 1864; In 1865 Sarah was charged with receiving stolen property. (Coventry Standard 11th February 1865); Hogan was fatally injured when he fell down the stairs on 24th April 1887. (Birmingham Daily Post 26th April 1887).

59 Not all Irish with Class 3 ‘type’ activity are on display, since under Armstrong’s recommendations, dealers, etc. initially placed in Class 3 were upgraded to Class 2 if they employed a person who was not a family member.
for Irish-born married heads in Class 3 ranged downwards from 78.4% in 1841 to 45.0% in 1861. These, together with results for solo-headed households, both male and female which averaged 55.8%, allow it to be concluded that Irish Household heads were well represented in Class 3 over the three decades, if more so in 1841 and 1851 than in 1861. The occupations that stand out in the Table were weaving, shoemaking and tailoring. Weaving (to include the first three rows of the Table), involved 64.5% of male household heads in Class 3 in 1841, 56.9% in 1851 and was reduced as a result of the collapsing trade to 45.9% by 1861. For Irish Household male heads these were substantial percentages and showed that for a goodly number of Irish there was an intimate involvement with the specialised local economy and reliance in common with others in the city on how the silk fortunes of the city fared. Watchmaking an esteemed skill locally, that merited a Class 3 placing, was not a prominent Irish activity, and when lightly followed in 1861, was engaged in by Non-Irish-born Irish Household heads. There was participation in a wide gamut of Class 3 activity that involved contact with locals which must have had an integrational effect.

Irish-born heads of Irish Households: Classes 4 and 5

Reflecting the yet unadjusted nature of the post-Famine ingress, Class 5 is raised for Irish-born male heads (and particularly so in 1861) while both Classes 2 and 4 are correspondingly lowered when compared to the profile of Host male heads. Similar to males in Class 5, females in the same class displayed an increased share of Irish-born across the decades.

Spatial Expression 1841 and 1861

An Enumeration Area (EA) could cover a number of streets so each has been given a name that is, or derives from, a prominent street therein. To assist in pinpointing EAs on maps, they are also referred to by their Map Area number (M) found in Map 5.1 or Map 5.6 as appropriate. For 1841, Table 5.27 in conjunction with Maps 5.1 to 5.3 show the areal distribution for both Irish-born and Irishcom. Table 5.28 in conjunction with Maps 5.6 and 5.7 show the areal distribution of Irishcom for 1861. It is to be recognised that EA’s might not be comparable in areal size, population total and density, social composition, or stage of residential development. To provide some relativity, a location quotient, where 1.0 is the norm, shown in Map 5.4, and Map 5.8, for respective decades, has been provided to determine how residually important each

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60 The population of the 65 Enumeration Areas ranged from 287 to 1,289 with an average of 692.
EA was to the Irish, in terms of the importance the city population as a whole attached to residing in it.

For 1841, the ‘purest’ manifestation of concentrations of Irish presence i.e. Irish-born, is shown in Map 5.2. Those EAs containing at least 20 Irish-born (3.5%) were as follows, M15:High St/Hertford St, M16:Greyfriars Lane, M18:South Fleet/Spon, M29:N Hill St, M39:West Orchard, M40:Well/Upper Well and M41:Upper Well/Well. Map5.3 shows these central EAs also contained the larger share of the Irishcom population, and in relation to location quotient, Map 5.4 shows Irishcom were over-represented in the same EAs. These neighbourhoods would swell with Irish over the following two decades, not simply because they had appeal to the migrants as areas where those of similar ethnic background dwelled but because being central areas they offered cheap accommodation in run down courts and lanes. Some EAs e.g. M43:New Buildings, or M10:MP St/St. Johns St that had a small numbers of Irish in 1841 covered streets that would have larger numbers in the future. Map 5.5 shows the relationship of the birthplace of Irish-born married heads of *Irish Households* to that of their spouse. No firm conclusions could be drawn because of the low numbers involved as to whether, expressed in binary terms, heads when Irish-born and married to Irish-born, showed different location preference to heads who were British-born but married to Irish women. If pressed, the ‘inner’ EAs e.g. M15, M16, M40 were likely to have more of the former while ‘outer’ EAs like M3, M4 and M21, more of the latter.

The degree of ‘expansion’ in EAs between Irish-born and Irishcom percentages as measured against total Irishcom in the city can be ascertained in Table 5.27. In 32 EAs it was < 1.0%, in 14 => 1.0%, and in 6 => 2.0% (M10, M12, M15, M18, M22, and M29).

In 1861 the Irish are most visible again in the areas where they were found in 1841. While the Irish are represented in almost all EAs in 1861 (where 1.0% represents 14.8 Irishcom and 2.0% represents 29.6 Irishcom), the EAs that encircled the Central Business District of M1:Broadgate/M39:Burges contained significant percentages of Irish. M40:West Orchard held 7.8% (116) of Irishcom in the city and was followed by M41:Well with 5.8% (86) Irishcom. Though adjacent they were distinct vicinities as they were separated by the Sherbourne River. M18:Warwick Lane held 4.9% (73) to complete the EAs with stand-out totals. The 3% to 4% tier with 46 to 55 Irishcom was represented by the very centred M51:New Buildings, followed by slightly less near to the core EAs, albeit still close in terms of a compact city. These were M42:Upper Well, M11:Much Park-26C, M47:Tower/Henry and M6:Gosford-92. Finally the 2% to 3%
tier (30-44 Irishcom) was comprised of M1:Broadgate, M17:Greyfriars Lane, M29:Fleet/West Orchard, M50:Palmer Lane, M12:St. Johns and M55:East. All but the latter 2 were integral to the heart of the city.

In relation to location quotient for 1861, Map 5.8 shows Irishcom were relatively under-represented in south-west, north-west (including Hillfields) and west EAs, M62:Lower Ford, and M53:Far Gosford EAs. They were relatively over-represented in the old inner core EAs, already remarked on, that circled M1:Broadgate/M:39Burgess. Those old core EAs featured prominently in the distribution of 125 Irishcom lodgers, with M40:West Orchard accepting the highest amount of 16, M17:Greyfriars Lane of 10, and M14:Earl of 9.

The degree of ‘expansion’ in different EAs between Irish-born and Irishcom percentages as measured against total Irishcom in the city can be ascertained in Table 5.28. In 41 EAs it was < 1.0%, in 17 => 1.0% and in 4 => 2.0% (M40:West Orchard 3.9%, M41:Well 2.9%, M18:Warwick Lane 2.7% and M42:Upper Well 2.0%).
Chapter 6

Irish household structure, Irish community attributes and its spatial expression in years of adjustment and settlement 1871-1901

This was a period where a section of the Irish community, sharply uplifted in size according to the 1851 and 1861 censuses, adjusted and committed to the city. The inaugural statistics for this period commencing in 1871 showed decisive change had occurred over the previous decade. Herson referred to an ageing Irish population in Stafford evidenced in 1871, where a third of his Irish were over 45 years of age. In Coventry there was an even greater share of the Irish-born in their mature years; 37.5% of the Irish-born were 45 years of age and over. Further, in 1871 the Irish-born population had fallen by almost a third, from 724 to 480, during the previous decade. Death would increasingly thin the community of its Irish-born, and the measurable community detectable in the census through association with these Irish-born, would consequently also fall. However while the statistics record a decline, it is to be recalled that beyond this measurable community lay, mentioned earlier as recognised by Fitzpatrick, a more shadowy quantum of local-born Irish children who had grown up, and fanned out from the home in which they had been reared by an Irish-born parent. Irish-born and detectable local-born-Irish numerically diminished until 1891, but thereafter was overlain by a fresh inward movement of Irish-born seeking out work in the cycle industry and in the growing tertiary sector of the municipality. The latter movement led to a gain of 92 Irish-born during the final decade. The Irish experienced life in this thirty year period of the city’s history when its gloomy economic destiny reversed and its character matured.

This was a period in the fortunes of Coventry where its outset, as recorded in the census of 1871, was marked by a population figure of 40,113 which showed a decline through emigration of 1,536 since 1861. In the same decade nearby Leicester had increased its population by 27,000 and Nottingham by 64,000. By the end of the period reviewed in this study, the cycle industry, though it had already passed its heyday, had re-animated the city and had drawn in immigrants that helped swell the population of 1871 by 75.2% to reach 70,296. Almost a third of that increase had occurred in the final decade of the century. In an expanding city, Irish numbers were diluted and did not

2 Fitzpatrick, A curious middle place, p. 13
3 Coventry ED = 393
threaten; Irish-born in the final decade of the century represented 0.7% of the population, with measurable Irish born in 1901 only 1.2% of same.

The city was becoming more urbane and informed as the century wore on. There were mutual improvement societies, a medical provident society, a music society, a choral association and an opera house that opened in 1889. Voluntarism and philanthropy were exemplified in the letters of appeal of Louisa Gulson, Irish-born wife of the mayor, in 1871 to a local newspaper for funds to fit out a second dedicated children’s ward in the local hospital. Mention of the construction of a tram network suffices to indicate municipal infrastructural betterment. Very telling of public opinion of the time was the re-establishment in July 1874 of a society for the prevention of cruelty to animals. This was prompted by a desire to end the practice in centre city Butchers Row of ‘calf bleeding’ where sheep and pigs were publicly slaughtered in the street.

Conservative MP, H.W. Eaton in March 1880 stated of Coventry that there was still a vast amount of distress and suffering due to a from lack of work:

‘We may, no doubt, be told of the other industries which have sprung up, and made a home in this city. Is that any satisfactory answer to the man who is suffering from the annihilation of his own trade, or is it any consolation to the watchmaker, to the weaver, or to the dyer to be told that other trades are springing up in this city and taking the place of those in which he has been brought up from his youth, or will that change in any way satisfy his children for the want of bread which his labour once earned for them.’

The cycle industry did return confidence to the city; a view of Kelly’s Directory in 1896 indicates that commercial activity was wide-ranging and that copious professional services were on offer as the century drew to a close.

Relative to the middle decades, the Irish were now better placed. They were resident in a city which was sharing in the social and economic progress, and increasing tolerance that was part of the backdrop of the nineteenth century as it advanced towards closure. The 1850s Irish influx that found its abatement extending into the 1870s and 1880s was significantly comprised of agrarian people, taking initial opportunity for employment in familiar activity e.g. gardening, labouring, laundering and charring, which was unskilled work where ruggedness and strength counted. However from 1870

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4 Letter dated January 12th 1873 to Coventry Herald
5 Coventry Herald 10th July 1874; 24th July 1874
6 Coventry Times 17th March 1880; Gutteridge wrote about the stagnation of the ribbon trade that left many weavers ‘silently but patiently starving’ a decade later when trade fell off. He wrote about his lack of work in late 1890, early 1891 and 1892, and the odd jobs he was compelled to do to avoid starvation. (Chancellor, Master and Artisan, pp. 229, 231, 232)
7 Kelly’s Directory of Warwickshire (London1896)
local-born children of the Irish benefitted from compulsorily elementary schooling. As a consequence of being literate they could apply for a wider range of jobs; ones that involved direct contact with the members of the host society through working beside them in factories and commercial businesses (Appendix 6). Many new Irish-born arrivals to the city towards the end of the century were attuned to an urban milieu having come from cosmopolitan Dublin, or through having already spent time in British surroundings, e.g. Kent (Chatham), London or Birmingham.

This was a time when the Irish enjoyed greater self esteem. They had, perhaps, while not truly appreciating it, benefited from the municipal improvement in sanitary standards and medical provision, and from regulation preventing overcrowding, that were features of the second half of the century. The availability of more regular employment in the cycle industry, within the constrictions of the insecure and seasonal ‘boom and bust’ environment noted by Sheldon, in the late decades of the century must have especially boosted their morale and commitment to the city.8 There were other lifting inclusionary influences, as mentioned in Chapter 4, such as the developing respect for the standing of the Catholic Church and tolerance of its mode of educational provision. This was proudly provided in new schools opened in 1876, and helped in socialising the Irish through its promotion of a culture of loyalty, abidance with the law and of remaining inconspicuous.

There were celebrations of Irish heritage that made for a positive identity and the frequent reference in constitutional politics to the ‘Ireland question’ made place of origin relevant. While there were differences in approach to the future administration of Ireland, its articulation in Coventry was without rancor and contained within the arena of parliamentary engagement. The Liberal consciousness in the city (ordinarily balanced by Conservatism) was enough to give the Irish, a contented optimism for the time being, that the task of providing justice for Ireland was taken seriously by a section of the legislature. The problems in Ireland that created distaste for Irish-born now seemed to be considered to relate less to the misery, poverty and fecklessness of a priest-ridden people and more so to land ownership issues and methods to achieve self-determination. The Coventry Times in 1889 wrote:

‘The truth about the Irish question is gradually finding its way into the heart and mind of the English people. It is no longer popularly believed in this country that the Irish nation is mainly composed of idle rascals and dissolute ruffians. Irish members of Parliament have been of late often found upon English platforms, and

8 Sheldon, Families in the firing line, p. 30
their hearers have been surprised to discern that the persons addressing them were educated gentlemen.9

As the century turned, a new Gaelic League nationalism created pride in, and the sharing of, an Irish identity that had been imbued by the League with a dignified cultural form. From 1871 in day-to-day Coventry the negativity of Fenian campaigns and the impact of the Famine numbers seemed to fade without mention or much remembrance, into yesteryear. This quietening also seemed to have largely occurred in Birmingham after 1867, the year of the Murphy Riots. Collective Irish public memory can be long and unforgiving but also short and forgetful. As the century aged fewer had direct memory of these happenings. There was less negative public representation of the Irish. A concert was held in 1880 in the Corn Exchange in aid of Irish distress to an audience gesturing goodwill towards the Irish.10

There was too the continued sprinkling of respectable Irish-born professionals, merchants and entrepreneurs fully acclimatised to the city. The smooth ability to integrate, self-assurance, and usually exemplary behaviour of these petite bourgeoisie showed in a positive manner to locals that being Irish-born did not automatically confer low-standing or deserve social disdain. Irish-born. It appeared to have been perfectly acceptable in Coventry, though her Protestant background no doubt facilitated this, for Irish-born Louisa Gulson, referred to above, to have been married to John Gulson who was a most prominent local citizen and benefactor. (Appendix 2).

The chapter sets out to establish the demographic structure, structural change and the spatial expression from 1871 onwards of this ageing and mutating Irish grouping that was enjoined by incoming Irish-born from the 1880s, that were first enumerated in 1891. The chapter will also seek data from the four relevant censuses to permit an assessment of the social standing and likely continuance of the Irish ‘community’. In order to ascertain how Irish findings might relate to the wider setting covered by this chapter, expansive household data on the indigenous Coventry population has also been extracted for one census, that of 1881. The irony is that for this period, in census terms, the grown children of Irish-born not resident with parents, were mingled with the host figures. Given this reality, it is to be recognised particularly in this chapter, that each census portrayed stands alone to itself and when statistics are provided to illustrate the degree of relative decennial change of Irishcom these are necessarily indicative rather

9 Coventry Times 20th February 1889
10 Ibid. 24th March 1880. The crowded concert was under the patronage of the mayor, and was attended by the four candidates for the city, Dr McVeagh and ‘other influential gentlemen’. The Irish organisers wrote in the Dublin Weekly Nation 1st May 1880 of ‘the warm hand of friendship extended to them by their English brethern’.
than categorical in nature. The same analytical approach and framework employed in the previous chapter is followed in this chapter and in this commonality shares a number of its Tables.

Censal disclosure 1871-1901

The Irish-born in 1871, as above noted, had fallen in the previous decade by a third. A further decline of over a quarter (26.5%) occurred to 1881 with a final decline of 11.0% to 1891. Corresponding declines in Irishcom from 1861 were 23.2%, 26.7% and 19.3%. During the last quarter of that century, as city population was increasing, the declining numbers reduced the proportion of Irish in the city to below 1.0%. The 1891 census represented the numerical nadir of the post-Famine Irish-born contingent and of measurable Irishcom in Coventry. From this census onwards industrial developments would again lift the number of Irish-born; from 672 in 1891 to 848 in 1901. Over this period, the Irish-born in *English Households containing Irish* rose from representing 10.6% of Irish-born in households in 1871 to 27.1% in 1891 and to a striking engagement of 30.4% in 1901. (Table 6.1). The Table shows that the ‘community’ i.e. Irishcom it was possible to identify in these later century censuses when expressed in terms of Irish-born was on average greater by a factor of 2.3.

Behind all these statistics were real people who were ageing, many with little financial independence, whose changing marital circumstances meant family relationship classification changed around them over this period. The position, briefly outlined, of Ann Thompson should suffice as an example of this transition (See Table 6.2). She and her husband Richard were recorded in 1861 as both Dublin-born coach lace weavers who had come to Coventry some years earlier from Manchester where their son Michael was born. In 1871 Ann was recorded as the married head of the household, there being no sign of Richard. In 1881 she was described as the widowed head of the household, but by 1891 now quite elderly she had been relegated to residing under the headship of her son.  

Table 5.3 sets out the continuing decline in the number of partnered *Irish household* families from 1861. What is noticeable is the relatively greater decline in partnerships where both were Irish-born after 1861, such that by 1891 they consisted of only 19.6% of *Irish household* marriages. The Table is clear that the greater percentage of *Irish household* marriages from 1871 included a Non-Irish partner conveying

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11 Barracks excluded from all calculations
12 Her census presence with her adult son, Michael, fortunately allows for the circumstances of a second-generation to emerge. He is seen to have smoothly integrated as he had married an English wife and was a watchmaker – a skilled, local staple occupation.
engagement with the host community. If however attention is given to the number of marriages where the male was Irish-born, and in the patriarchal society of the time where his ‘Irish’ outlook was likely to hold sway then such ‘Irish’ in tone marriages were still more common (roughly by two thirds) than ones where an English man was married to an Irish woman.

These Irish-born male headed marriages would appear mostly to be long standing with 69.1% of the 133 heads in 1871 aged 40 or more. In 1881 it was rare to find Irish-born males under 40 years heading marriages (15 out of 82). Even in the 1901 upturn there were but 21 Irish-born/Irish-born marriages and only 5 where the male was under 40 years. In fact in that year there existed a strong proportion of marriages, 42.6% (29 out of 68), where Irish-born men (under 40 years) were married to Non-Irish-born women again reminding of the continued extent even of first-generation mixed marriage.

Solo headed households grew in volume over the decades as death took its toll and came to account for 34.9% of all households in 1891. The heads of these households consisted of the widowed, and women whose husbands were away most likely searching for work, but at an average rate of approx. 54.7% widows predominated over the four censuses.

From Table 5.4 it can be deduced that family size 2, followed by size 3, was the most common family size from 1871-1901 and that the average family size for the period remained at a low 3.7. which was not remarkably higher than the Coventry average of 3.8 in 1881. Family size in the census represents the number resident at the time of its taking and not necessarily the total number born to a family during child-bearing years. Thus family size may be more clipped in presentation in this period relative to 1841-61, as a result of the children present in the 50s and 60s having grown and vacated their childhood environs. There was still a number of larger sized units. During analysis of the 1841-61 period an Irish family with 7 members was chosen as a large sized unit. A similar approach now reveals there was still, of such sized families, over the four consecutive censuses respectively: 9 (3.5%), 12 (6.7%), 2 (1.3%) and 10 (5.7%). The 6.7% for 1881 may again be viewed as not entirely distant from the Coventry Host percentage of 5.8% based on 561 units. For that year the profiles of the percentages of Irish household families in all of the different sizes were very similar when compared to the Coventry Host.

[13] It also refers to the family as a unit and not simply the number of children in the unit.
Looking within *Irish households*, the average coupled family unit size showed little variation over the four censuses, when the birthplace combinations were examined. The Irish-born/Irish-born pairings had a 4.0 average size, the Irish-born/Irishcom pairings 4.2 while the Irishcom/Irish-born pairings also returned 4.2. Solo headed family units were smaller; the average was 2.3.

There was a maximum of approx 10 persons in most households over these censuses, but very occasionally a household could contain significantly more. In 1881 the average size of a Coventry Household was 4.5 while that of an *Irish household* according to Table 5.5 was similar; a percentage which was consistent with the average of 4.6 across the four censuses.

When household size was ascertained for couples across the four censuses the Irish-born/Irish-born pairings averaged 5.2, Irish-born/Irishcom pairings 4.8, and Irishcom/Irish-born pairings 5.0. The greatest disparity was shown in 1901 with Irish-born/Irish-born pairings at 5.3 and Irishcom/Irish-born pairings at 4.2. Solo headed households were smaller; the average across the censuses was 3.5.

The extent to which *Irish household* families at various sizes matched i.e. totally embodied the household size, and the corresponding situation for the Coventry Host are explored for 1881 and results are shown in Table 6.3. When the family size was 2 this was also the household size 57.8% of the time for the Irish and nearly matched that of Coventry families at 59.3%. For family sizes in the range 3, 4, 5 and 6, Irish families still completed the household in the region of 60.0% but in that range on average 7.6% lower than for Coventry families. In the case of the *Irish household* with family size of 2, up to four extra could be complete the household, and with family size 3, 4, and 5, one or two extra persons could complete the household. In contrast, for Coventry Households with families of various sizes, 1 extra person and to a lesser extent 2, usually helped to bring the household to completion. While there were exceptions, and there was a large disparity between the totals under contrast, as a general statement the relationship between family size and household size for the two groupings was similar in 1881.

Finally in relation to *Irish Household* families, the volume of their children yet to marry, set out in Table 5.7 indicates over this period, the dominance of local-born children of Irish parentage. A reboot of numbers is visible in 1901 but the fall away after 1861 in the number of Irish-born children is very marked and the 23 in 1871 represented merely 4.5% of all children. From relating the number of children who came as first to be born in Coventry rather than elsewhere, between 10 and 20 years ago
to their *Irish Household* heads, for 1871 set out in Table 5.8 it can be observed that 58.6% of 87 heads were resident in the city for that length of time and almost a further quarter were resident for less than ten years. The maturing of length of stay relative to 1861 is obvious when 67.5% of 114 families were less than 10 years in the city. A fresh cycle of settlement is visible for 1901 with 61.0% of 59 heads having evidence of arrival, through the birth of their first child to be born in Coventry rather than elsewhere, as occurring within the previous 10 years.

**Lodgers and Kin**

Lodger taking had eased off by 1881. Now, according to Table 5.5, 9.0% of *Irish Households* kept lodgers, with or without an Irish background, which was a reduction from the 22.5% acceptance of 1851. This 9.0% finding showed *Irish Household* lodging acceptance had come more into line with the 11.1% reported for Coventry Households. Irish lodging numbers continued to be much reduced after the sizable drop of 1861 (Table 6.4).\^14 While a tiny number of married couples lodged, it was mostly practiced by the unattached. Relative to *Irish households*, Irish-born lodgers were increasingly taken-in by *English Households containing Irish* particularly in 1901, where the latter entertained 48 solo Irish lodgers compared to 11 by the former. This may have been due to greater approval of the Irish, especially as they were likely to be in workshop type employment, or because these *English Households containing Irish* were headed by second-generation, local-born Irish thus favourably disposed to the Irish. Again such heads may have been more akin to lodging house proprietors that openly accepted lodgers, or that heads of *Irish households* were rarer, or too enfeebled to take-in lodgers by the end of the century. These circumstances have been explored more closely for 1881, when detail was not yet suffused by new end-of-century arrivals, and is considered within the ambit of the Table 6.5.

There were 60 Irish-born and 63 Irish-com living under the umbrella of *English households containing Irish*. These comprised at least five very distinct households types. First were English parents of Irish-born children. This group accounted for almost a quarter of the 60 Irish-born. Newbridge, Cahir, Templemore - towns with military barracks, indicate the main reason for these children being found among Coventry’s Irish-born. Their parents were proletarian, with only a solicitor, whose daughter Kathleen was born during a short family stay in Ireland, an exception. As Table 6.6 shows many children were too young to have occupations from which conclusions

\^14 Kin figures included in this Table. As noted in Chapter 1 it would include a wide variety of relations with widows particularly noticeable.
might be drawn, but their characteristically English surnames suggest they could well integrate with the host community. Next were those who kept lodgers; most households kept 1 Irish-born lodger, a limit which may have been imposed by the capacity of the accommodation, but even in households where a large number of general lodgers was kept, in all cases the number of Irish-born did not exceed 2 lodgers. The ‘classic’ unattached young Irish-born lodgers were as might be expected present, but so too were a noticeable number of much older widowed Irish-born women and men who fell back to relying on lodging. Those over 40 years presented more in semi-skilled occupations while labouring was no longer attractive for those under 40 years as only two of same described themselves as labourers. The occupation of those offering lodgings stretched across a range of nondescript employments with those involved in public houses offering lodgings on 4 occasions. In some cases heads took lodgers with similar occupations. The quintessential Coventry occupations of the landlords suggest that many Irish could find lodgings across a broad spectrum of the population.\footnote{Those offering lodgings on a large scale such as widower gunsmith Thomas Gaule, who took in 23 lodgers in Much Park Street, and William Cooper, a general labourer who took in 44 lodgers in West Orchard, did not identify their main occupation as lodging house keepers.}

Next there were live-in servants in these households of which 5 cases existed.\footnote{In both relevant Tables for 1861 and 1881 the Catholic presbytery had coincidentally an Irish-born servant but that was not always the case over the century.} Finally, there was a set of households where kin resided. Two thirds of the eight cases of kin, in these households were of an Irish-born parent who was residing with their local-born ‘child’ whose family assumed headship. The ranking (from head of household) of the members of these families on the enumeration pages with older Irish-born listed later in a subsidiary position, indicates the sway of influence within a family had shifted to the ‘child’s’ generation and technically, if not also in practice, the family was now an \textit{English household containing Irish}.

Reference to Table 5.9 shows that continuing from 1841-61 there were still a small number of occasions when an \textit{Irish Household} head’s grown up child had changed marital status but still lived at home. The wide range of sub-family distinctions is obvious from the Table. So also is the frequency of the term ‘Irishcom’, and the mention of ‘Irishcom’ to ‘Irishcom’ marriage which indicates local-born second generation Irish had become family creators.

\textit{Birthplace}

Between 1871 and 1891 the rate of county disclosure held at an average of 49.6% but in 1901 dropped back to 40.1% as revealed by Table 5.16. With cognisance of this restricted divulgence it can be noted that as in the period 1841-61 Dublin predominated
from 1871-1901, by accounting for an average of 39.0% of Irish-born. Mayo with an average of 17.1% between 1871 and 1891 continued to show as the second highest county of birth, however its 8.9% of 1901 was superseded by that of Cork with 12.5%. The counties of Roscommon, Sligo and Galway that were more prominent as birth counties at mid-century completely fell away as source areas later in the century. Belfast, under Antrim was another Irish city of birth that showed an increased presence in Coventry at the turn of the century.

An appraisal of Table 5.17 shows the gap between sons and daughters born locally and those born in Ireland remained wide during this period with that of 1871 being 17.9 times greater in favour of local-born. As local-born in the 1880s increasingly moved beyond identification as sons or daughters of Irish-born, the divide lessened to 11.2 times in 1881 and 5.3 times in 1891. It tightened further to 3.5 times in 1901 as a result of the end of century fresh arrival of Irish-born, some of whom turned up with young Irish-born sons and daughters. The Table lays out information on those British counties where the Irish-born of Coventry may have previously resided as evidenced by the location of their children’s birthplaces. Source areas earlier in the century, Cheshire and Derbyshire were of no importance, but the attraction of Irish-born from Chatham and Hampshire suggest ex-military personnel, seeking work in Coventry.

**Age, gender balance and marital condition**

The Coventry Host population in the four censuses presents a standard profile with the largest percentages in the young age-cohorts and consistent reductions in almost all columns as age increased (See Table 6.7). The Irishcom age profiles parallel, if less smoothly, those of the Coventry Host. Irishcom males did not follow the regular city trend for 1871. Some pinching in the 20-29 age ranges may have been due to local-born Irish, moving from parents’ residences and from the ambit of census recognition as Irish-associated, but also some Irish males may have sought work elsewhere over the previous distressed decade. (A net loss of 167 Irishcom males occurred in the decade). There was a more pronounced value in the 40-44 age group reflecting the ageing of the 1850s influx of Irish population. In 1881 and 1891, older age groups were also slightly higher than the Coventry norm, but the largest percentage was in the age group 10-14 as if the peak child-birth years had passed a decade ago. The presence of new Irish-born in 1901, rearing their children locally, brought the age range 0-9 into alignment again with

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17 Irish-born described as sons or daughters, who were under 10 year of age, amounted to 30.0% of the total of 63.
the Coventry Host profile. Like males, females were also more represented in older age groupings compared to the Host.

The age and sex structure pyramids (Irish-born/Irishcom) Figure 6.1 graphically illustrate for 1871 how little of the pyramid base reaching to 20 years was comprised by Irish-born. Since they mostly lost their census Irish association on leaving the family home in their twenties the pyramid profile constricts sharply thereafter and the upper bars, as in other decades, are in reality embodied by mature Irish-born. The forces at work in 1871 become even more apparent in 1881. The 0-4 age-cohort at the base was in decline as fewer births emanated from this evidently ageing community. The local-born Irish of 1871 ratchet forward a decade to become subsumed in their twenties under the heading Coventry Host-born. In 1891 there is a slight strengthening of the bars in the 25-34 male cohorts reflecting a pick-up of Irish-born numbers from arrivals in this age group but generally the pyramid depicts a stagnating declining Irish-born aspect to the ‘community’ with Irish-born members lodged in the upper age echelons. However 1901 shows an expanding base of local-born children belonging to recent Irish-born arrivals, while above 45 years, death took its toll on the post–Famine generation leaving more diminished cohorts of Irish-born.

The Irishcom/Coventry Host relationship relayed in population pyramids is presented in Figure 6.2. The shapes for the Host population over the four censuses were broadly regular with expected declining percentages in older age-cohorts. With cognisance that a change of merely 3 to 5 Irishcom represents a 1.0% extension or contraction of an Irishcom bar, for comparison the Irishcom pyramids may be layered over the Host pyramids. For 1871 the Irishcom was generally distributed as for the city up to 20 years, after which age, numbers fell away in comparison; this pinching as suggested earlier due to difficulty of their detection in the census books or a movement elsewhere for work. From 30 years and above, where Irishcom bars, if not matched, then generally extended beyond those of the Host, the older profile of the Irishcom can be ascertained. In 1881 and 1891 this phenomenon of an ageing Irishcom can be seen with more clarity against the Host backdrops, as also the reduced number of childbirths (none from second-generation local-born Irish are catchable). In 1901 the 0-9 cohorts and the 25-44 cohorts of Irishcom representing a new infusion of Irish parents and their children into the city almost restored the general correlation between these cohorts with the city at large.

Irish-born imbalanced gender ratio of 87.6:100 (M:F) noted in 1861 continued into 1871 with 89.0:100, but in censuses thereafter became more even, and was actually
106.1:100 in favour of males in 1901 (Table 5.19). The ratios were very similar to that of the Coventry Host which favoured females throughout the four censuses and which ranged from 89.8 in 1871 to 93.6 in 1901.

The civil condition the Irishcom according to age followed a foreseeable pattern from 1871-1901 as disclosed by Table 6.8. The age group with the largest percentage of unmarried for both genders was the 15-34 age grouping. The largest percentage of married men was as might be expected in the 25-54 age grouping; with a noticeable presence in 1901, of married men in a younger 25-34 cohort. In general married females were evident from the age of 25, with the 25-34 cohort accounting for 27.0% and 30.8% in 1891 and 1901 respectively. The widowed were noticeable in the upper age-cohorts particularly above 55 years but could be found even in the 25-34 cohort. Over the four censuses widows constituted on average 14.4% of females age 15&>, with a peak of 18.3% in 1891, and there were almost twice as many of them as widowers. When compared to the Coventry Host in 1881 and 1891 there was a higher proportion of male marrieds in the older age grouping which reflected the ageing of the Irish that could be captured from the census. Irishcom widows averaged 14.4% of females age 15&> over the period which was more than the 10.8% noted for Coventry Host widows. Other findings that related to condition of the Coventry Host were not dissimilar and displayed an obvious pattern. The majority of the unmarried were under 35 years, men and women appeared ready to marry on reaching the age of 25 years, and the widowed were apparent in the age range from 55 years upwards.

**Heads of Irish Households: Age and civil condition**

Moving forward, as in Chapter 5, from the above figures which represents the Irish *en masse*, the data for heads of *Irish households* is now examined. It is to be seen from Table 6.9 that from 1871-1901 married heads constituted the bulk of heads of *Irish households* with an average of 81.4%. In 1871 there were but 44 heads whose spouses had died in a household total of 254 (17.3%), but in 1891 in the lowest number of recorded households (149) for any decade of the century there were 45 such heads. These widows and widowers now represented 30.2% of household heads in 1891 indicating how as time progressed death was increasing the non-partnered percentage of *Irish households*. In 1871, the peak age-cohort for married male and female heads was 35-44 followed by 45-54, however by 1881 and also in 1891 the peak was 45-54. Rejuvenation can be detected in 1901 when the peak age for married male heads was the lower 25-34 followed by 35-44. The ageing character of male married *Irish household* heads by 1881 is to be noted when comparison is made with male Coventry
Host heads. For the age-cohort 25-34 the Irish percentage was much weaker than for the Coventry Host, the same for 35-44, but higher for subsequent cohorts. Women who were heads were mainly widows and their accounting for 8.8% of all household heads in 1861 was continued with conspicuity into later decades with 16.3% of households headed by a widow in 1881. In the same year a lesser 11.8% of Coventry Host households were headed by widows.

**Occupation and social classification**

**General findings**

Turning to social classification, Table 6.10 reveals the dominance of Class 3 for both Irish-born and Irishcom. In 1881 and 1891 half of active Irishcom males were found in Class 3 and therein too an even larger percentage of females. However the reservations expressed in the previous chapter about the attribution of some activities to Class 3 and particularly in 1901, where arguably some relatively skilled work in cycle production was directed to Class 4, means that it was only for Classes 1, 2 and 5 that sharp social distinction can be inferred. Class 1 rose slightly to 4.7% in the final two decades but remained a small category. Class 2 contained almost 10.0% of the active Irishcom by 1901 which was an impressive doubling of the 5.2% found in 1871. For Irish-born, Class 5 as a category had also fallen in significance to 19.0% in 1901 from earlier decade percentages of between 30-40%, perhaps due to a surfeit of semi-skilled opportunities in the cycle trade making a Class 5 occupation more easily avoided.

**Occupation and social classification: Irish-born heads of Irish Households**

The more satisfying procedure as noted in Chapter 5 is to consider social classification in terms of *Irish household* heads, thus avoiding the inclusion of young persons in the textile industry whose occupational title warranted Class 3 but potentially rather than immediately deserved such attribution. Table 6.11 illustrates that very few men and a small number of widows found themselves in the residual Class X. Prominent throughout the period was Class 3 which in 1871 accounted for 51.3% of married males, though by 1901 it had reduced to 35.4%, at whose expense Class 4 and Class 2 appear to have increased. Over the four censuses the general trend for married male heads was for Class 4 to increase while Class 5 decreased. Taken together from 1871-1901 Classes 4 and 5 averaged 43.4% of the totals arising from the six class groupings and indicate that, as could be noticed even in the middle of the century, the majority of active *Irish household* heads in Coventry were not classed as unskilled or semi-skilled. The Table teased out figures for Non-Irish-born heads of *Irish Households* (who were all married and male). These show for this group prominence across the
decades in Class 3 with light representation in Class 5. In 1881 while the Class 3 share of male married heads of *Irish Households* who were Irish-born was 27.6% for Non-Irish-born it was 69.0%, the latter as might be expected came closer to the Coventry Host Households Heads 56.9%. Also in the same year of comparison, and with respect for the large difference in quanta, a more significant 36.5% of male married Irish-born heads of *Irish Households* are found in Class 5 than the 7.6% of the Host. Female figures seemed too low to permit conclusions to be drawn but the significant number of widows is noticeable.

*Irish-born heads of Irish Households: Classes 1 and 2*

Table 6.12 is a continuation of Table 5.24 and outlines the Irish-born male and female heads of *Irish Households* assigned to Classes 1 and 2 on the basis of occupation or employment of extra staff 1881-1901. Brief, but interesting biographical, notes on a selection of those, marked by (*), who engaged with the town in these decades, are found in Appendix 2. Clergyman Cuffe remained in Coventry but Monahan and Mills seeking better livings moved on. Medical practitioners Fenton & Rice stayed but Bullen and Callaghan left. Sinclair, Stephens and Maloney stayed while managerial/manufacturing opportunity presented itself in the cycle trade but these restless persons did not settle.

There appears a short-term, disengaged attitude towards Coventry from those who did not settle, but against that observation may be mentioned the action of Callaghan who became a Conservative councillor during his short stay. Association outside of their collegial circle with the Irish majority did not seem to feature in their sojourns in Coventry and indeed Harmer who was Irish-born did not appear to attach any significance to that fact.

*Irish-born heads of Irish Households: Class 3*

Table 6.13 is an exposition of those Irish-born *Irish Household* heads found in Class 3, not uplifted to Class 2 under Armstrong’s recommendations. This Table also included details on Non-Irish-born heads (married to Irish-born women) which show there was a raised presence, identified in the previous chapter, of Non-Irish-born male heads in Class 3 constituting a larger proportion of all Non-Irish-born headed *Irish households* than did Irish-born heads in Class 3 in relation to all Irish-born heads. The raised presence did however decline over the decades to 41.5% in 1901. For all, weaving and tailoring fell away from their importance at mid-century. Shoemaking held its place into the 1880s.

Watch and cycle production, though best viewed in conjunction

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18 Females ‘living on own means’ should be ignored in this context since the Class placing did not match the reality of these elderly women who were most likely surviving on a small pension.

19 1871 was excluded in order to provide a roomier Table layout.
with Class 4, did not attract significant interest. By the end of the century, dealing in its many forms had lost appeal while clerical work gained in relevance.

**Allocation of occupations of Irish-born and Irishcom males according to Booth’s principles**

In a turning from a presentation of Irish-born and Irishcom according to Classes based on their occupation to a presentation where their occupations are relevantly grouped for the period 1841-1901 (Table 6.14), Armstrong again facilitates. He furnishes Booth’s occupational headings and allocations thereto, and he provides a list of a wide range of occupations with their most suitable placing under Booth’s headings.20 One point of difference, compared to the previous social classification method of allocation, was that pensioners could not assume the class of their occupation before retirement but were treated as dependents. The Table regrettably does not make for a differentiation between employer and employee, or distinguish levels of skill. The corn cutter and the surgeon all found their way into ‘Professional Service – Medicine’. However it does serve to illustrate the wide range of activities the Irish engaged in, and to codify and condense the cumbrous material within a national taxonomy.

Noticeable in volume are agricultural labourers, building operatives and general labourers (recorded under ‘Industrial service: Labour’). In these activities Irish-born figures generally matched Irishcom, indicating these activities were not followed by a local-born generation of Irishcom.21 This is in contrast to watchmaking which was more popular among the local-born Irish. All forms of silk working were strongly represented among Irish-born and amplified in Irishcom figures; but so too is the fall away over the later decades. Dress covered a range of occupations that interested the Irish, such as that of clothier, tailor, boot and shoe maker. Griffin remarked these were the skilled occupations most easily entered but that accessibility particularly in tailoring led to oversupply and unemployment.22 Dealing was a consistent activity across the decades but as the similar Irishcom figures show, it remained a practice of the Irish-born.

The activities of women which were more confined than for males, listed under Booth’s headings, are relayed in Table 6.15. The silk and, from 1867, cotton employments, while attracting Irish-born, engaged local-born Irish to an even greater extent (three times greater in 1871); the fall off noticed in later years for males, also occurring among females. Factory cotton weaving was an activity that can be pinned

20 Armstrong, Use of information about occupation pp. 247-310
21 Irish-born are always a subset of Irishcom
22 Griffin, *Liberty’s Dawn*, p. 33
down to one location in 1871, in a manner that for silk working is not easily achieved.  Referring to the Irish female presence in cotton activity in 1871, there were 6 Irish-born and 17 local-born Irish working as cotton reelers/spinners/weavers/winders. The Irish-born were described as: ‘wife’, ‘daughter’, ‘sister-in-law’, and on three occasions ‘lodger’. However, all but one, of the 17 local-born Irish were described as ‘daughter’ and ranged in age from 13 to 20 years. This indicates that the second generation Irish from a young age were immersed in the local industrial milieu and were sufficiently settled in the city to take up employment in a manufactory. While it appears that they were acceptable as workers, this type of factory production was becoming feminised and possibly they were accepted because they tolerated low pay and the demanding working conditions that deterred others.

Dress, covered those who were dressmakers, seamstresses and milliners, also included the area of boot binding (of whom 6 or 25% of that category were engaged in 1851). It fell away over the decades as an activity among Irish-born but maintained some importance among local-born Irish. Women were noticeably involved up to 1881 in dealing, which covered hawking, but it appears a particularly Irish-born favoured activity and had little cachet among local-born Irish. Domestic service was an important source of employment in the middle decades but numbers engaged in it declined, both because the number of new migrants declined but also presumably as the young women engaged in service left on marriage to rear a family. In 1901, showing an increase of 50.0% on the previous decade to 18, all but one, of the Irish-born female domestic servants were single, and 15 were under 30 years of age. It may not have been that popular a choice of occupation. Hunt noted that at a meeting of unemployed women in Coventry, albeit following the Great War, 65.0% asserted that ‘they would not take domestic service under any circumstances, with 30.0% prepared to do so if they could live out and finish their day at six in the evening’.

Charring and laundering, which came under the heading ‘Extra service’ though in decline, held appreciable numbers into the 1890s because of the continued presence of a

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23 One but possibly more. There is reference to a cotton factory in Sandy Lane being burnt down in 1890 but when it first opened is unclear, though obviously before 1871. It was part of the Leigh Mills Company based in Hill Street where some cotton weaving may have taken place. OS Map 1889 Warwickshire Sheet 21.12; http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Leigh_Mills_Co:_1920 Accessed 28th May 2017
24 The ‘all but one’ was 30 year old Ann Gurnan described as ‘wife’ who was born in Birmingham. One of the 16 ‘local-born Irish’ daughters was born in Derby. There was also six males under 20 years similarly employed and described as sons; five were born locally and one in Dublin.
25 Cathy Hunt, The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921 (Basingstoke 2015) p. 140; However there is also the possibility that these represented the extent of acceptability because, of the females between 10 and 20 years who were not described as scholars, 16 gave no occupational details and were classed as dependent.
26 Hunt, Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921, p. 157
number, if now ageing, Irish-born women who had known no other work during their lifetime. Almost half in this category (16 of 33 Irishcom) in 1881 were 50 years or over in age. A sizable percentage of females was dependent; they represented 37.2% of Irishcom females, aged 15 or older, in 1871. The corresponding figure for 1891 was higher at 48.9%.

The above male and female activities draw notice because of their volume especially in earlier decades. There was also evidence that new manufacturing activity and expansion of clerical jobs was attracting fresh Irish-born and local Irish at the end of the century. For males, under the heading ‘Manufacture-Machinery’, cycle and pneumatic tyre production emerged as significant in 1891 engaging 13 Irish-born (37 Irishcom) and by 1901 had trebled to employ 40 Irish-born (62 Irishcom). Also expanding was the number of accountants or clerks (‘Industrial Service’) of which there were 14 Irish-born (19 Irishcom). Post office, excise and revenue work (‘Public Service’) was attended to by 6 Irish-born (7 Irishcom). Women were also involved in cycle/tyre production with 3 Irish-born (13 Irishcom) in 1901. Females found increased opportunities in teaching (‘Public Service’) from 1881, with 10 Irish-born (12 Irishcom) so engaged in 1901. There was an uplift in nursing provision involving 8 (9 Irishcom) and 2 Irish-born found employment as typists (‘Industrial Service’) – an activity mentioned for the first time.\(^{27}\) Engagement in these activities meant sharing the same work environments with other Coventry residents and must have aided integration.

There were also Irish-born present in low volumes in professions whose prestige may have engendered a wider approval for all born in Ireland than the meagreness of their professional numbers might suggest. In 1901, apart from 4 Irish-born physicians, there were 5 male Irish-born in religion; four were Church of England clergymen and one was a Roman Catholic priest.

Finally the underlying assumption is that the natural trend to anticipate is one of upward mobility. The migrant however may have attained greater stability and security and occupational fulfilment while remaining within a particular class. This progressive consolidation e.g. from outdoor labourer to indoor porter, or from agricultural labourer to gardener, if merely a lateral movement within a class band, may represent a significant achievement for an individual generation. Also, the progress into old age

\(^{27}\) Motor car manufacture that commenced in Coventry in 1896 was so novel that census officials abstracting information from enumeration pages of 1901 could be seen in three cases involving Irishcom to overwrite with the word ‘cycle’ occupational references mentioning motor as in ‘Motor works engineer’, ‘Motor car maker’, or Motor fitter. RG13/2906.27.24 ED 2; RG13/2908.81.10 ED 22; RG13/2911.13.17 ED 10
necessitated adjustment to less onerous work and for many a decline in economic standing.

It also assumes the migrant is readily identifying with the native conception of progress along the socio-economic scale. Migrants may have had their own markers of achievement and may have taken satisfaction out of living modest, non- aspirational Catholic lives. Ziesler cautions about dismissing slight gains in occupational mobility. Though superficial in advance, employment in a factory offered the benefits of security and less exposure to harsh weather. In a downturn - and Coventry suffered cyclical recessions - to hold one’s social class may be an achievement. Any advancement through occupation would depend on the soundness of the occupation at its uptake. To take up work in silk weaving as an occupation might have seemed like progress in 1851 but the same action commenced ten years later after the collapse of the silk trade in 1860 would appear retrogressive.

**Intergenerational change**

Finally to obtain a sense of the degree of intergenerational occupational change and possible social advance, for 1901 a comparison was made between the occupation of fathers with an Irish association i.e. Irishcom, and that of their eldest co-resident son if aged 15 years or above. There were 23 such fathers: 16 were born in Ireland, all of the remainder had Irish-born wives. In only two cases did the son follow the father’s occupation directly i.e. as a coalminer and as a draper. The influence of the cycle industry was pervasive with some fathers and sons both engaged in the industry. In some cases there was a sense of the labouring tradition being maintained where a general labourer son worked as iron founder, or a gardener’s son worked as a labourer. However in the case of other labouring fathers, their sons took advantage of openings in cycle workshops, although in these the work had a physical element to it. In this comparison these sons of 1901 had to their advantage opportunities in this field not

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28 Ziesler, *Irish in Birmingham*, p. 130
29 All unmarried sons. Of Irish-born fathers, only 1 had a son born in Ireland and paired: Bicycle rim maker/Clerk (cycle factory). The remaining sons were born in Britain paired father and son as: Stonemasons labourer/Cycle cleaner; General dealer/Range fitter; General labourer/Iron founder; Watch jewel maker/Cycle wheel maker; Draper shopkeeper/Drapers assistant; General labourer/Cycle machinist; Gardener/Labourer; Shoe maker/Machinist burner; Cycle brazier/Motor car driver; Silk weaver/Machinist; Coal miner/Coal miner; Ribbon weaver/Tram car conductor; Mill engine driver/Coal? Carm; Cycle tool maker/Motor fitter - cycle; Retired farmer/Grocer’s assistant.
There were four Coventry-born fathers all with Coventry-born sons and they paired: Railway goods porter/Cycle brazier; Trimming manufacture/Machinist iron planer; Window cleaner/Fried fish dealer; Watch cap maker/Agent, tea salesman; Watch jeweller/Engineer mechanical.
There was one Birmingham-born father pairing with a Coventry-born son: Railway goods porter/Cycle brazier. One Berkswell, Warwickshire-born father pairing with a Coventry-born son: Watch finisher/Bricklayer. Finally there was one Oxfordshire-born father pairing with a Birmingham-born son: Tailors manager/Mechanical Draughtsman. The sons ranged in age from 15 to 43 with only 6 over 30 years; as many were youthful they may have changed their occupation as they grew older.
presented to sons in earlier decades. Fathers with traditional skills of weaving, shoe making and watch jewel making, were not emulated by the sons, who were involved in transport orientated occupations. While there was some movement from unskilled to semi-skilled, the occupations followed remained within the ambit of Classes 3, 4 and 5.

Four generation case study of the Doran family

This is provided in Appendix 12 which illustrates the complexity of family response in Coventry. It outlines development and directions taken, reaction to the challenges of early death, to finding employment, and to commitment to the city.

Spatial Expresion 1881

Table 6.16 furnishes the spatial distribution for both Irish-born and Irishcom, with the latter depicted in Maps 6.1 and 6.2. The most significant share of Irishcom in the city lived in: M40:Well with 6.8% or 57 Irishcom, M47:New Buildings 5.8% or 48, M46:Palmer Lane with 5.3% or 44 and M62:Tower/Henry with 4.1% or 34. The 3% to 4% tier, with 25 to 33 Irishcom was taken by M:41Upper Well, M39:West Orchard, M:56Adelaide and M:11Cow Lane. The 1881 EA representation cannot be compared directly with that for 1861 since the areal coverage of EAs depicted by both censuses diverged significantly in parts of the city, and the 1861 quantum was reduced in 1881 by 56.2%. This given, what may be rendered is that M39:West Orchard lost its prominence of share of city Irishcom with an 1861 share of 7.8% or 116 Irishcom now reduced to 3.1% or 26 Irishcom. M13:Warwick Lane also fell away in share and in numerical importance from 4.9%, 73 Irishcom to 1.8%, 15 Irishcom. M:39West Orchard was subject to commercial and industrial intrusion which may account for it 90 Irishcom fall in twenty years. Sleepy secondary streets and Lanes appeared to retain their 1861 totals with more success. In 1881 then, M40:Well and M47:New Buildings, M46:Palmers Lane and M41:Upper Well appeared to continue as core neighbourhoods of Irish residence. Elsewhere in the city there was adjustment. Fro example if M11:Much Park 26C, shown on the Map for 1861, is combined with M10:Much Park, then together they are matched with the generally equivalent area in 1881 represented by M6:London Rd, it can be noticed city share of Irishcom had declined from 5.3% (78) to 1.6% (13). M56:Adelaide in 1881 contained 27 Irishcom which signified a lift of Irishcom in the general area of Hillfields. Some gain in outer EAs may be observed but in fact the threshold in moving upward from one category to another was small; 8 Irishcom to enter the 1.0 < 2.0% range and 17 Irishcom to enter the 2.0 < 3.0% ranking. Further, these are Irishcom statistics and it is to be recognised that the underlying Irish-born figure on which the Irishcom was supported could supply varied results. For example
taking 6 as specific number, the 6 Irish-born in: M56:Adelaide returned 27 Irishcom, M55:Albert 13 Irishcom and M19:Gosford [64-106] 7, which ensuring different levels of categorisation and representations on Map 6.2. This type of ‘expansion’ between the Irish-born and Irishcom percentages as measured against total Irishcom in the city showed itself at < 1.0% in 37 EAs, in 17 => 1.0%, in 4 => 2.0% and in M46:Palmer Lane and M47:New Buildings 4.4% and 3.2% respectively.

The location quotient of EAs shown in Map 6.3 reveals the Irishcom were relatively under-represented beyond the central EAs, where they were over represented; M46:Palmer Lane, M47:New Buildings, M40:Well and M12:Greyfriars Lane being particularly so. The first two EAs recently mentioned also marked themselves out as EAs of Irish focus by containing the highest numbers, 12 and 7 respectively, of the city’s 52 Irishcom lodgers; the largest number that could be mustered by any other EA was 3 lodgers. Map 6.4 expresses the areal distribution of married heads of *Irish households* by their birthplace and that of their spouse. There were 124 such marriages; 36 marriages consisted of both partners being Irish-born, 46 where an Irish-born was married to a British-born female and 46 where a British-born was married to an Irish female. The tripartite division showing an increasingly integrationist balance, when expressed by area, revealed the number of Irish-born/Irish-born and Irish-born/ British-born relationships were more noticeable in the core Irish EAs of M41:Upper Well, M40:Well, M13:Warwick Lane and M46:Palmer Lane. However Irish-born women in 46 British-born headed marriages, 29.0% of the total, that might be perceived as the more integrated of the three categories, were to be found to the west, east and north-east of the city. Their presence in all these areas indicated that these Irish-born women (and their children) had the capacity to live anywhere in the wider city and were in a more integrative ‘suburban’ milieu.

**Spatial Expression 1901**

For 1901 Table 6.17 furnishes the areal distribution for both Irish-born and Irishcom, with the latter depicted in Maps 6.5 and 6.6 which take account of municipal expansion to the east and north. Compared to the relevant distribution for 1881 shown in Map 6.2 the relaxation of density in the old core areas, the finding of relatively higher values farther from the centre, and a presence to the north is marked. The Irish were more diffused and had some representation in most EAs. They were still noticable in old areas like MP6:Whitefriar/MP St., and M:28Well St. Their settlement pattern now was the consequence of the intrusion of industry and commercial activity into the city centre causing people to reside in streets beyond it. Irish-born, noted in brackets, were
found in EAs to the east which housed a large number of cycle and associated manufactures (Map 6.8\(^{30}\)). These were - M50:Alma/Raglan St (13) which contained the Dunlop Pneumatic Tyre Co, M51:Paynes Lane (18), M56:EastSt/South St (13), and M53:Jesson/Priory St (13), M17:Queens Rd, with 24 Irish-born (44 Irishcom) requires mention. This residentially superior EA contained Irish-born like the Tukes, Harmers, Callaghans, Sinclairs and McVeaghs, indicating Irish-born were quite prepared to be residentially selective if their circumstances permitted.

The location quotient for 1901 shown in Map 6.7 reveals Irishcom were relatively over represented in central EAs, and while under-represented beyond, maintained some proportionate presence in most EAs of the city. Those now with 2.0 or above were - M1:Broadgate, M10:Cow Lane, N17:Queens Rd, M23:Holyhead Road, M24:Hill St, M36:Leicester St, M57:Derby Lane/Freeth; and M58:Far Gosford 88-168. The degree of overrepresentation had fallen in central EAs when indicitavely compared to 1881. It is to be recalled that this representation was for a specific census at century end; the nature and pattern of the dispersal that had occurred earlier in the century by mature second-generations of local-born Irish remains elusive.

\(^{30}\) Part of Warwickshire Sheet 21.12 Second Edition 1906
Chapter 7

Conclusion

Over the century inward migration occurred in three distinct and distinctive waves; this phenomenon should not obscure the fact there was also individual, ‘accidental’, and ‘eventual’ Irish arrivals. In the Coventry setting it was revealed there was an interplay of factors that shaped migrant experience. These were the innate temperament of the city, its environmental salubrity, its economic underpinning, and its changing fortunes. Further, there was the import of the decision by migrants to specifically select Coventry, the scale and propitiousness of timing of inflow and outflow, of cultural compatibility with the host population, and migrant wherewithal that dictated residential location. To this was added the disposition of the migrants that may have been influenced by alike regional origin and the nature of their desire to live close to one another for mutual support. Another relevant shaping factor was the degree of intra-migrant class and social accordance. Permeating this localised mixture were national attitudes which gratuitously disparaged the Irish character and in essence believed the Irish should ‘know their place’. Additionally, local sentiment until the 1870s was suffused by national dislike of the Church to which many migrants adhered. Extraneously directed alarms and promotions either relating to the quest for Ireland’s self-destiny, or that of the Church e.g. the bull Universalis Ecclesiae issued in 1850, had potential to directly or indirectly affect migrant relationship with the host population. There were too, the grounding effects from gaining ‘social experience’ and family commitments which only the elapse of time could bring about. Finally there was available for the majority of migrants the strong service of the local Catholic Church, in existential terms by extolling beliefs that gave life direction and purpose, and in providing social support through its functions and lay agencies. Outplay of all these forces determined the structure of the Coventry Irish ‘community’, its residential expression, degree of distinctness, sense of common purpose and sustainability.

The general effect in the city of the elapse of the century was exposed in this study (Appendix 18). The borough, with the Irish therein, benefitted from increased municipal regulation of sanitation and identification of conditions that influenced the

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1 This indigenous sense that the Saxon was superior to an inferior Celt was according to Gardner a racist attitude that lay at the root of the Home Rule struggle. (Steve Garner, *Racism in the Irish Experience* (London 2004) p. 127).
2 Incipit of the papal bull 29th September 1850 restoring the Catholic Hierarchy. It could be suggested that the writing of the text in Latin as was normal, was enough for the Church to be seen by its opponents as having an alien attitude.
3 Kitson Clark, *Making of Victorian England*, p. 196 refers to religion giving shape and meaning to many lives without which there was none.
spread of zymotic diseases. The choleraic 1830s and 1840s were a different environment to the more aseptically aware 1900s. The Irish were now conveyed, along with everybody else in the city, through the years of social reform and change. Resonating with aptness for Coventry, was Gilley’s observation that in the mass of Victorian social reporting Irish migrants were but a minor theme and especially after 1870 ‘when all consciousness of the Irish poor in England as a special social problem requiring special solution quickly dies away’.

The extension of franchise in 1867 was to the advantage of Irish standing; through involvement in mainstream decision-making they became stakeholders in society. This involvement helped, in Goodhart’s words relating to the integration of migrants to move the population from seeing the Irish as ‘they’ and to regard them as part of the ‘us’. With Irish working-class men in a position to vote and reputedly holding enough votes to sway a result, the editor of the Standard must have reflected on the negative effect on the Tory party of his paper continuing to denigrate the Irish at large or the Catholic Church.

The march of time saw progress in transport methods - the decline of the stagecoach and the popularity of the bicycle affected Coventry in their own, very significant ways. The kind of employment that attracted early migrants would over time, not remain the employment that would uphold them in the city. Over the century earlier cultural distance reduced and the Irish on wearing clothes purchased locally became even less visually distinguishable. They were also more in local accord as the Celtic cadence lessened and familiarity with local speech pattern and idioms increased. For the Irish, time took care of overcrowding, clustering, and pre-industrial customs. Features that caused social disadvantage were surmounted; they were inducted into self-restraint and discipline, through following factory rules, and to cleanliness and hygiene if they took up as servants, laundresses and chars. To borrow a phrase employed by Fitzpatrick, time gave poor Irish ‘a shove up the ladder of civilization’. Although the scenarios, involving distrust and defiance, would never completely disappear they seemed to recede over time in the city. On St. Patrick’s Day 1847 a reveler in the Graziers Arms told an officious constable who complained of the commotion, that he would make as much noise as he pleased. That example of an early cultural streak of

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4 Evans said on practical grounds the Public Health Act of 1875 could qualify as the greatest Parliamentary Act of the century. (R.J. Evans, The Victorian Age 1815-1914 (London 1968) p. 198).
5 Gilley, English Attitudes p. 102
6 David Goodhart, More immigration means less integration, Standpoint Issue 77, November 2015 p. 30
7 Fitzpatrick, A curious middle place, p. 45
8 Coventry Standard 26th March 1847
defiance towards laws made by others was less easily found toward the century end. Vice’s observation in 1853 relating to an Irish lodging house in White Friars Street, that he could never discover how many lodgers were kept, had in that period revealed an innate Irish wariness, due to their colonial history, of the enquiries of those in authority. Perhaps some wariness might have remained but overall it would appear an outmoded remark if made later in the century.

Time took its mortal toll on the Famine era generation, a part of which, by engaging in dubious anti-social behaviour had manifested Irish lifestyle as troubled. As adjudged later in this chapter the Catholic Church helped over time to bring the Irish into respectability, while itself had the benefit of a changing societal outlook that involved reduced antipathy towards it and its adherents.

Crucially time’s elapse, provided, migrants with social capital and social memory gained through sharing with the native population in the maturation of the city. Those Irish, or whose parents, were present in the city during the harsh early 1860s were in a position to represent themselves within the shared city memory of notable hardship. When migrants died they were interred in Coventry, deepening in the eyes of their remaining family the city’s domiciliary role. In this regard Fielding’s observation is appealing: ‘most became enmeshed in the banalities of everyday life, such as marriage, raising a family and trying to make ends meet’. The Irish over time no longer felt they were sojourning in the city but began to belong to it - they were ‘of the city’ - they were not simply Irish, they were Coventry Irish.

Chapter 2 provided a spatial, environmental and economic assessment of the city in order to properly contextualise the Irish experience and showed that the Irish experience was not unique; they initially resided in a city where many were in distress. It was a city where poor and crowded streets had a reputation as such before the Irish arrived post-Famine and gravitated towards them. Garner noted the nineteenth century tendency to take a moralistic view that disease was divine punishment for the type of degenerate lifestyle the Irish led. That cholera had broken out in Coventry 1832 (prior

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9 Coventry Herald 22nd July 1853
10 McLean believed the sincerity of his remarks in 1859, referred to in Appendix 2, was proven by his stating to loud cheers he was ‘an Irishman that had been with them 40 years, and he was jealous of their rights and liberties as any among them, and if the defence of their liberties required it, he would mount a breach with any of them’. Steven Fielding, Class and Ethnicity, pp. 36, 37
11 ‘Of the city’ was a phrase used in local marriage announcements to describe those who were from Coventry.
12 Garner, Racism in the Irish Experience, p. 118. The Coventry Standard 12th November 1847 quoted Dr John Ryan, Catholic Bishop of Limerick as saying:
to any serious inward movement of Irish) meant the basis for such a sententious view of the Irish could have had little validity to Coventrians in the light of the city’s own experience.

The temperament of the early nineteenth century town could be described with some reservation as innately individualistic, deferential and tolerant. Searby’s analysis outlined a settled pattern to local society adducing it to the linkage between paternalism, weaving and freemen’s privileges which led to deference, and the attainment of objectives by persuasion, through meetings or strikes, rather than by violence. Relative to Leicester he saw trade in Coventry as prosperous which allowed weavers to rise in status and for the aspirations and values of the middle-classes to be adopted. To him Coventry was to some extent like Birmingham, the archetypal example of the permeation of the working class by a middle-class ethos. 14 Prest agreed, remarking that ‘a wide franchise and a small town put the working class on a level with other classes’. 15 This would change over the years when the industrial revolution came to Coventry but it came later than for elsewhere and domestic production by out-weavers of an independent spirit was more significant for longer in Coventry. Thus for Coventry its local character had a particular benign influence on migrant reception and adoption. McLean remarked in 1859 that there ‘never was a more loyal and docile people than the people of Coventry till this agitation [relating to silk trade]’. 16 It is to be noticed that the ‘crowd’ could exist, with the risk to the Irish that such might beget. However gatherings

‘Whilst [Irish] society is thus deranged, and the condition of men open to an improvement and every day growing worse and worse, the Almighty God looks down with sorrow on the earth, and instead of sending down His Blessings, will shower down curses and affliction on wicked men. If the people of this country had not fallen back to a state of wickedness and depravity, and forgotten in their vices their Christian obligations, how is it possible that in a land like Ireland, blessed with fertility, glorious in the produce of nature, and ample in its natural resources, the poorer classes should be steeped in such wretchedness and misery.’

This was but a quotation from his fuller remarks which condemned as wicked the cold greed of landlords and the knavish indolence and apathy of many tenants, and which urged both parties to pull together in a friendly alliance. The Standard while acknowledging the clarity of his remarks then used the opportunity in publishing them to ask why the Catholic clergy had not acted to repress disorder. The paper noted how clergy encouraged the poverty stricken Irish to contribute to the Repeal rent. It accused the clergy of seldom pointing out the real causes of distress, and of telling the populace that there was no sympathy from the Imperial Legislature; a sympathy which they maintained only a domestic parliament could offer. It then, in a swelling crescendo, centred on the perceived power of the clergy and the deeply held fear that the integrity of the Empire might be at risk wrote:

‘It is not, however, only acts of omission which are chargeable upon the body of men possessing this power, and wielding this influence over the ignorant masses under their sway. It is not merely that they have neglected to excite the gratitude of their flocks for the timely aid so often afforded them by the benevolence of England. It is not either, that they have assisted in wringing from the needy their weekly pence to swell the aggregate sum collected for the seditious purpose of dismembering the empire. They are directly charged with impelling these wretched people to the commission of crime.’

14 Searby, Chartists and Freemen, pp. 764, 770, 776
15 Prest, Industrial Revolution in Coventry, p. 139
16 Appendix 2 Thomas McLean, Coventry Times 25th May 1859
outlined in Appendix 16 did not centre on religion or ethnic issues but more on spectacle or trade disputes.\textsuperscript{17} The receptive mood of Coventry appeared to strongly contrast with nearby Leicester’s antipathy to the Irish as depicted by Danaher.

Following consideration of the reasons for the increase of Irish in the city, their state on arrival and their interaction with the city the following conclusions could be made. Its staging point position on the London to Liverpool or Holyhead route had early significance, similar to the role observed by Herson that a stopping point played in Stafford. Coventry’s role as a resting stop for Irish travellers diminished with the ability of railways to whisk passengers travelling from the northwest to London, around it via Stafford and Rugby, or permitted passengers on the route between Birmingham and London to reach their destination so quickly that a resting stop in intermediate Coventry became unnecessary. Just like the stage-coaches travelling to Holyhead helped raise the profile of Ireland locally, so did the cavalry barracks with its high Irish-born content. The calming significance of the presence of the barracks in the very centre of the town, it is suggested, has not heretofore been grasped. It very rarely intruded on civic matters or industrial disputes but its very existence was a reminder of the state’s ultimate power and thus helped preserve an overarching placidity. Even theoretical consideration by the civilian Irish of gathering in large scale confrontation with the police would have been ruled out and deemed foolish in the light of the army presence. The same reflection may have crossed the mind of those who may have given thought to collectively confronting the Irish.\textsuperscript{18} Coventry did not have any magnetic attraction. It was a silk weaving town which meant that general textile weavers did not seek it out. It had reputation for drabness, with trade depressions causing deplorable distress and nearby Birmingham offered better prospects. For much of the century Coventry seemed set in its ways, cautious of industrial dynamic and appeared a city that it was as easy to uproot from as it was to settle down in.

The reception given to Dublin silk workers on their arrival, from the later 1820s is insufficiently documented to permit scrutiny. The absence of evidence displaying local concern could suggest that new entrants did not cause panic; the vernacular speaking, skilled, metropolitan, but humble background of the migrants outweighed reservations. They were also mature perhaps with less of the headstrongness of youth that could

\textsuperscript{17} Daniel M. Jackson, \textit{Popular opposition to Irish Home Rule in Edwardian Britain}, (Liverpool 2009) p. 5. He outlined how crowds might be classified ranging from, mob gatherings, to people gathered in common to proclaim their cause. Spectacle refers to election-time riots, public executions, military drills, and farewells to men transported by the authorities.

\textsuperscript{18} The Coventry cavalry were called to Birmingham during its riots in 1867. (\textit{Birmingham Journal 22nd June} 1867).
recklessly strain local equilibrium; the average age of the 77 Irish-born male weavers was 38.9 years in 1841. Relatively generous outdoor relief given to locals may have prevented any deeper resentment from hardening in the depressed Coventry of those years. That it was an all-round traumatic time for Irish weavers may be gauged from an 1830 report from Manchester stating: ‘We have had within these ten days an inundation of the most wretched looking Irish weavers we ever saw, in search of work…the poor creatures are in great distress.’

Dublin silk workers may not have arrived as an ‘inundation’ in Coventry and thus raised less disquiet. They may have come in a sporadic fashion having first sojourned in Congleton, Macclesfield, or Derby. Weaving in the 1830s was still a domestic activity in Coventry and so the incomers were not utilised in the undermining of strikes, and thus subject to local resentment. They may have been seen as part of the general in-movement of people to the city at this time. It may have been realised locally, as the letters of Thomas McLean show, that an attractive quality of these Irish weavers, was their desire to become involved with the weaving issues of concern to the local population and their desire to raise children properly. Overall this wave - if that designation is appropriate given that by 1841 only 1.4% (437) of the total population of Coventry were Irish-born - was small, but it did familiarise Coventrians with Irish migrants in a non-threatening manner that cushioned acceptance of the next more turbulent wave.

Coventry endured serious cyclic depressions caused by lack of demand or strikes. However in the 1840s and 1850s, with production increasingly powered by steam, it was on the whole a relatively thriving period. The arrival of the Famine era migrants in that ambience may not have caused an economic worry to city denizens especially since the largely rural migrants were unlikely to immediately engage in weaving activity and thus threaten local accords in the trade. That some were low Irish was tolerated as part of the burden which all towns had no option but to accept. The town was aware from

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19 Drogheda Journal 11th May 1830
20 Mulkern presumably referring to powered, factory based manufacture, stated that ribbon manufacturers, who also controlled the domestic weaving trade, did not replace native weavers through the employment of cheap Irish labour. This was a cause of tension in northern towns. (Mulkern, Irish and Public Disorder in Coventry, p. 129).
21 Perhaps not economic alarm but concern over health. John Gulson Chairman of the Workhouse Directors wrote to the Poor Law Commissioners on 26th May 1847 concerned that the numerous Irish tramps calling at the workhouse for lodgings would bring the fever with them. He sought sanction for obtaining a separate building to house them. The clerk of the workhouse informed the Commissioners on 9th June 1847 that they had been unable to hire a building for the reception of ‘Irish Tramps’ and that having 2 or 3 ‘Irish fever’ cases they had been compelled to erect a male ward and a female ward on some land adjoining but isolated from the workhouse. During the month Frances Green was appointed nurse but she became ill with fever and an assistant nurse had to be appointed. This is largely the extent of information on the local effects of the arrival of Irish at this period found in the National Archives. (MH 12/13378 Coventry 496 Correspondence with Poor law Unions).
local newspapers of the desperation in Ireland that propelled an outflow of its natives. The depiction of wretched living conditions and behaviour of some of these Celtic Irish in Coventry bore a similarity to that of many other cities, large and small. These residential conditions were associated with the Irish but they already existed in Coventry before the arrival of Famine migrants.

The tendency to overcrowd, that accelerated clustering, was reduced by pro-active municipal inspection of lodging arrangements. Central space at mid-century in this compact town was not then clearly zoned by activity function; residential was jumbled in with the industrial, ecclesiastical, and commercial. Thus they noticeably lived (as did the host population) in courts off alleyways, lanes and side-streets, a few steps away from the core street spine that contained business, commercial and civic buildings, and also three Established Church buildings.\textsuperscript{22} The city was compact which may provide a reason why these Irish appear to be live closer to the heart of the city than may have been anticipated.

The Irish initially settled in close-by streets due to the comfort of familiarity and shelter offered by fellow Irish but largely it was the result of economic determinism. Though they liked residing with those who originated in Ireland, the Irish did not seek in a fundamental manner to live residually separate from the host population, or to avoid ‘marrying out’ in order to protect a traditional culture distant from the majority population. However they seemed to like living without official intereference and many did live in the lanes and courtyards of the city that had a tucked away feel to them.\textsuperscript{23} When isolated on a distribution map the Irish appear prominent - dense and clustered - in a certain few yards or lanes, which suggests a clustering mentality. It was true that certain streets customarily were mentioned when the Irish appeared in court but it would be inappropriate on the basis of negative newspapers mentions to see them as dedicated ‘Irish streets’, ‘delinquent Irish streets’, or to over-attach an ‘Irish’ penchant for close- by residence with compatriots as responsible for migrants selecting these streets. Irish desire for co-national familiarity was important but socio-economic position was more determining in street selection. The streets were none other than the regular central streets with yards behind at a low rent, that would have to be chosen by persons, according to their income, whether Irish or not. The Irish were not numerically

\textsuperscript{22} The use of Lane can confuse. Some narrow streets fronted by houses such as Greyfriars Lane or Warwick Lane were so called. Palmer Lane on the other hand was a narrow passage running behind Cross Cheaping and The Burges.  
\textsuperscript{23} John Mouchet Baynham, Surgeon of the General Dispensary, and of the Town Infirmary of Birmingham, referring to Birmingham Irish in 1834 stated ‘the Irish keep themselves distinct and do not mix with the English’. (Report State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, p. 6)
dominant in any ‘Irish’ associated streets; in a few yards of such streets they were more physically than numerically dominant. Further the general caution of Dennis is pertinent against assuming that in an area where a group is found in a high level of concentration that it ‘dominates’ that area. He suggested that the group ‘may still be in the minority and perceptions on the ground may not coincide with statistical assessments of reality’. 24

In the interpretation of Irish residential settlement and movement, in so far as Irish were found in a concentric arrangement around the city core, it might be construed that there were micro-vicinities within this band, each with some local aspect desired by Irish, perhaps a prominent presence of fellow county natives, a popular landlady or a tolerant licensed premises. However it is difficult to conclude whether certain streets possessed Irish with distinctive Irish county of origin or respectability traits. There is similar difficulty in determining if the Irish identified themselves as ‘belonging’ to a particular street, and who might as a result be described as e.g. Much Park Street Irish, or Greyfriars Lane Irish or Well Street Irish, or New Buildings Irish. If pressed, an Irish association with shoemaking in the vicinity of Well Street or with rag dealing in Warwick Lane/Greyfriars Lane might be observed. The drawing of conclusions about the significance of Irish presence in a street, in terms of clustering, is inhibited by not knowing how restricted in a psychological sense it occupants were to the street, or if they saw themselves as belonging to a wider network of ‘Irish’ local streets. A verdict on degree of local clustering is impeded by the presence of radiating arterial streets on a map, which could leave the impression there were distinctive vicinities in the streets on either side of a main routeway. 25 However, the Irish who may have had their own mental map of the extent of an ‘Irish area’, may not have sensed that arterial routeways acted as the boundaries between separate Irish vicinities. It is also questionable if precise understanding can be conveyed by the use of the word ‘cluster’ since it is capable of holding wide meaning depending on areal size and intensity. 26

It would be unwise to interpret most Irish as viewing themselves as settled long-term in particular central city vicinities of their choosing. The Hill Street analysis showed residential movement was common. Property was rented which lent to the

24 Richard Dennis, English Industrial Cities of the Nineteenth Century, (Cambridge 1984) p. 207
25 This perception may be accentuated by the fact that the boundary between EAs could run down the middle of arterial streets.
26 The attachment of the proper measure of significance to the Irish in e.g. a particular street, is constrained by the type of areal unit of analysis that is employed to frame the street. In the employment of a small areal unit, a street might offer results suggesting a local cluster. Whereas with the operation of a larger areal unit that might embrace a number of streets, the contents of a specific street will register less prominently on its own and more so as part of the findings of a larger vicinity.
practice of more frequent changing of residence. The maps in Chapter 3 show the significant extent of residential dissipation between 1861 and 1881.

Irish were found in some locations, in West Orchard, behind the south side of Well Street and Palmer Lane, which were all in the vicinity of the river and were environmentally hazardous. They were also located in other thoroughfares such as St. John Street, or Greyfriars Lane which had housing stock that was considered standard for the city, albeit dilapidated and unhealthy. In the 1850s and 1860s in Caldicott’s Yard, and in a few courts in Much Park Street, Well Street and New Buildings the presence of some kin-related families could be sensed as creating a physically and numerically domineering atmosphere. It may be the case that some Irish may have wished to avoid these uncouth temperamental, assertive families, where offence was easily taken, and where a perceived slight on one member was taken exception to, and regarded as a tribal insult of all. That the Irish would always tend to stay residentially close is a theme of the large volume studies, but may not be the case in towns where the Irish felt themselves not under indigenous besiegement. There were no streets persistently dominated by Irish in the manner that Caribee Island and Stafford Street in Wolverhampton, or the Inkleys and Park Street in Birmingham, bring to mind. Nor were there echoes of what O’Leary noted for Cardiff where the Irish were almost as segregated in 1871 as the black population of Philadelphia in 1860. Or in Swansea where he reported the Irish were highly segregated with their condition worsening into the 1860s. Usage of the term ghetto, employing the notion of an area of sustained cultural isolation would not be appropriate in a Coventry context. There was no long-term entrenchment by a collection of specific Irish families in the streets that evidenced clustering in 1861. From the persons mapped in Greyfriars Lane in 1861 only 1 of the 28 identified in 1881 might have still resided in the lane 20 years later.

The Irish were also found scattered in single families throughout the remainder of the city and no sense of a siege mentality could be detected from such a pattern. Given such a scattered pattern it would not have been even hypothetically possible for them to form part of some Irish defensive phalanx. The Irish may have been secretly welcomed. Accommodation was always rented and landlords may have gleaned income from letting out dilapidated property below the standard that natives would accept, or to find once again in demand property that was vacated by indigenous residential drift towards

27 O’Leary, Irish in Wales, p. 113
28 Maps 3.8 & 3.8A. Greyfriars Lane. It contained in 1861: 82 Irishcom/39 Irish-born, and in 1881: 28 Irishcom/16 Irish-born. Margaret Burke born in Coventry 1 year 1861. Same name mentioned as 21 years old in 1881.
Hillfields. Licensed victuallers may have quietly welcomed the increased custom that the Irish brought.

In the fractious disputes that plagued the weaving industry years, or during the Chartist age, there is almost no mention, apart from Thomas McLean, of any ‘Irish’ participating in or fronting proletarian action in the city.

Coventry ‘prosperity’ was always somewhat precarious. There is no reference to the Irish during the 1860 collapse, or that they were blamed, or scape-goated in that anxious time, as being in any way responsible through labour competition for the downturn. The collapse damaged the natural evolution of the Irish community. It must have sapped the confidence of its citizens and affected the decision by the Irish to continue residing locally. Numbers declined, with it could be argued, those skilled and energetic of their kind, most likely to vacate. In this regard an indication of the sense of a clouded future, if not impending collapse among the Irish, is shown in the exit of the family of Joseph Elston, age 57, and his wife Lucretia, both Irish-born (located in the census of 1841) and their 9 Coventry-born children, the youngest Ruth aged 2 years. They were found in Colne, Lancashire in 1861 as a family of cotton powerloom weavers. Birmingham’s nearness, Preston seeking to employ weavers, or advertisements in the Herald during the 1860s offering passage to Australia and New Zealand had appeal. The industrial pick-up in the 1880s would come too late in life for many ‘original’ migrants to benefit from it.

Allowing for embellishment to reporting of Irish rows, and that migrant males were coming into their prime at this time, the outrageous quarrels which were reported in the early 1860s were due to intoxication but may also have been prompted by an underlying lack of money or prospects. The 1870s seems a moribund period; thereafter

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29 RG9/3080.33.5 ED 2. The number of families that made similar decisions is unknown. Appendix 1 refers to the Furlong and Aden households moving to Colne. Elizabeth Broughill, a 25 year old Coventry-born was also located in Colne in 1861 as a cotton powerloom weaver. RG9/3079.86.40 ED 21. Eliza was daughter of Edward and Sarah both handloom weavers from Dublin. HO/107.2067.120 ED 6. A fellow boarder similarly occupied was Ann Clark, 18 years, from Coventry. William McGowran (Appendix 2) and family moved to Derby in 1864 but returned to Coventry some years later.

30 An example of a family moving to Birmingham is that of Coventry 1861 resident Thomas Farrell, aged 54, Coach Maker, and his 44 year old wife Elizabeth, both from Wexford with 2 Cheshire-born children, Catherine (15) and William (13). By 1871 the family had moved to Birmingham. (Thomas was there stated as born in Lancashire) RG9/2202.41.19 ED 11; RG10/3108.8.7 ED 1. Advertisements on travel to the southern hemisphere appeared in the Coventry Herald 7th December 1860, 7th December 1862, 19th April 1867. The Coventry Times 30th April 1862 reported under the heading ‘Emigration of Coventry Weavers’ how Lord Leigh witnessed the departure of a second body of distressed operatives, with their wives and children, for their adopted homes in the New World. A letter published in the Coventry Herald 26th February 1864 written to Rev Clay told how all of the people that he sent out in the ship Golden Empire had landed safely the previous July and most of them were in work and doing comfortably. The writer mentioned ‘the weather is very hot here and not like the winter in old Peeping Tom’s town’. Sentiment such as this must have encouraged further emigration.
the size and essence of the community - indeed the very existence of a community comes to the fore. Its articulation found purpose not in matters of mutual well-being, but around Ireland’s destiny. It is interesting that the time-period up to 1870, should contrast so markedly with the years thereafter in reportage of the Irish. The earlier type of negative reportage on the recalcitrant Irish simply faded from newspapers. Reasons have been already been given, but the most likely is their children who were locally- born blended into daily life of a changing and growing city. There was little reference to the activities of the later local Irish (except under a Catholic guise) indicating they were either not noticeable or were inactive. There was never editorial castigation of the local Irish even in the post-Famine years when ‘Irish rows’ commonly featured in their editions. Neither was there criticism in later years, when the perceived opportunity could have been taken, under cover of the solid reportage of nationwide efforts relating to the Irish Question.

There were very few fresh ‘west of Ireland’ incomers at the end of the century. Irish arrivals in this period may have included second generation Irish from elsewhere in Britain. They came as part of a wider national influx, under different more voluntary circumstances to that of mid-century immigrants, and could on arrival take up the well-paid work. Though their number would grow by 1911, in 1901 the increase as represented by Irish-born over the preceding decade had been small. The ‘second’ wave of Irish that settled from mid-century onwards may have found little common cause with these. Cycle workers in general who came to the city were complained of as having little attachment to the city and in times of demand could earn good wages which led to brash, ‘anti-respectable’ behaviour. There were too in the third set of incomers, a number of Irish-born engineers and entrepreneurs, whose stay in Coventry was motivated by opportunity and not as a response to crisis.

Irish volume was identified as key to understanding Irish response in this city. The Irish population was never large. As Mulkern noted, Coventry did not offer opportunity to unskilled Irish and they favoured settlement elsewhere.31 The Irishcom figure which includes all those detectable with an Irish association in the peak census year of 1861 was 1,480 or 3.6%. It was not sufficiently large for the host population to feel overwhelmed and resentful. Nor was it so large that it might allow micro-clusters to swell into concentrated areas of Irish that could sustain social withdrawal from the host population, or give a sense to the Irish there was sufficient strength in numbers to make feasible any concerted large-scale opposition to the police. The torrid descriptions of

31 Mulkern, Irish and Public Disorder in Coventry, p. 121
isolation and associated Irish misbehaviour reported for Wolverhampton, where in 1851, of its total population 3,491 or 7.0% were Irish, seemed absent from Coventry.\textsuperscript{32} Baynham’s remark in 1836 that he had a sixth part of Birmingham under his care which contained at least 2,000 Irish almost all of whom were living in poverty and filth, illustrates how small in relative terms were the number of Irish in Coventry i.e 1841: Irish-born 448/Irishcom 897.\textsuperscript{33} Referring specifically to the Famine generation, since very few migrants arrived in the decades after the mid-century inflow, which might have counteracted depletion by death and outflow, the numbers of Irish-born present to keep the Irish cultural mores of that generation alive declined. In the absence of continued Irish-born cultural refreshment the Famine generation’s descendants possessed a derived or Coventry-Irish culture as part and parcel of their upbringing, and as a result experienced a calmer rapport with the host population.

Coventry’s geographical position \textit{per se} would have entitled it to claim slightly more than the minimal number of Irish located in Warwickshire towns such as Warwick, Leamington, Stratford or Rugby. This was because of its role as a staging point on the main road between London and the north-west. Also in its closeness to Birmingham it may have gained some Irish who were originally drawn into the midlands by the regional city. Birmingham and Coventry though only seventeen miles apart were autonomous cities, each with its own civic pride and industrial energy. Coventry regarded itself as a long-established, freestanding city and did not imagine itself in the role of second fiddle to Birmingham. However in regional order, it was below Birmingham where in the 1860s Protestantism was more ebullient, provocative preaching found an excitable audience and seven Orange Order lodges were established by January 1868.\textsuperscript{34} The contrasting level of hospitality towards the Irish between the two cities in this hierarchical relationship, calls up the findings, admittedly centred before and on 1851, of Moriarty on Huddersfield and that of Jeffes on Chester, where both towns did not experience the tensions of their respective dominant regional neighbours Bradford and Liverpool. It shows that individual towns could have their own ‘ring fenced’ relationship with the Irish, that benignity was more likely in smaller

\textsuperscript{32} Swift, Irish Migrants 1815-1914, p. 109. The absence of hostility may have been the result of the Irish deciding that given their small numbers it was prudent to keep a low profile.
\textsuperscript{33} John Mouchet Baynham, Birmingham surgeon, Report State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, p. 6
\textsuperscript{34} Birmingham Daily Post 13\textsuperscript{th} January 1868. The number had risen from the two mentioned in the Birmingham Daily Gazette 15\textsuperscript{th} July 1867.
urbanities, and was perhaps due to the larger municipalities attracting away from nearby smaller urban centres the more energetic but also the most troublesome.\textsuperscript{35}

The study revealed that Coventry was not a complete haven of welcome and tranquillity. While it cannot be ascertained if the Coventry press restrained itself from publishing even more bigoted material than it did, what was published did not appear very restrained. The study showed week after week into the 1870s, the local press reported with a certain degree of sensational condescending relish, the anti-social behaviour of the local Irish that confirmed the national negative stereotype of the Irish as having as ‘natural’ a sub-standard culture.\textsuperscript{36} When specificity demanded, a saving clause was employed that reference was intended for the ‘low’ Irish. Local accounts of court proceedings where the Irish were ethnically identified, depicted them as lacking personal control, as hot-tempered drunkards linked to crime and disorder and imbued with a low cunning. Coupled with this was reportage of reputation damaging Irish antics and criminal conduct in other cities and articles on the brutalised conditions in Ireland which depicted the Irish as contented idlers who were responsible for the conditions that surrounded them. Their country of origin was touted as a place from where unrest and ingratitude radiated. To complete the cocktail of disparagement, all local newspapers had an endless supply of jokes where the Irish were depicted as naïve crass buffoons. There was a sense of ridicule being compounded because these Irish did not seem to realise humour was being taken at their expense.\textsuperscript{37} The tenor of this insidious medium of mockery which was sold under the guise of harmless amusement may not have disturbed the illiterate Irish.\textsuperscript{38} There remains a lack of explanation in all this as to what

\textsuperscript{35} There were exceptions e.g. Stockport seven miles from Manchester where an anti-Irish riot took place in 1852. (Manchester’s Radical History, https://radicalmanchester.wordpress.com/2010/04/08/stockport-riot-june-1852/ Accessed 25\textsuperscript{th} November 2017).

\textsuperscript{36} The Irish must not be excused for their behaviour. In the prevailing city ambience of the time, they became their own enemy. Ziesler remarked in relation to the Dissenting and artisan city of Birmingham that the disgraceful drinking and rows did not meet with approval. (Ziesler, Irish in Birmingham, p. 21).

\textsuperscript{37} Gilley, English Attitudes, p. 84. Some Irish could deprecate themselves by presenting themselves, notably in music-halls, as happy go-lucky rascallions. Some Irish appeared amusingly obsequious though this may have been a tactic, particularly employed in law-courts or when seeking alms, to gain sympathy.

\textsuperscript{38} Unchanged by the end of the nineteenth century was that ingrained, condescending and mocking disrespect that featured an assumed Irish stupidity and disregard for the law as shown by a ‘joke’ published in the Coventry Herald 16\textsuperscript{th} May 1902 - the newspaper on balance most cordial to the Irish. ‘The district visitor said to the proud mother Mrs Rooney in relation to her child that it is at a young age ideas are formed and characters of the young are moulded by what goes on around them. If we have good parents who try to bring us up in the proper way we escape the evil influence of bad surroundings. The visitor remarked ‘Of course you are bringing him up properly, and showing him what he is to do when he grows up?’ ‘Av course, mim!’ answered Mrs. Rooney, confidently. ‘Why, it was only last night Oi hild him up to the windy to watch his fayther bate a p’licemin in the strate!’
sentient Irish thought of the way the Irish as a race were mocked. For many it must have meant a desire to play-down their origin, or to show their own respectable standing by adopting the manners of the host.

The *Standard* was most hostile to, as it saw it, the pretensions of Romanism, and showed little sympathy for Ireland’s sorry plight. A cold levelling of blame for its dire pre-Famine condition could be found in its pages that charged the clergy with duping their flock. Its opinions were pitched to reach over the heads of local migrants as if their sensibilities were irrelevant. The *Herald* was editorially more reflective, showing an understanding of who was responsible for the plight of the Irish. As noted in Chapter 4 it wrote with courage in the tense atmosphere of the time asking what purpose was served by executing all three Irishmen in Manchester in 1867. The extent to which these city newspapers with their partisan editorial views, opinions of contributors, and reports on: local Irish behaviour, affairs in Ireland, and stand of the Catholic Church either influenced, or reflected the mind of the reader at street level may have been small. Neal pointed out the uneducated section of the working class formed its judgements through direct experience of living near the Irish. It strikes, from

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Racial discrimination was so embedded, it was still in evidence a century later. (Rachel Borrill, Reporting on the publication of ‘Discrimination and the Irish community in Britain’, by the Commission for Racial Equality, *Irish Times* 26th June 1997.)

39 The *Coventry Standard* 16th October 1846 printed a piece from the *Dublin Packet*: ‘Repeal Capacity, - “We know your sufferings, our hearts bleed with yours;” these were the words written by Mr John O’Connell on the part of his fellow-plunderers of the Association a few days since, and coolly addresses to the famishing people of Ireland. But how was sympathy for these sufferings evinced on yesterday? By extracting from the pockets of the starving wretches upwards of £86, and this chiefly through the instrumentality of the Roman Catholic Priests. One of these pious ecclesiastics, a person named Sinnott writing from Wexford, remarks thus: - “But the approaching miseries of famine proclaim to the Government and the landed proprietors - HASTE -HASTE - HASTE;” and at the same time sends up a bank order for £25 3s 6d! Another member of the cloth…[it continued in similar vein]’. Coincidentally Placid Sinnott, born in Wexford, was a priest resident in Coventry 1847-1850 but it was not him that the article referred to as he was in Weobley 1841-1848. (The Rex Sinnott Site, https://www.sinnottnz.com/getperson.php?personID=I2437&tree=tree5 Accessed 15th January 2019); See Appendix 8.

40 See Appendix 8

41 Hobbs wrote of newspapers helping to create communities, and of readers in English towns feeling connected to other readers though they had never met. (Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town*, p. 14). Coventry newspapers were a medium that conveyed municipal pride and the desirability of civic identity. Through informing readers of opinions, commercial and social activities, a communal theme was conducted of people interacting and sharing, leading fulfilling lives in the city and contributing to its good.

This rendering of city life may have belied the reality where many felt disconnected and foreign. Frank Bates, 44 years, residing in a family of six, at 51 Eagle Street, a turner and fitter in the Ordnance Works wrote on his 1911 census form in the Nationality column that he was ‘English but be better off as African Blacks’. When asked if he was an ‘Employer or worker’ he wrote in the column ‘Wage slave’. He wrote the same comments beside his two working children. When asked for the number of rooms he replied ‘Four. One shilling and four and a half pence each per week & not been whitewashed or papered for about 10 years’. (RG14/18581 ED 43).

Within the relay by the media of a roseate city community any mention of Irish activity in newspapers may have been viewed contemporarily for its positive or negative contribution to the city.

42 Neal, *The Irish in Britain: integrated or assimilated?* p. 12
surveying these papers, that the Non-Irish concerns over parliamentary elections, control of Lammas lands and bitter weaving disputes may have served to engage fully the populace’s capacity for irritation thereby allowing the Irish to avoid becoming its venting target.

The excitable bigotry and provocation of Catholics and by inference ‘ordinary’ Irish, found a locus in Birmingham and not Coventry; the Irish did not cause riots in the latter, nor did they become the target of rioters that would have involved Irish disaffection and alienation. Neither were there rival Irish and English warring gangs of youths that Weinberger stated was a feature of Birmingham in the 1870s. This absence of tension was not particular to Coventry. Disquiet that boiled into clashes appears to have been rare in most towns and if an Irish related disturbance broke out it could be the result of a complicated mix of factors peculiar to the town in disorder. Swift noted there was little evidence for ethnic tension or sectarian action in Wolverhampton, in contrast to the tension found in selected Lancashire or Cheshire towns. The assessment of the degree of anti-Irish sentiment or Irish integration in Coventry cannot rely solely on the presence or absence of riot. Hickman rightly warned that anti-Irish sentiment could exist without riots occurring or where large numbers were not present. O’Leary too cautioned on construing the decline of riot as a satisfactory index of integration. The middle class who disapproved of the anti-social activity of the Irish, according O’Day, would be the most unlikely to riot. The well-attended concert in 1880 to raise funds for the relief of distress in Ireland indicates a measure of Coventry goodwill towards Irish people, but the strength over the decades of this kind of spirit, must have been sorely tested by the seeming thanklessness in Ireland for help as shown by the continuance of atrocities in the form of e.g. the Phoenix Parks murders in 1882.

A popular view expressed in generalised studies is that the common Irish were regarded by the native workers on the lowest social tier, as even below themselves. These Irish were the butt of the disdain that could emanate from all classes who presumed to range above them. It is difficult to find evidence of the ‘national disdain’

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44 Swift, ‘Another Stafford Street Row’, p. 198. There were anti-Irish riots in Stockport (1852) and anti-Catholic Murphy riots occurred in Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Ashton-under-Lyne (1867).
45 William Murphy did not visit Coventry which meant any latent feelings were not provoked into the open.
46 Hickman, Religion, Class and Identity, p. 92
47 O’Leary, Irish in Wales, pp. 502-503
48 O’Day, Varieties of anti-Irish behaviour, p. 31
49 Dublin Weekly Nation 1st May 1880
50 Roberts, The Classic Slum, pp. 22, 23
as a force in Coventry. It may have existed just at a sufficiently low-key that it did not draw notice on itself, as would an open policy of ‘No Irish need apply’. However it may have occurred as a matter of form, in refusal of job applicants, or those seeking lodgings. There may have been a reluctance by some to lease property to Irish which may have contributed to Irish overcrowding and the forced tolerance by them of sub-standard dwellings. The words quoted earlier of young Henry Duckham who said in July 1861 the Irish were of no account may have revealed a common, but more guarded view of the Irish. Otherwise it was only in animated situations reaching print that a deeper view might be ventilated where the Irish were directly called ‘dirty’ or ‘Irish b-- s’. Lynch mentions Coventry youths in 1869 shouting abuse at convent school-girls, albeit because they were Catholics. Perhaps poor Irish knew what hotels and salons did not welcome them and self-discriminated by not frequenting them.

The seeming absence of overt hostility may have been the result of the Irish deciding on a policy of passive acquiescence and given their small numbers they may have considered it prudent to play down their identity and to keep a low profile to avoid unwelcome attention. There were some mid-century, troublesome Irish families that did not regard keeping a low profile as crucial. It is possible that their apparent fearlessness of the law may have caused locals to reflect on the risky consequences of their showing any open hostility to the Irish. Swift has written about Irish disorders that in Wolverhampton had an anti-police element to them. They were of a serious scale but not all-out riots. He attributed the cause of the disturbances to the military background

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51 Fielding remarks that usually prejudice was discreet and more likely to have occurred in small family firms. (Steven Fielding, Class and Ethnicity, p. 36)
52 Nationally racial discrimination was deeply embedded, it was still in evidence a century later. (Rachel Borrill, Reporting on the publication of ‘Discrimination and the Irish community in Britain’, by the Commission for Racial Equality, Irish Times 26th June 1997.)
53 Appendix 4: 4th July 1856, 6th August 1858, 31st October 1862
54 Lynch, Autobiography of a Child; Binckes & Laing, Irish Autobiographical Fiction and Hannah Lynch, p. 123
55 Standish Meacham, A Life Apart, The English Working Class 1890-1914, (London 1977) p. 34 (quoting Gordon Allport, The Nature of Prejudice (New York 1958) p. 143). Meacham wrote about how the working class might handle themselves by playing the game of passive acquiescence when standing alone against middle-class representatives. Passive acquiescence was a method by which those in a threatened minority group could survive ‘by agreeing with his adversary he escapes being conspicuous…and quietly leads his life in two compartments: one (more active) among his own kind, one (more passive) in the outer world’.

The Irish playing down their identity was noted by Mary J. Hickman and Walter Bronwen, Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain: A Report of Research Undertaken for the Commission for Racial Equality, (London 1997) p. 229. They found this was the reaction of 20th century migrants when exposed to anti-Irish hostility. They wrote ‘A significant minority especially amongst women, said they had played down their Irish identity at times, especially by altering their accent or keeping quiet’. It is difficult to ascertain if these strategies were employed by the Irish in Coventry. In interpreting the degree of assimilation, allowance must be made for their possible use, and heed taken of Hickman’s advice that the maintenance of such a stance is not evidence of assimilation ‘but of a specific response by Irish people to the various anti-Irish and anti-Catholic discourses and practices’. (Hickman, Alternative historiographies, p. 253).
of successive Chief Constables keen to assert police authority, and who with the blessing of the Magistracy and Town Council, did so by deliberately clamping down on petty crime. This cut across the habits of the Irish who resented the police evicting them from public houses at closing time, arresting them for public drunkenness and for regulating numbers in lodging houses.\textsuperscript{56} This sort of clamp down was in evidence in Coventry but without similar police heavy-handedness or collective Irish resentment of the police that was expressed in violence.\textsuperscript{57} McLean told how he was arrogantly treated by a policeman in 1860, though not because he was Irish (Appendix 2). Examples of draconian, or conscious overly forceful treatment of the Irish have not been noted. Most likely the Irish were wary of the police, as part of what Weinberger noted was the general unpopularity of the police among the working class. But also because they may have suspected the police had hidden anti-Irish sentiment which could bare its teeth if specific conditions of unease gave opportunity, as had happened in Birmingham where their partisan attitude saw light in 1867.\textsuperscript{58}

The police rightly challenged individuals drunk and disorderly in the streets but were not otherwise proactive against the Irish; they only appeared to come into conflict with more clustered Irish when they were forced to intervene in Irish rows. Perhaps they had some reluctance in getting too involved as reports showed in doing so the Irish could well assault them, or have attempts made by Irish friends to forcibly rescue the arrested person, or could be intimidated by a surrounding crowd who might turn from being onlookers to participants in a moment.\textsuperscript{59}

Anti-social behaviour when referred to in this study has featured usually in relation to a street, and may seem sporadic, but if viewed in a city-wide perspective, two patterns could be noted. These might be classified by ‘type’ i.e. the ‘Irish row’ (Appendix 4), or by ‘family’, since it was caused over time by scattered members of the then known as aberrant families such as the Gahagans or Grogans. In each of these families the presence of a number of young adult brothers that could defend themselves, may have supplied a fearless attitude to neighbours and the law. The deviancy in some

\textsuperscript{56}Swift, ‘Another Stafford Street Row’, pp. 184-185
\textsuperscript{57}John Norris who was born in Wells, Somerset became chief constable of Coventry in 1862 and remained so until 1890. An interesting note is that the year before he took up his position, he was recorded in Walcot (Bath), Somerset as sharing the same house as Dorathea Tollenham, aged 60, Fundholder, born in Dublin. RG9/1691.79.23 ED 10
\textsuperscript{58}Weinberger, Police and Public, pp. 69, 75. She noted the police were disliked because they were strangers who intruded unnecessarily into working-class neighbourhoods where they had no other business except surveillance. She outlined police behaviour which showed bias against the pastimes and practices of the poor and so were resented by the working class.
\textsuperscript{59}A policeman’s lot was not the easiest. The most cursory perusal of the Coventry Police Force Annual Reports for mid-century reveals a high turnover of police. (Coventry Police Force Annual Reports 1836-1900, Ref: CCPO, Coventry History Centre, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry).
of these families was seen to continue into the second generation. Their lack of social
etiquette could be described in modern parlance as ‘shameless’ with them having no
concept of responsibility to act as ambassadors promoting the Irish as an honourable
people. This turning of their backs on society seems to have its origin in an outlaw
disposition that was unused to having its actions interpreted as breaking the law, or was
unwilling to have it actions circumscribed by law, especially if the law was regarded as
made by ‘alien’ authority. The lack of social conscience expressed in their behaviour
might also be explained by referring to the frustration of their circumstances, a lack of a
sense of belonging to wider society, quarrelling, faction fighting and family feuding as
aspects of culture, and the troubled adjustment of young unschooled migrants untethered
from familiar surroundings.

The disquieting behaviour provided confirmation for those who sought it that the
Irish might be referred to as ‘low’ and that such conduct was intrinsic to Irish cultural
tradition. Fitzpatrick asserted the British belief that anti-social behaviour was an innate
Irish trait which ‘left its imprint on immigrant imagination, causing many settlers to revel
in misconduct that might otherwise have been a matter of shame’. Much disorder was
rooted in an Irish fondness for alcohol consumption. According to Swift drinking was ‘a
key element of leisure culture in Ireland’. Alcohol was an accelerant of mayhem by
inducing anger and bravado. In all this the Coventry magistracy appeared firm but
remarkably fair and forbearant to the Irish. Transgressions, even vicious fights or assaults
on constables, were usually leniently dealt with by the imposition of a fine or binding to
the peace, but custodial sentences were meted out e.g. if there was persistent domestic
abuse.

Apart from Gavazzi’s visit in 1854, there were no anti-Catholic visiting preachers
that might stir up trouble, or hinder the Catholic Church’s journey towards respectability,
or suck the Irish into conflict as occurred in Birmingham. Even if they had sojourned,
the metaphor used for elsewhere ‘of simmering resentment that preaching could bring to
the boil’ did not apply to an amiable Coventry. The compact form of the city might have
brought about, as Herson suggested occurred in Stafford,

60 Swift noted that Irish peasant society was widely perceived as brutalized. (Swift, Behaving Badly? p. 113).
61 Fitzpatrick, A peculiar tramping people, p. 651
62 Swift, Behaving Badly? p. 110
63 See Appendix 4: Coventry Herald 22nd September 1876
64 The remarks made by Rev. J. Drury, London Clerical Secretary of the Protestant Reformation Society, who spoke at a Coventry City Mission meeting in St Mary’s Hall in November 1857 were mentioned in Chapter 1 and referred to in Appendix 5.
proximity of classes that assisted social control and facilitated integration.\textsuperscript{65} There was no febrile atmosphere in the city that might have developed if separate Catholic and Protestant Irish quarters containing those with opposing versions of identity existed. This arrangement could be found in more northerly towns e.g. Greenock, where it was a source of sectarian and nationalist tension.\textsuperscript{66}

There was an apparent easing in the late century of prejudice as reflected by less reference in Coventry newspapers to the Irish in terms of e.g. their supposed contentment with ‘pigs in the parlour’ conditions, although this abatement may not have occurred at street level. Reduced newspaper attention that specifically identified the Irish in a negative light may have been due to what Ziesler, writing on Birmingham, identified as occurring there. She noted the later century Irish were less newsworthy, due to their having smaller numerical significance and their increasing conformance to accepted behaviour patterns.\textsuperscript{67} The Irish of later generations if born in Coventry were less identifiable as Irish. The alcohol fuelled fighting and animus of the 1860s that tainted the reputation of earlier Irish settlement had remarkably now vanished and thus was no longer an issue that drew attention to the Irish. Generally circumstances improved for the Coventry Irish and would have been in line with Swift’s remark that the Wulfrunian Irish by the 1870s appeared ‘less alienated, more integrated, and increasingly tolerated in local society than they had been earlier in the nineteenth century’.\textsuperscript{68}

Irish nationalism and the Catholic Church and were seen by a number of writers as the cornerstone of the Irish community, according to Hickman.\textsuperscript{69} However the study showed the use of ‘cornerstone’ requires qualification. While ‘justice for Ireland’ was a topic that was of common interest to many Irish, the expression of local nationalism through active collective gesture, found purchase first only in the 1880s through the meetings of Land League, later National League in Coventry. While the Branch’s concern for Ireland raised consciousness among local Irish of their identity, its effective role was essentially a vote mobilizer at the service of the Liberals. The Branch seemed conflicted by its strongly couched opinion that England was to blame for Ireland’s grievances, and its desire to maintain local popular goodwill which the airing of such sentiment might impede. Holding some of its meetings in public houses may have lessened the local League’s wider appeal. The unlikelihood of early advance in the

\textsuperscript{65}Herson, Migration, ‘community’ or integration? p. 168
\textsuperscript{66}Lobban, Irish in Greenock, pp. 270-281
\textsuperscript{67}Ziesler, \textit{Irish in Birmingham}, p. 133
\textsuperscript{68}Swift, ‘Another Stafford Street Row’, p. 199
\textsuperscript{69}Hickman, Alternative historiographies, p. 243
provision of Home Rule due to the defeat of Bills in 1886 and 1893, along with its hectoring view that local Irish people owed it to their ancestors to have a ‘sense of duty to Ireland’ may also have lessened its allure.

The study outlined how the Coventry Catholic Church in its local governance and outlook, remained an ‘English’ Church: It made no public gesture of recognition to the Irish in its congregation, and was silent on the merits of nationalist aspiration; Ullathorne was resolute in his inimical opposition to Fenianism.\(^70\) The latter part of Gilley’s remark that the enormous task of ministering to the stressed Irish on their arrival was a distraction from the Church establishment’s mission to convert England, and that the Irish were little credited as Irish and seen as the poor, may be valid in Coventry. The findings on Coventry Catholic Irish concur with Herson’s observation on their counterparts in Stafford that the Irish had to find respectability within the larger Catholic community rather than in ‘a representation of Irishness’ to the native population.\(^71\)

Gilley suggested that the attitude of many English lay-Catholics towards the Catholic Irish, mirrored that of the English population without the anti-Catholicism and was a mixture of hostility and indifference. This suggestion could not be verified in relation to Coventry, beyond noting that the CYMS membership in the years of foundation appeared a harmonious mixture of English and Irish-born.\(^72\)

The study found from evidence in McDonnell’s letter of July 1885 that assertive local nationalism was kept at arm’s length by the local church in the 1880s which only sanctioned gatherings in the Catholic schoolroom with a genteel, romantic, nostalgic remembrance of Ireland, or the ‘Auld country’.\(^73\) Even in constitutional political activity, with Catholic stalwart McVeagh in an anti-Gladstone standpoint (not to mind similarly disposed English Catholics such as Petre) any espousal of a candidature promoting domestic government in Ireland, which would be a promotion popular with

\(^70\) The non-appearance of any acknowledgement of specific ‘Irish’ involvement in Church affairs particularly in the 1860s and 1870s, if indeed such participation occurred, may not have been deliberate on the part of the Church. It may relate to what sources are available and what they relate. They focus, as might be expected, on parochial activity in a Warwickshire mission, at a remove from Irish affairs e.g. building St. Mary’s convent and school, ministering to the workhouse, relations with the Mercy Convent, and summer outings of parishioners to country estates. The establishment of the CYMS in 1858 shows there was no discrimination by the local priest against the Irish-born since he selected Irish-borns as its president and vice-president.

\(^71\) Herson, Divergent paths, p. 281

\(^72\) Gilley, English Catholic Attitudes, p. 109. Appendix 20 in referring to a letter written in 1906 shows that Catholics could then see themselves as Irish Catholics or English Catholics.

\(^73\) There was a mildness to proceedings based on a wish not to offend non-Catholic locals who were always thanked for turning up. The money from the admission tickets they bought was important source of revenue. At the turn of the century ‘God save Ireland’ was sung at the close of a number of meetings in the schoolroom.
the majority of Irish, was likely to be eschewed by the clergy. In making available the schoolroom as a venue for popular celebrations of Irish culture and heritage it maintained a level of control over local manifestation of Irish identity.

The local Church made for a distinction between the lives of Irish Catholic people and the lives of those who were English, through separate schooling and insistence on same-faith marriage. Through their education scheme they minimised the ethnic background of migrant children by instilling British values, and may have regarded this as wholly normal and beneficial to migrant children born in the city. In this process the Church was acting according to Bossy as an ‘agent of assimilation’. But in that process also was at play the paradox remarked on by Gilley. In minimising the ethnic background through Catholic schooling the Church’s insistence on sectarian schooling, given Gilley’s remark that the ‘form of the Irish community was simply the Church’ upheld the view the Irish had an especial identity. It was only according to its own particular terms prepared to assist in bonding the Irish on an ethnic basis, i.e. if the Irish were Catholic and enjoyed an appreciation of refined Irish culture. Its acceptance of the Irish simply as Catholics must nevertheless have helped the Irish to feel part of the wider organisation of society. Its presence in offering solace, hope and purpose to Coventry migrants is to be recognised. Casey suggested the possibility that ‘the community which publicly engages in religious practice generates positivity in the face of the travails of life’. Its tenets of moral rectitude, upheld by fear of damnation, together with its conservative religious message of respect for authority, stoic acceptance and humility, must have aided conformity, acquiescence and integration (Figure 4.8). It would surely have encouraged temperance, thrift and care of dependents to the advantage of its Irish adherents. Nevertheless its promotion of earthly existence as temporal – ‘in a vale of tears’ which was a mere prelude to that in an afterlife, and its disapproval of materialism may have lessened the purpose of worldly self-advancement among the Irish.

Belchem refers to the existence in Liverpool of a culture of poverty based on the sanctity of the ‘Catholic virtue of Holy Poverty’ which there marked out the truly Irish. Such self-debasement if it existed in Coventry would have lowered the self-esteem of the Irish. Evidence of the Irish in Coventry accepting, or being encouraged to

74 Bossy, English Catholic Community, p. 309
75 Gilley, English Catholic Attitudes, p. 103
76 Ibid., p. 103
77 Patricia Casey, Professor of Psychiatry, University College Dublin. (Irish Independent 9th February 2019).
78 Belchem, Irish, Catholic and Scouse, p. 72
accept, their social standing through taking virtuous satisfaction in the ennobled state of poverty could not be found. 79

The Church - both the institution and its doctrine - was actively disliked by much of British society, which was to the general disadvantage of its Irish adherents. In Coventry this study discerned antagonism towards Catholicism, in what was published by the Standard and by what was blazoned by Dissenting clerics, but it was levelled directly at the Church as a body and rarely at the local mission or the local Irish. 80 This was in the open and directed at the Church’s presumptions as an organization - its loyalty to the Crown and hold over its members - and to its theological interpretation. Catholics as individuals faced discriminatory practice when seeking employment, which rankled the clergy. Sullivan in 1875 referred to its occurrence while over a half century later Abbot Bamford felt compelled to introduce it in his address to civic dignitaries. 81 Later century local criticism of the Church was not as intense especially after the death of Delf in 1882. 82 In its final quarter Catholics benefited from the growth of what Evans states might loosely be called secularism. 83 Norman explained the lessening of anti-Catholicism at the end of the nineteenth century as due to the general decline in religious sentiment among the public rather than any especial tolerant approach towards Catholics. 84

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79 Barclay revealed that his mother in Leicester took solace in her poverty. ‘Poverty was accepted by mother with the patience of Job. ‘Why shouldn’t we suffer when Our Blessed Lord Himself suffered? Didn’t He say blessed are the poor…’ 79 (Barclay, Memoirs and Medleys, p. 24).

80 The Standard always made space for letters and sermons of critics expounding on questions of Catholic teaching. For example John Cumming, a London based virulent anti-Catholic lecturer (who did not frequent Coventry) visited Northampton in February 1865. His provocative sermons given there were published in full by the Standard. See Appendix 5 for detail on Dr Cumming. Fielding remarked that doctrinal or theological religious questions only enthused the middle class and not the population as a whole. (Coventry Standard 10th, 18th & 24th February 1865; Steven Fielding, Class and Ethnicity, p. 35).

81 Canon O Sullivan at the opening of the new St. Osburg’s schools quoted the case of a young man who was refused an apprenticeship in the drapery business in Birmingham because he was Catholic. (Coventry Standard 8th October 1875). In 1928 a civic visit was made by all city dignitaries - councillors, aldermen, justices and senior officials - to St. Osburg’s Church to attend High Mass. Heading the procession was A.J. Makepeace the newly elected Mayor of the city who was the first Roman Catholic Mayor since the Reformation. Abbot Bamford said the Catholics of Coventry felt honoured in the conferral of Mayoralty on Makepeace. He said Catholics knew from experience that very often their religion was a bar to promotion and that often times a person who was suited for a certain post was set aside simply because he was a Catholic. (Midland Daily Telegraph 19th November 1928). It might be noted that Sullivan had come from Birmingham and Bamford from Blyth Northumberland on both celebratory occasions and they may have been providing an imported view that was not reflected in Coventry. Bamford was aggrieved that being Catholic was a bar to promotion but being in a job position that offered the kind of promotion implied by Bamford may not have arisen for many Irish.

82 In an address in St. Osburgh’s, Rev. Pius Cavanagh was reported to have admitted to the congregation ‘that of late years there had been a great change both in the press and in the pulpit, and that from the latter we seldom heard now the fierce denunciations of Catholics which were common in bygone days’. (Coventry Evening Telegraph 7th September 1891)

83 Evans, The Victorian Age, pp. 277, 279, 280

84 He did qualify his remark by noting anti-Catholicism was fading in educated minds but was still strong among the working class. (Norman, Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England, p. 20).
Herson noted that Catholicism had transformed from a community of dissent to a secure and disciplined Church. In Coventry through the ameliorating manner of Pratt, the innocent detachment of Moore and exactitude and probity of Pereira, the local clergy embedded itself in the social and mental fabric of the city as a force for rectitude and stability. Delf’s pointed questioning of Catholic right to have a seat on the School Board in the 1870s, and in doing so raising smearing, hoary canards about Catholics surrendering their mental and moral freedom and their loyalty to the Queen, was particularly irritating to the Catholic Clergy as they sought to present the Catholic relationship with the city as in a normalised state. Over time there was ingratiation, its effect seen in the visible gestures of engagement by the local Catholic Church on occasions of civic celebration and of reported respectful loyal toasts submitted by clergy when dignitaries attended Catholic related social functions. This civic participation, assisted by its local side-stepping of potential tension by a discrete absence at election meetings, and non-involvement in nationalistic or radical concerns, must have contributed towards a more beneficent public view of its adherents, which included the Irish.

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85 At the time of Delf’s opposition in 1876 a letter in the Herald 8th December, written by ‘A Protestant of Protestants’ stated in part: ‘Let Father Moore take note that there is a constantly increasing number... who think the teaching of priestcraft not only useless, but also, as judged by the history of his infallible church, mischievous: and though he and others of his kind may think themselves quite safe in that coward’s castle, the pulpit, the time will come when they will have to meet their opponents face to face on a free platform, or be publicly branded as braggarts who used persecution to put down the free expression of thought as long as they were able to do so, but now lack courage to show the truth of their much-vaunted faith by fair and open discussion.’

86 The Coventry Herald 18th November 1881 saw Fr Moore in attendance along with a large collection of dignitaries for the Annual Meeting of the governors and friends of the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital. The Coventry Herald 2nd November 1883 reported that a civic banquet was given at the Queens Hotel, by the Magistrates, Corporation and citizens to honour the Mayor A.S. Tomson. The civic, legal and medical elite enjoyed a sumptuous dinner to the strains of an orchestral band, after which toasts were loyally drunk and the National Athem sung. Father Moore was present and was one of the respondees. He said, after which he received applause: ‘Speaking in the name of the Catholics of Coventry, he might say that his worship had been most liberal to them...he felt bound to say they owed Mr Tomson a deep debt of gratitude for what he had done for them. He (the speaker) had been twenty-four years in Coventry, and he felt great interest in the old place...’ The Coventry Herald 6th June 1908 stated that at the CYMS dinner celebrating the 50th year since its foundation Fr Finch toasted ‘The Pope and the King’. Three years later on 20th April the Telegraph recorded a similar toast.

87 An example of the Church’s willingness to be a participant in the preservation of social order, and the co-incidence of it values with those of established society, is shown by the Telegraph 18th January 1909. It reported St. Osburg’s was filled to overflowing by a congregation present to witness the blessing of the colours of the recently formed Catholic Boys’ Brigade then 123 strong. The Earl of Denbigh who presented the colours picked up the point about the need for obedience made by Fr O’Reilly earlier. Denbigh in commending the role of the Boy’s Brigade which fostered ‘habits of discipline and accustomed them to obey the words of authority’, said in part, ‘habitual disobedience was taught nowadays by some organisations that were not ashamed to go around and poison the minds of our youth and do everything they could to incite them against every form of authority. In these days it could not be too earnestly remembered that society as a rule could not possibly get on unless they obeyed those who were in authority over them. They all had to obey orders, whether it was the man in blue or the Judge in the High Court, their parents, their superiors in business, or their superiors and advisers in the Church. If
Herson pointed to migrant entry and exit figures for a city, leaving an impression of transience and instability that did not do justice to the existence of a significant body of settled stable families.\textsuperscript{88} Irish households containing a growing local-born second-generation, were revealed to anchor Irish presence in Coventry, onwards from the first census in 1841 to specify the Irish. Intermarriage was shown to be common, with Table 5.2 disclosing e.g. in 1871 that in two-thirds of 191 Irish Household marriages, one spouse was Non-Irish-born. This finding aligns with that of Herson who noted more than one-third of Stafford’s Catholic marriages were of Irish marrying locals.\textsuperscript{89} Table 5.7 showed even from 1841 the overwhelming weight of ‘Irish’ children were born and reared in a Coventrian ambience which must have diluted Irish cultural distinctness from an early age.

Lees noted about Irish households in London that they were larger than British households due to a greater Irish acceptance of lodgers, though the family within it was the same size as for working class British families.\textsuperscript{90} This study has shown that there was little unduly different in family size, or household size, between the Irish and Coventrians households in 1851. With appropriate allowance for the older age-bias of Irish-born populations later in the century, and the quantums being compared, convergence with city demographic norms can be seen in the Tables of Chapter 6. City alignment is attested to once more in the employment and residential findings for 1911 in Appendix 20.

Similar to Lees finding, there was relative to ‘Coventry Households’ an increased number of lodgers in Irish Households. The heightened lodging phenomenon was due to the post-Famine exigency. As Lees suggested for London, in Coventry, lodging (if not the over-crowding) was a stabilising influence on the Irish community. As a practice it satisfied those who accepted lodgers, who were provided with a useful source of income and those seeking lodgings who were provided with shelter and local grounding. It was visible in 1851, predominantly among unattached young adults, but excessive lodger numbers per household was strongly curtailed thereafter by inspection, and for a number of subsequent decades by the fall-off in new arrivals. Even at the pinnacle of settlement in 1861, of 319 Irish Households, over 80.0% did not share with kin or with lodgers. The Irish were also noted lodging in English households containing Irish which must have aided acceptance. By 1881 as Table 6.5 indicated the lodging profile of the

\textsuperscript{88} Herson, Migration, ‘community’ or integretation? p. 162
\textsuperscript{89} Herson, A small-town perspective, p. 96
\textsuperscript{90} Lees, Irish slum Communities in London, p. 382
Irish ranged widely in age and marital status in these households, and showed analysis of lodgings is best served when not undertaken separate from the context in which it occurred. Dwelling behaviour in Coventry was not divided between those in a transient process undertaken by lodgers, and those in a stable settled process engaged in by households. Persons labelled as in one category in a census might be labelled as in another later. Lodging while purveying an essence of transience and dependence was in fact a term that in practice in Coventry also embraced sophisticated boarders.

Table display has been as open to cater for the findings on women as much as for men. However married women fell in enumeration pages under the headship of their husbands where they largely appeared as unoccupied dependents. Without it being recorded they may have assisted their partners where work such as weaving was undertaken at home. Their actual role in rearing and making a home for their children lent stability to migrant families. They were as O’Leary noted the ‘culture carriers’ to the subsequent generation. They do not feature in reports in a Coventry society where male exploits dominated. It is suggested that many of these anonymous women over three generations were resilient during their fraught lives, caused by poverty, multiple pregnancies, labour and risks in childbirth, alcohol-abusing husbands, and the likely endurance of years of widowhood.

As perceived in the present study, the Irish did not manifest to any degree, a collective sense of self until the 1880s. There was no appeal for clemency before, or sympathy expressed after, the State’s wrathful retribution in 1867 in executing the ‘Manchester Martyrs’. The behaviour of the State seemed, more so in nearby Birmingham than in Coventry, to viscerally affect the Irish. However if there was sympathy for the plight of the condemned, it may simply have remained unspoken in the face of the wall of denunciation from newspapers and Ullathorne. The thickness of the tolerant Coventry crust was unknown; the Irish had been had violently accosted in 1867 in nearby Birmingham and a smaller grouping of Irish in Coventry was even more vulnerable. Common purpose was to occur in the 1880s under the aegis of advocacy

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91 O’Leary, *Irish in Wales*, p. 300
92 Davis writes of the moving experience of 5,000 Irish walking in procession to the grounds of Nechells church where on the steps of the church, which had its doors locked, the Irish without any priest present said prayers for the condemned men in Manchester.
93 The sense that innocent Irish people residing in Coventry felt at risk of revenge attacks following the Coventry IRA bomb outrage in August 1939 could be gleaned from the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* 28th August 1939, where widespread feeling of anger against Irishmen was recorded. That innocent persons apparently on friendly terms with locals could quickly become the target of anger, simply because they shared the same birthplace as enemies of Britain is seen in Walters’ recount of the frightening treatment that Rudolph Hemminger, a German resident who kept a shop in Lower Stoke, Coventry, and his family experienced at the hands of a mob during the Great War. (Walters, *Story of Coventry*, pp. 205, 206).
for self-rule, alleviation of distress, and protest over coercive security that affected the island of Ireland.

Having a common native land was a detail that would have facilitated migrants becoming mutually acquainted. However sharing same-place origin was not sufficient to fuse migrants into a close interacting group. As Herson noted for Stafford, there was no monolithic community in a strongly cohesive mode advocating ethnic core values or addressing concerns pertaining to its day-to-day existence in Coventry. In those terms there was not a community and ergo not one that was sustainable. At most, the study showed different combinations of Irish people, could come together with different frequency, purpose and enthusiasm, to share in perhaps a number of different ethoses that had different levels of Irish connection. Many would worship in company weekly; ‘young’ men would gather in a spirit of Catholic fellowship perhaps monthly; some would enjoy attending an occasional St. Osburg’s schoolroom presentation listening to Irish story and song. There is a subliminal desire for migrants to associate with each other when in the midst of an ‘alien’ culture. These people may have found sufficient contentment gathering together under a Catholic identity rather than an Irish one.94

Others would meet half-yearly in a public-house to advance the Irish cause under the auspices of the Land League. Many enjoyed the opportunity to gather annually for entertainment and in celebration of Irish roots on St. Patrick’s Day. It was an occasion on which it was ‘licensed’ to display, through symbols and merriment, an Irish ethnicity. However it was just an annual assemblage and otherwise those persons did not appear to gather in any such volume as Irish, in order to activate any mutual vision of what might be collectively important to them. These festive participants may have included those Irish who came to Coventry in the final decades seeking employment in the cycle trade; some of these may have had a footloose commitment to the city. If the celebration was held in the Catholic schoolroom the ‘Catholic’ and ‘Irish’ reasons for gathering may have been ambiguous.

Constitutional activity provided another setting in which the Irish could coalesce but the ‘Coventry Irish’ as spoken of in that connection was a political conceit that was premised on bonding around an issue to secure parliamentary advantage and was largely tactical and periodic in nature. Also Hennessey and McGowran were public house licensees, who may have had a clientele that met regularly to engage in Irish raillery. Irish people would also share in consanguineous and affinitive relationships where they might supportively attend in sympathy at funerals, and for revelry after marriage

94 Herson, Divergent paths, p. 281
ceremonies. Attendance could range over a number of these comprisals of community which were not mutually exclusive, but were shaped around those who were active, and in the dominant cultural and religious grouping i.e. Celtic Catholic. In this sense ‘community’ was the physical expression of Irish identity.

This type of active expression may not have been undertaken by all; a lapsed Catholic, or one too decrepit to attend church, or who did not drink alcohol or deemed themselves too old to engage in gaiety, may not have engaged in any communal activity. Some in order to gain peer acceptance may not have adverted to their Irish heritage, which had historical negativity, and believed keeping a low profile and mirroring the idioms of city natives was the way to ensure acceptance. For some of migrant stock, due to time’s passage and host cultural dominance, Irishness had lost its significance. It may be this that P. McDonnell identified, as lethargy among the local Irish, that worked against the patriotic expression he desired in his letter, referred to in Chapter 4. Iteration of Irish identity seemed particularly bound up in a nationalistic desire for self-rule, or retaining a lasting, bitter feeling of being victimised. Some Irish may have not wished to be associated with an assertive iteration of being Irish that emphasised difference with locals.

Again identity might be on show, even if indirectly, during these gatherings frequented by the Irish, but was unlikely to be flaunted in the workplace. The above activities all had a private ring to them in Coventry, there being no public parades or demonstrations of the Irish consciously gathered to show distinct ethnicity. The useful Coventry list of subscribers to the Parnell Testimonial Fund in late 1883, with allowance made for those too polite to decline the request for a contribution, shows there was a collection of Irish who were known to each other on an ethnic basis, and probably shows the extent of the Irish circle who felt themselves to be the Irish of Coventry. It would be too ambitious to conclude on the basis of a mere subscription, that those listed comprised the cohesive community extant in the 1880s. The publication of the list in a Dublin printed paper, and not locally, might suggest unease

95 It was likely those over 60 years of age gathered together only by reason of their Catholic Church membership. In December 1906 and August 1907 the Brotherhood of St Vincent de Paul treated Catholics of that age group including those in the Workhouse to music and food in St. Osburg’s schoolroom. At the latter meeting there were ninety present including it was stated James Callaghan (93 years) and Michael Monaghan (91 years) both from the Workhouse. Their births in Ireland were not mentioned in the report. (Coventry Herald 29th December 1906; Coventry Telegraph 17th August 1907).

96 O’Day, Varieties of anti-Irish behaviour, p. 93. He remarked when the Irish conformed to English values they were quietly accepted in England; Roberts, The Classic Slum, p. 110

97 The prime contributor simply could not be identified, while the names of Dr McVeagh, Dr Fenton and William McGowran are noticeably absent.
for those on the list of subscribers becoming locally perceived as part of an Irish grouping. In the search for tangible visible groupings, a network of trusted Irish/Catholic private friendships may be overlooked. The study provided examples of how the Irish could act as executors of wills for each other. In an outlining of ‘the Irish’ it must be realised that the meaning of ethnic belonging may have changed over time, and what the sense of being Irish meant to one generation may not have been the same to those who had never set foot on the island of Ireland and had grown up in a British milieu. Fitzpatrick observed ‘sidestepping of the complexities and ambiguities of emigrant ‘Irishness’ is to exaggerate the cohesiveness of a supposed community’. 

The fixity suggested by the term ‘community’ implies a comfortable commitment to the city by an Irish endeared to its character. The study showed that despite appearances connectivity could be weak. P. O’Donnell who conspicuously represented the Coventry Irish in the 1880s returned to Ireland. For every example of a professional, or assistant priest who lingered in the city, another example could be furnished of someone who left. Indeed the illustrious Denis McVeagh after a lifetime of high medical and civic commitment left the city when he retired (See Appendix 2 for the controversy that may have prompted his departure).

The previous chapter in introducing the Doran family showed how specific individual experiences might be, and thus how sweeping observations about e.g. ‘poverty struck Irish’ risk misconstruing substantive realities. Due to its compelling, tragic nature and the large numbers involved, recounting the collective experience of poor Famine-era Catholic migrants has become the standard portrayal in migrant narration. It is a practice - easily lapsed into even by circumspect writers - where Irish outside that particular characterization may be neglected. This study has shown the heterogenous extent of the Irish; all were not of one mind, as Irish Catholic McVeagh’s support for Unionism showed. Protestant Irish are not distinguishable as such in the census and cannot be systematically followed. The absence of exposition appears conveniently excused by writers, on the basis that pursuance in any case is unnecessary, since they could so quickly blend into the host society. Information on working-class Irish Protestants is not available for Coventry, with the helpful exception of McLean.

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99 Belchem, Irish, Catholic and Scouse, p. 45. He referred to historians ‘with their fixation on the ‘poor Irish’.

100 McVeagh attended a Unionist demonstration in the Corn Exchange in 1892. There is no mention of his political affiliation before then. He may have been a consistent Unionist rather than having become a Liberal Unionist in recent years. (Midland Daily Telegraph 25th June 1892).
but the situation of some of those of middle-class and higher rank outside the Catholic Celtic milieu that has emerged in this study has been explored. Similar to what Ziesler concluded occurred in relation to Birmingham, the Coventry Irish Protestants adopted rapidly the allegiances and attitudes of the English middle-class, they did not convene as Irish Protestants (though may have met socially), or feel responsible for the majority of the Irish in poverty. However as noted there appeared to be a transient ‘incidental’ quality to their Coventry residence and their inclusion in statistics may actually distort discernment of the size of community conceived around the notion of more long-term settled stay in the city.

The large number of Dublin-born in Coventry threaded across the decades did not go unnoticed. These citified folk may have found adjustment to the Coventry urban ambience less traumatic. The study highlighted migrants in Coventry whose identity appeared mutated by time, Irish-born who never identified as Irish, or professional or retailing Irish of such social standing they could straddle with ease both indigenous and Irish cultures. These possessed identities based on having ‘English’ military inheritance, or having ease of religious or social accommodation with the host country. The examples provided, showed that of itself, being Irish-born did not seem an issue in Coventry, if social standing or disposition were deemed correct. Because Coventry was a small pool, some of these refined Irish-born had greater opportunity to achieve city-wide recognition and to be perceived as prominent and influential in a way that might not be attained if they were to operate in a larger city. Their presence (not all were Protestant), in sharing the same norms of the host population, signalled integration as the route to success, but was also influential in bolstering the dignity of all Irish. It showed to locals in a compact city that being Irish-born did not necessarily mean a lack of intelligence, loyalty, drive, or commitment to the social values and well-being of Coventry. However while ambassadors of Irish good character it is unlikely they would

\[\text{Ziesler, \textit{Irish in Birmingham}, pp. 123-125. St. Lawrance Burke, prioritised English cultural norms. However he displayed those aspects of the Irish character that the English consider to be charming facets of Irish personality. It was said that he was ‘Cheery, witty and like many Irishmen, naturally witty’. See Appendix 2.}\]
\[\text{Chapter 5 referred to the 12 lodging surveyors. A suitable family example of this transient ‘incidental’ involvement is provided by William A Gardiner (1837-1924). He was born in Dewsbury. In 1891 he resided at 5 Queens Road, Coventry with Irish-born (Kingstown) wife Katherine. He was a physician & surgeon to the army. In 1901 he was recorded as a retired colonel living in Ipswich St. Margaret, Suffolk and in 1911 he resided in Cheltenham. RG12/2451.76.3 ED 33}\]
\[\text{Their interesting pathways to Coventry are related in Appendix 2.}\]
\[\text{The \textit{Coventry Evening Telegraph} 22\textsuperscript{nd} March 1905 described a lecture given by Dr Richardson Rice upon “Irish Wit and Humour” to a large attendance in St. Paul’s Schools. Dr Rice remarked that the characteristics of the Irish were that of a light-hearted and humorous race, never seeming to take anything seriously, and they could quickly adapt themselves to the various situations they were in. This employment of Irish wit was a flourish used by Dr St. Lawrance Burke (Appendix 2). Irish-born medical doctors in Coventry left few in doubt how learned Irish people could be.}\]
have mixed socially with the Irish in other classes. Pooley’s observation is pertinent to Coventry that the bonds between inner city families of any cultural background experiencing poor housing must have been ‘closer than the links between poor Irish migrants and successful middle-class Irish families living in the suburbs’.105

The study emphasised that the attributes of professional people should not be glossed over because of their fewness. Nor should their import be unwitnessed by any insistence on conciseness that restricts tabulation to displaying the traits of the numerically dominant swaths of the Irish population. An auctioneer or doctor could have social impact beyond the peculiarity of their skills (which in themselves involved networking and trust). If not all possessed an Irish kindred spirit, or behaved self-consciously as Irish, or were on the same side of the wide social divide as the majority of Irish, they were still marked lifelong as Irish by birth. They brought prestige to the fact of having Ireland as birthplace, and they gave an infusion of class respectability into the Irish quantum.

Consideration has been given to the continued existence of distinctive Irish presence in the city. Aware of O’Day’s reference to the neglect of the phenomenon of integration in analytical literature, where there is more attention on those who kept their ethnicity than on those who relinquished it, some deliberation follows on the degree of Irish integration at the turn of the century.106 According to Panayi integration remains a slow process. He observed: ‘Over time and through generations, convergence with the norms of the population as a whole occurs’.107 Thus there is wariness in relation to Coventry of over-reading an integrative momentum into the actions of the Irish for the period under scrutiny which was the half century before 1900. This caution is also appropriate when it is obvious from Appendix 4 that some Irish had not up to 1880 modified their uncivil manner.

There is not available a ‘correct’ set, or weighting of criteria guidance, to facilitate assessment of the degree of integration. For example, evidence of integration using the ‘daily’ metrics of workplace engagement, intermarriage with the host, residential diffusion and the early preponderance of local-born Irish could be counterbalanced by a separation of consciousness acquired from their religion, by the receipt, for most, of sectarian schooling and of their continued celebration of Irish heritage. In Coventry, complexity is introduced to the issue, since over the final decades of the century the number of Irish-born should have fallen, which was the expected trajectory of decline as

105 Pooley, Segregation or integration? p. 81
106 O’Day, Varieties of anti-Irish behaviour, p. 40
107 Panayi, Immigration History of Britain, Multicultural Racism since 1800, p. 122
the post-Famine cohort aged. However these failing numbers were boosted by the rejuvenating tranche of freshly arrived Irish migrants seeking work in cycle factories. It is to be noted O’Day saw in the Irish in Britain a vibrancy that supported their integration.108 As a people the Irish had a dynamic rather than static outlook fixed on cultural isolation and could accommodate over time to the cultural routines and manners of the host. Not pressured on a day-to-day basis to show garb or facial hair-style markers of a contrary culture, they were not visually distinguishable and could mingle successfully with the host.

Nationally the tempo of integration could vary. Ziesler cautioned against accepting runaway integration. On the large quantum of late nineteenth century Birmingham Irish, she remarked ‘that if most of the second generation Irish were moving towards the mainstream it is not likely that many of them managed to move very far’. She saw improved but still limited opportunity for the Irish to achieve social and occupational mobility, yet ‘the pressures for assimilation were countered by others equally strong’.109 To her, the opposing influences were that of being reared in areas that remained Irish, coupled with attendance at Catholic schools and churches.

Fielding referred to Roberts description of Salford in the first quarter of the twentieth century which portrayed a working-class with a hierarchical culture which considered the Irish to be inferior due to their rural background, their nationality and their religion. The relationship could be framed as a ‘them’ and ‘us’ situation. While Fielding also gave evidence that there could be neighbourly co-existence he concluded that the friendliness was superficial and ‘the cultural bias against Irish Catholics remained an omnipresent, if latent force’.110 For this large city that seemed a stagnant scenario where integration found no encouragement. In Stafford, a city much smaller in scale, Herson found ‘ethnic fade’ to have quickly occurred. He stated that contrary to the evidence in large cities there was not much to be gained by remaining separate in Stafford and the logical course in a small town with a small Irish population, if not leaving for another location, was for the Irish to integrate.111 Pooley remarked that in Liverpool the large Irish community gave an opportunity for the Irish to withdraw into an Irish area but that in a smaller town like Lancaster daily interaction with the host

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108 O’Day, Varieties of anti-Irish behaviour, p. 40
109 Ziesler, Irish in Birmingham, pp. 133-134
110 Steven Fielding, Class and Ethnicity, p. 34
111 Herson, Migration, ‘community’ or integration? pp. 181-182
population was inevitable.\textsuperscript{112} In the smaller city of Coventry this level of interaction was also likely to occur and made integration the most realistic outcome.

In Coventry if integration was to occur it would commence by ‘English’ and ‘Irish’ acceptance of each other at street level. In assessing the level of acceptance it is hard to detect how fixed working class attitudes were in Coventry in the manner that Fielding described for Salford. Though much has been written on Coventry regarding municipal evolution, city personalities, and industrial developments, there has been little expounded on working-class consciousness and its judgementalism at local level. Sheldon provided some assistance of this context when she wrote that the authorities in the 1880s seeking to prosecute parents with truanting children may have targeted certain, streets or yards based on their reputation. She said not only did the attendance officers know of the ‘fine gradations of the working-class social scale’ these nuances were also known to residents of each neighbourhood even if it had a varied occupational composition.\textsuperscript{113} The degree, if any, to which these working-class residents were tolerant, classist, racist, xenophobic or anti-Catholic in attitude which would in part dictate how they might respond to the Irish living close to them is unknown.\textsuperscript{114} One telling factor is that in Coventry there was little hesitation before complaints were made before the magistrates. The absence of mention in court reports of rows between Irish and English neighbours suggests a modicum of harmony existed.\textsuperscript{115} It is suggested any potential for confrontation was lessened by the fact that as the years passed Irish families with different degrees of Irish cultural expression came to know and only select yards and streets that would be appropriate for their level of expression. Irish families that included a British-born partner may have found easier acceptance in the back-streets.

In Coventry the discerned penchant for Irish intra-city residential movement allowed their settlement pattern over time to become diffuse which in turn assisted integration. A further integrational boost derived from the fact that most ‘Irish’ children were born in Coventry (Table 5.17 showed 80.0% or 412 in 1871) and would have, given it was their homeplace, an instinctual familiarity with the essence of the city. However the most significant factor increasing the accord between the Irish and host

\textsuperscript{112} Pooley, Segregation or integration? p. 79 He pointed out that maps depicting residence are static and ‘false’ since they do not convey the daily intermixing that was likely to have occurred.

\textsuperscript{113} Sheldon, Families in the firing line, p. 27. She also remarked that families were influenced by the ‘habits’ of the street or yard. She referred to the topography of Coventry that facilitated the avoidance of detection by school attendance officers because there was behind the main streets ‘a hidden world of back-to-back houses’. It is suggested many of the post-Famine Irish liked that aspect of the city.

\textsuperscript{114} The late century infusion of workers from outside Coventry may have softened any narrow-minded attitudes of the locals.

\textsuperscript{115} Rare examples of confrontation: One incident is furnished in Appendix 2: Thomas McLean. Two incidents are furnished in Appendix 4: 15\textsuperscript{th} July 1859 and 9\textsuperscript{th} July 1876.
populations was the wide extent of intermarriage (Table 5.3 showed 51.6% of 248 married couples in 1861; 63.4% of 191 in 1871).

The smooth alignment of those of Irish heritage with the prevailing conventions of British society was assisted by the relaxed ambience of the city. In the process of alignment Coventry acted as a complaisant platform on which the Irish could persevere with those cultural and religious vestiges of significance to them. This continued opportunity for the Irish to secure cultural comfort and connection with their roots, if only on St. Patrick’s Day, maintained Irish calmness. This study outlined how Coventry induced less defensive based group cohesion. The atmosphere prompting O’Leary remarks on Wales that native ‘hostility was a powerful solvent of divisions in immigrant ranks and helped to create a context within which a new shared identity could be forged’ was absent in Coventry. This study outlined that both the power of native bitterness and intra-Irish divisional impasse were never so serious in Coventry for the former to induce a cohesion on the latter from which sprung a fresh congruent identity.

The workplace was shown to be an agent of integration. The children of the first wave, grew up identified as ‘children of weavers’ and with that common denominator and interest married the grown ‘children of weavers’ in the wider populace. Coventry’s industrial renaissance, truly manifest in the final decade of the century, crucially saw an Irish-born numerical boost which modified the vista of a relict community occurring in Coventry, similar to that recognised by Herson in prospect in Stafford by the 1920s.

The study identified the Irish in Coventry at the end of the century as comprised of a number of Irish-born who arrived in the previous decade, and by many who were born and settled in Coventry, some of whom were interested in Irish culture, and astir with enthusiasm for learning Gaelic, the most potent denotation of Irish identity. It also encountered second-generation Irish such as Charles Murray who came from Birmingham attracted by the recent upswing of industry in Coventry.

Those regarded as Irish would appear, as the century progressed, to have possessed a dual sense of being. They were not readily distinguishable as Irish if they

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116 O’Leary, Irish in Wales, p. 113
117 It was noted that the Dorans could and did become freemen of the city. McLean was involved with the weavers of Gosford Street, while James Doran was a spokesman for the workers seeking greater wages in 1871.
118 In 1861 H7C11Cox Street, Margaret Godfrey [Doran], 39, silk picker from Dublin was living with William Godfrey 40 silk weaver, and their daughter Maryann, 16, silk winder, and William, 11, all locally born. She was daughter of Thomas and Mary Doran weavers from Dublin who settled in Coventry on or before 1840 initially in Hertford Street. They are referred to extensively in Chapter 6. William lived with his parents, James, 40, weaver and Elizabeth, 40, in Freeth St in 1841. These streets were all in the one vicinity. HO107/1152.Book 8.17.29 ED 16; RG9/2201.39.12 ED 3; HO107/1152.Book 1.29.9 ED 2
chose not to display their social flourishes of Irishness and placed their religious particularity aside. It would appear they possessed what Gilley and Swift referred to as ‘curious combination of achieved Irish integration and acceptance with a surviving Irish apartness’. 119

John Denvir addressed a Coventry meeting of the Irish National league in 1889 which was chaired by second-generation Michael Burke who was born in Coventry and married to Rosannah also Coventry-born.120 In 1891 their seven children mentioned as residing with them in the census would have attended local Catholic schools; 4 were still scholars.121 A decade later the Catholic children from these schools: St. Osburg’s (total 420) and St. Mary’s (total 250) joined other children parading through Coventry on Coronation celebration day in August 1902. They sang the National Anthem in the parade led by eight massed bands. A process of inevitable change appears underway. Michael, though born in Coventry, actively recognised his Irishness which was transmitted by his Irish-born parents. His children were also born in Coventry, and though educated as Catholics and thus marked as different, time and the institutional loyalty of the Church seemed to have placed them and children like them, in common with the rest of Coventry in circumstances where British allegiance was to be taken for granted.

The ‘second generation’ is commonly regarded as an en bloc group that followed on from the Famine years’ incursionists, but the second generation was a rolling phenomenon from even before those years. Ziesler reminds that it was less than fixed as

The Standard 1st January 1864 recorded that ‘On the 25th ult, at the Roman Catholic Church Thomas Turner married Miss Ann McGowran, both of this city.’ Thomas Turner was son of Coventry-born weaver William Turner. Ann was Coventry-born daughter of Dublin-born weavers James McGowran and Ann McGowran. Her older brother was William the Liberal Councillor. Both families lived in Freeth St./Jordan Well where the children obviously knew each other and would eventually marry. In 1871 her younger brother John was a boarder with them. While the newspaper announcement followed the customary pattern the words ‘both of the city’ epitomised the reality for many migrants and their children. Ann could not be captured after 1851 by a normal census trawl seeking Irish, ‘She only came to attention because of her distinguishing family name. Coventry Standard 1st January 1864; HO107/2067.38.23 ED 2; HO107/2067.119.26 ED 6; RG9/2201.27.15 ED 2; RG10/3178.91.17 ED 35

120 Coventry Times 14th August 1889. See lengthier reference in Appendix 2 from same edition. Assuming it was the Michael Burke born in Coventry in 1849.
121 See Appendix 9. The most likely Michael Burke was a watchmaker born in Coventry in 1849 to Mayo-born labourer Peter Burke and Mayo-born Bridget. See Table 3.2. What is particularly significant is that Michael, though showing Irish identity on meeting Denvir, had through his Coventry birth and move from his parent’s home by 1871, become undetectable as an Irishcom during the normal census trawl using ‘Ireland’ as birthplace filter. Also although reared in Greyfriars Lane he was subsequently found in houses around the city, indicating the absence of any clustering mentality in the second-generation. He died in Mar 1922; leaving Charles McGowran, son of William, to take out probate. He left £266 in his will, the equivalent of £11,182 in 2018. His life shows some occupational and social mobility over his father Peter (England & Wales, National probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966. 1922, Michael Burke).
a group, and that e.g. in 1881 it could include someone born in 1875 or 1850. Those born in the latter year were much more likely to follow their father’s occupation while those in the former could take advantage of new opportunities in the job market.\textsuperscript{122} This study also found at the end of the century that few sons followed the occupation of their fathers, because they had opportunities which they took, in cycle workshops, that were not available to their fathers when young men.

Allowing for the nature of such occasions when corporates attempt to present their affairs in a favourable light, the following report at the end of the century must still have some substance. Under a headline: Coventry ‘An Anglo-Irish Town’ the \textit{Coventry Evening Telegraph} reported on the annual meeting of the Dunlop Pneumatic Tyre Company held in London.\textsuperscript{123} After completing his remarks on the financial position of the company the chairman alluded to the remarks that had been made as to the “Irish element” in the company. He said ‘this was explained by the fact that the company originated in Ireland. When the work was transferred from Dublin to Coventry, the employees all had the option of coming over to England. Coventry was now an Anglo-Irish town. A great many people would not know who were Irishmen and who were Englishmen’.\textsuperscript{124}

The Coventry setting of this study should provide a contribution to findings on the Irish in British cities by serving as a measure, devoid of the worst of those complicating variables of intolerance and influx, against which Irish in other cities may be

\textsuperscript{122} Ziesler, \textit{Irish in Birmingham}, pp. 134-135

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Coventry Evening Telegraph} 5\textsuperscript{th} July 1898; The term Anglo-Irish came to notice in 1894 when an Anglo-Irish Cycling Club was established by ‘some few energetic Irishmen and Saxon Friends [who] met together to prove the much-talked-of barrier between the races existed not, but instead a feeling of right good fellowship’. In 1896 it was said ‘They were correct in their views; the barrier between the Englishmen and Irishmen in Coventry at least, was imaginary, and since its inception the club has been noticeable mostly for the harmony existing within its ranks…’ The club which was non-political and non-sectarian had originated within the Pneumatic Tyre Co, many of whose employees were members. A club house was opened in High Street in 1896, however two years later the club appears to have been in financial difficulty. The club rooms were taken over to be run as a private club. Dr Callaghan who was involved in the running of the Anglo-Irish club became chairman of the committee running this club. (\textit{Coventry Evening Telegraph} 8\textsuperscript{th} April 1895, 24\textsuperscript{th} July 1896, 25\textsuperscript{th} February 1899).

\textsuperscript{124} The remark was made by Du Cros (See Appendix 2: Arthur DuCros). The \textit{Coventry Evening Telegraph} 6\textsuperscript{th} July 1898 took umbrage at the description of Coventry as an Anglo-Irish town. Its comment while complimentarily laced with welcome for the Irish, recognising their ‘hearty, good-humoured characteristics, the athletic prowess of many of them, and their generous participation in many of our public movements’ stated ‘we deprecate being so described [as an Anglo-Irish town]’. It continued: ‘If there is one city more essentially English than another it is the good old city of Coventry, situated as it is in the very heart of England, and retaining many of its old English features’. It concluded that on hearing Du Cros remark that in Coventry many people would not know who were Irishmen and Englishmen, it could ‘scarcely restrain a gasp of surprise’. The article may have written with tongue-in-cheek, but it is possible that the newspaper may have found such an opiniated remark from the confident Irish Du Cros entrepreneurship, who brought employment to Coventry, and who were different from the unassuming ‘Celtic Catholic Irish’ somewhat hard to digest.
examined. The elaboration in the study on the methodology used to handle the features and failings of the census source material should be of value to others in elsewhere research. Investigations of the Irish in large volumes in urban contexts lend towards generalisation and aggregated display. Advantage should be taken of the fact that the small city with its manageable scale permits, both a more comprehensive depiction of Irish experience, and precise observation of the nature of interface behaviour between migrant and host. This can make results available with a more finger-tip sifted quality. This study concurs with Herson that interpreting the experience of the Irish within a family framework is the key to understanding Irish settlement and to unlocking the subtleties within the Irish-born mass.

Studies on Irish nineteenth century migrants, have been produced in such a variety of formats and styles that it raises for question what scale, pitch and depth of investigation, most fittingly conveys the ultimate truth of Irish migrant experience. Generalised works it has been suggested have a greater likelihood of referring to the ‘Irish’ in collective terms and that it may be first-generation Irish-born Famine migrants they are contemplating on when referring to these ‘Irish’. The focus of many locally based studies lies within the frame of 1845 to 1870, and perhaps a decade on either side. This was a time of particular urban and social upheaval, of religious zeal and resentment, and when British national identity was strengthened. In these heightened circumstances, and given the migrants’ voluminous intrusion, residential plight, and othering, historical accounts of Irish settlement have been largely grim in their telling. There are many such studies concerned with this desolate period which may lend weight to the fallacious impression that their findings represented the very quintessence of Irish experience for the entire century.

125 The provision of context was of importance to this study. There was awareness also of the risk in the presentation of statistics, that too severe a dichotomic relationship between Irish and host might be portrayed. There was at heart an imbalance in the comparison between the Irish and host population figures which ranged over the period from being 50 to 170 the size of the Irish-born population. The latter may also have been too readily assumed to be overtly uniform, stable and pecunious compared to the restiveness of Irish settlement.

126 Herson, Migration, 'community' or integration? p. 160. Herson in his later work took a wide view of who qualified to be included in a family.

127 When commenting in 1993 on the targeting of studies on the period 1845-1870 MacRaild accounted for the tight period focus as the result of the limited availability of census enumeration books due to the 100 year rule. He noted academic interest can be stimulated by the arresting nature of epic migrations. Scholarly attention was drawn to interpret the great numerical impact of the Famine on Britain with those fleeing from it intensifying the powerful negative images which the British already had of the Irish. Study was not protracted to the later century because the numbers migrating to Britain in that period were low, and owing to the presumption that the Irish had become assimilated. (D.M. MacRaild, Review of Steven Fielding Class and Ethnicity: Irish Catholics in England, 1880-1939, Labour History Review, Vol. 58, No. 2, Autumn 1993 pp. 44, 47).
Drawing on examples of Irish reactions, perhaps of different vintage, from a variety of locations, some the product of excited local circumstances e.g. Stopfordian riots, or the outcome of bespoke study e.g. Wulfrunian crime, or in descriptions of establishment minded writers e.g. Mancunian Irish squalour, a representation of Irish migrant experience may be confected that is larger than the sum of its parts. Selected examples from cities may leave a global impression of police or judicial prejudice towards the Irish; bias which was not apparent in Coventry. Research centred on areas containing large numbers of Irish may provide conclusions on cultural vibrancy or residential isolation that may only exist, or have been sustained in those areas by virtue of those numbers.\textsuperscript{128} A large city with large Irish numbers is more likely to be able to supply evidence based answers on its experience than a smaller city. In addition, the absence of in-depth accounts may leave the impression that the small city did not have any matters of interest or concern and that such were only a feature in the large city. Roberts picked up in Manchester the irritation of long resident Irish migrants caused by the embarrassing antics of unsocialised newer Irish arrivals.\textsuperscript{129} There was a similar incursive wave of Irish in late century Coventry, but while there is no evidence to show that it caused resentment among longer resident Irish, meaning cannot be taken from absence of validation either.\textsuperscript{130}

Large volume cities may have had a variable character of welcome or hostility and may have had periods of trade and industrial expansion or stagnation; the period from whence Irish examples are taken from these cities can influence perception. Again, large Irish numbers were found in metropolises which may have experienced issues unique to such cities due to the very size of their metropolitan population; problems such as pressure on accommodation that then shaped a particular Irish response. Or such cities may have had class or employment traditions particular to themselves. Fielding forwarded the view that couples did not marry outside their religion in Manchester.\textsuperscript{131} This may have been the practice that occurred there, not only as the result of its expected promotion by the Church, but because it was feasible due to the large number of Catholics in the city and the presence of Irish clubs where Catholics had the

\textsuperscript{128} Fielding observed that a large community might provoke more hostility but it would also promote the development of ethnic institutions that would shield migrants from its force. (Steven Fielding, \textit{Class and Ethnicity}, pp. 27, 43).
\textsuperscript{129} Roberts, \textit{The Classic Slum}, p. 110. See Appendix 19.
\textsuperscript{130} In Birmingham an inspector of the borough police told the manager of a licensed house that, if meetings of the Land League continued to be held in his house, the license would be opposed in due course. Whereon the League was refused permission by the manager to meet in the premises. (\textit{Dublin Weekly Nation} 3\textsuperscript{rd} December 1881). Such officious behaviour by the police might have also occurred in Coventry even though no record of it exists.
\textsuperscript{131} Steven Fielding, \textit{Class and Ethnicity}, p. 71
opportunity to find a partner.\textsuperscript{132} Whereas in Coventry the same sized availability of Catholic potential marriage partners was not available so relationships may as a result have not only crossed ethnic groupings but also religious ones.\textsuperscript{133}

This study makes the case that authenticity, especially over the long-term, is best served by more exemplification from micro-studies based on the reveal of a number of censuses within an agreed common research format. Stemming from the experience of this study a strategy to increase inter-study compatibility would along with other issues, determine who in the census would be considered Irish, settle on the enumeration book area as the base unit of spatial expression and embrace family as the unit of focus.

This study promotes the desirability of greater articulation around family transition, as revealed by the census and shown in this study, as a direction for the future. This pathway, particularly where a centurial span for investigation is mooted, appears to offer fruitful understandings on migrant processes of settlement and adaptation. It may offer insight into family structure that gave migrants support and facilitated cultural continuance outside of clustered conditions. In terms of migrant mobility it may inform on whether their prolonged settlement in an urbanity remains a function of employment availability, or due to roots having been set down.\textsuperscript{134} It is to be realized that in the pursuance of household data, locked in the census, the rich insights it releases are only slowly obtained by patient squeezing. The value of this process may in the critical academic balance, sadly be outweighed by short-sighted claims that the pursuit of household data is a mundane task, with management and presentation of unwieldy data an issue, and as a process lacking intellectual reach and capacity to provide ebullient conclusions.\textsuperscript{135}

The study has demonstrated the distinctive character of the small city and acknowledged its policemen, clergy, industrialists, opinion formers and notability that integrally influenced the response to its Irish townspeople. The circumstances of some prominent citizens with discreet Irish connections e.g. John Gulson, Coventry’s foremost citizen was married to an Irish-born, as was another mayor, of eight occasions,

\textsuperscript{132} Fielding refers to the social disapproval that prevented Protestants from marrying Catholics, and draws attention to Roberts (\textit{The Classic Slum}) remark that even Protestant slum dwellers felt marrying a Catholic was beneath them. (Ibid., p. 71). No evidence of such disapproval could be found in Coventry.
\textsuperscript{133} This study cannot provide the religious affiliation of marriage partners but it showed in Table 5.3 that intermarriage was common. However some of these British-born partners may have been second generation Irish.
\textsuperscript{134} Even if effort nowhere approaches the heroic scale of Herson’s lifelong work laid out in \textit{Divergent Paths}.
\textsuperscript{135} Tables 5.14 and 6.5 serve as examples of data appearing as if in an unwieldy assemblage. Yet the reality is they have been carefully cast, to best display information, that has been highly honed from a large body of scattered census material, in order to reveal, as they do, migrant process, and interaction between Irish and Non-Irish at their Coventry interface.
Albert Tomson, must have had some influence, however intangible, on how the nineteenth century Irish-born were perceived.\textsuperscript{136} The prestige of Irish-born persons materializes in Tables 5.25 and 6.12 when a social Class 1 or 2 filter is applied to census details.

The study showed that Irish-born personages and their occupational activities, certainly in the higher social echelons, had altered much over a half-century, as perusal of recently mentioned Table 5.25 and it continuation Table 6.12 reveals. It provided evidence that there emerged over time what Swift and Gilley described as a ‘rich yet diverse migrant culture within which a variety of Irish identities coexisted’.\textsuperscript{137} Heinrick’s observation in 1872 that saw the Irish as subaltern victims where they were mostly the ‘hewers of wood and the drawers of water’ does not represent the fullness of their encounter with Coventry. Many of the Irish in Coventry would not, as Inglis remarked of the Irish in England, have remained stranded in the lowest stratum of society, out of which they seldom lifted.\textsuperscript{138} While no doubt, especially due to the onset of old age, a number would be found in straitened circumstances, later generations appeared to have satisfactorily advanced from the lumpen circumstances of some in the post-Famine years to a general correspondence in occupational class with the host.\textsuperscript{139} The fillip to Coventry fortunes due to the success of the cycle and follow-on industry was particularly important in giving equal entry to steady employment and potential for material advance to the generations that succeeded the Famine-time arrivals.

Table 6.13 showed 37.2\% averaged over 1881-1901 of male-Irish married heads of _Irish Households_ were in occupations Class 3.\textsuperscript{140} With reservation already expressed about the level of skill that could find itself meriting Class 3 inclusion, it shows the progress of the Irish. However the extent of such progress would be confined as Fielding reminded when he referred to the rigidity of England’s class divisions: ‘Movement between classes was rarely accomplished, whatever the individual’s ethnic background…any improvement [of majority of Irish] was achieved within the working class.’\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{136} Both of their wives were also prominent in their own right. Second-generation Basil Riley also featured among notable Coventry citizenry (Appendix 2).

\textsuperscript{137} Swift, Identifying the Irish in Victorian Britain, p. 2

\textsuperscript{138} K.S. Inglis, _Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England_, (London 1963) p. 121

\textsuperscript{139} O’Day, Survey of the Irish, p. 39

\textsuperscript{140} These percentages represent Irish-born (a relatively reduced total in 1881 but a higher total in 1901 due to the arrival of fresh immigrants), however the local-born Irish may have had even greater representation in this Class.

\textsuperscript{141} Steven Fielding, _Class and Ethnicity_, p. 30
Coventry was shown to present aspects of a typical midland Victorian city. It also had to Irish advantage a moderate population and compact areal size that helped give it a ‘small-town’ intimacy. It possessed a community spirit that was only recognised to have been present and of value when it had been lost at century end.\textsuperscript{142} To the Irish its parochial sociability was a comforting replication of that found in provincial Irish towns. The collapse of 1860 reduced the numbers of Irish to a ratio with the total population figure that was more conducive to harmony and incorporation rather than social detachment. Coventry had a particular location that created its own outcomes for the Irish. It seemed beyond the force of the rollout from the intense Famine influx zone of Lancashire. Adjacency to regionally significant Birmingham relieved Coventry of its unsettled Irish, and also drew away virulent preachers with their potential to create tension.

This study relied heavily on two sources, the census and city newspapers. The former showed aggregated details of interest e.g. the balance between Irish-born and local-born Irish was heavily in favour of the latter even at mid-century. In data terms at least, the ‘Irish’ quickly became largely a comprisal of those born locally. Aspinwall and McCaffrey remarked: ‘The problem with immigrant studies is that groups have to be examined in aggregates so that they become ‘the Irish’…but their story has to be considered as the sum of individual experience’\textsuperscript{143}. Thus this study was keen to render from the census more than ‘Irish’ totals, which may lend to a supposition of Irish homogeneity. It was also wary of the production and comparison of ‘street’ totals, since such summations could not take adequate account of the fact many streets might have harboured two differing social-status layers, one comprised of those in street-fronting houses and the other from those in the courtyards directly behind. The study domain of Coventry contained both a relatively moderate size city population and a modest Irish one; it was of a dimension that facilitated interrogation of the census in order to provide results arranged at a more intimate household level. It was to show the importance of the family as the stabilising unit for many whose destiny it was to become Coventry Irish.

While the census can assist in determining the character of Irish diversity, by supplying data on regional origin in Ireland and on occupations, it little facilitates, assessment of the issue that perhaps most interests the nineteenth century historian. That relates to the nature of the identity of subsequent generations. The evidence regarding

\textsuperscript{142} ‘The City of Coventry: Social history from 1700’, pp. 222-241
this which the census provides relates only to occupations, mixed marriages, and
birthplace. It is too elemental and static in form to provide deep insight into the sense of
identity held, or degree of acculturation undergone by follow-on generations. Herson, in
a phrase that combined astuteness and succinctness, construed this process as involving
‘the replacement of Irish identity by a more neutral Irish heritage’.\textsuperscript{144} Given census
disobligement of evidence on the matter, it is hoped that newspaper archives have been
quarried sufficiently, not only to extract information on the city’s compact ambience for
context, but also to allow this study to illustrate how tempered Irish identity had become
by the end of the century.

\textsuperscript{144} Herson, \textit{Divergent paths}, p. 304
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