

University of Bristol

Department of Historical Studies

Best undergraduate dissertations of
2011

Matthew Smith

'The ready made nucleus of degradation
and disorder': an examination of Irish
criminality in Victorian Bristol in 1881

The Department of Historical Studies at the University of Bristol is committed to the advancement of historical knowledge and understanding, and to research of the highest order. We believe that our undergraduates are part of that endeavour.

In June 2009, the Department voted to begin to publish the best of the annual dissertations produced by the department's final year undergraduates (deemed to be those receiving a mark of 75 or above) in recognition of the excellent research work being undertaken by our students.

This was one of the best of this year's final year undergraduate dissertations.

Please note: this dissertation is published in the state it was submitted for examination. Thus the author has not been able to correct errors and/or departures from departmental guidelines for the presentation of dissertations (e.g. in the formatting of its footnotes and bibliography).

© The author, 2011.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means without the prior permission in writing of the author, or as expressly permitted by law.

All citations of this work must be properly acknowledged.

‘The readymade nucleus of degradation and disorder: An examination of Irish criminality in Victorian Bristol in 1881’

Chapter 1 - Introduction

In 1839 Thomas Carlyle wrote that ‘in his squalor and unreason, in his falsity and drunken violence’ that the Irishman constituted ‘the readymade nucleus of degradation and disorder’.¹ This much quoted view was synonymous with contemporary opinion of the Irish in Victorian Britain throughout the nineteenth century. The belief that the Irish were harbingers of crime and disorder was not novel and negative stereotypes of the ‘brutalised paddy’ can be found entrenched in English popular opinion throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For example David Hume’s influential *‘History of England’* published in the 1750s described the Irish from the beginning of time as being ‘buried in the most profound barbarism and ignorance’.² The Irish potato famine from 1845-52 and the mass migration that followed throughout the nineteenth century served to intensify these popular prejudices. Cormac O’Grada estimates that by the end of the nineteenth century nearly 5 million people left Ireland, with between one fifth and one quarter arriving in Britain.³ The vast majority of these migrants were poor, jobless and homeless, and the Irish rapidly became negatively associated with the squalor, degradation, disease and crime which were at the forefront of the ‘condition of England’ question in the second half of the nineteenth century; with Frederick Engels describing the Irish as ‘uncivilised’, ‘dissolute’, and ‘volatile’.⁴

The Irish were seen by Victorians as the ‘social, economic, political and religious outcasts of Victorian urban society’⁵, and it is clear that the popular link between Irish immigration and crime was a component in the formation of this negative Irish stereotype. Moreover it is clear that these stereotypes had some basis in reality, as judicial statistics for England and Wales from 1861-1901 indicate that the Irish were on average five times as likely to be committed to prison than their English contemporaries.⁶ Whether it be as drunken

¹ Swift, R. ‘Another Stafford Street Row: Law, Order and the Irish presence in mid-Victorian Wolverhampton.’ in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* pp179

² Livingstone, K. *Nothing but the same old story: The Roots of Anti-Irish Racism* pp36

³ Davis, G., *The Irish in Britain 1815-1914* pp11

⁴ Engels, F *The Condition of the Working Class in England* pp107

⁵ Pooley, C.G., ‘Segregation or integration? The residential experience of the Irish in mid-Victorian Britain’, in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. (eds), *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939* pp60

⁶ Swift, R ‘Heroes or Villains?: The Irish, Crime, and Disorder in Victorian England’ in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal concerned with British studies*, Vol. 29 No. 3 pp404

vagrants, Fenian monsters or as primitive Celts, throughout the nineteenth century the Irish and crime were inescapably linked in both popular minds and to a large extent also in reality.

Despite contemporary opinion on the link between the Irish and crime, analysis of Irish criminality in Britain has been a relatively understudied field when compared to burgeoning historiography of the Irish Diaspora as a whole. Roger Swift has been the only historian of the Irish Diaspora to try and provide a comprehensive overview of Irish criminality; however he himself acknowledges that his work does in no way provide a definitive synthesis.⁷ Instead assessments of Irish criminality have been restricted to a small number of case studies looking at the relationship of the Irish and crime in particular towns.

These studies have shown that the Irish experience and relationship with crime in one city was never the same in another. Neal's study of Liverpool emphasizes the importance of sectarian violence in causing disorder and highlights how the Irish continued to be well overrepresented in criminal statistics well into the twentieth century.⁸ In contrast Swift has found that in Wolverhampton sectarianism played a much smaller role, instead Irish overrepresentation in criminal statistics was more the result of external economic factors, and that by 1870 the Wolverhampton Irish had become more integrated and evidence of Irish overrepresentation was declining.⁹ Paul Mulkern has found that in Coventry, one of the country's less industrialised cities, Irish disorder was limited to drunken fights and rows among Irish labourers, and that whilst the Irish accounted for a substantially higher proportion of public order offences than their percentage of the city, by late 1860s this had largely subsided and they were remarkably well integrated.¹⁰ Frances Finnegan finds a similar situation in York, in which she argues that the propensity for the Irish to be overrepresented in criminal statistics was down to their socio economic position not ethnicity; 'considering the continuing poverty of their successors in the city, their disproportionate, though diminishing contribution to crime, is perhaps hardly surprising.'¹¹

⁷ Swift, R 'Crime and the Irish in nineteenth century Britain', in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. (eds), *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939* pp164

⁸ Neal, F. *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience 1819-1914*

⁹ Swift, R. 'Another Stafford Street Row: Law, Order and the Irish presence in mid-Victorian Wolverhampton.' in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* pp198-199

¹⁰ Mulkern, P. 'Irish Immigrants and Public Disorder in Coventry 1845-1875' in *Midland History*, Volume 21 pp130

¹¹ Finnegan, F. *Poverty and Prejudice: A study of Irish Immigrants in York 1840-1975* pp154

Whilst these studies have provided extremely important insights into Irish criminality there still remains significant gaps within the field to be explored. Swift highlights that ‘our understanding of Irish disorder beyond South Lancashire and the West Midlands is at best patchy’ and that ‘there is ample scope for the study of less serious Irish disorder, particularly in towns and regions whose immigrant populations have not, thus far, received a great deal of attention.’¹² One of the most important areas yet to be analysed by historians looking at Irish criminality is the south west, and in particular the port city of Bristol. Despite its proximity to Ireland, passenger links to the important Irish cities of Cork, Dublin and Waterford, and containing a significant Irish population, Bristol has been significantly undervalued in the study of the Irish Diaspora and has been the subject of only three published individual works, none of which deal directly with the relationship between the Irish and crime in the city.

This study therefore shall address this gap and contribute a detailed and original study of Irish criminality in Bristol. It remains impossible within the limits of this study to provide a comprehensive overview of Irish criminality in Bristol throughout the whole of the nineteenth century and this study does not aim to provide this. Instead, through an examination of prison records, census data, contemporary press reports and social commentaries, this study aims to provide a snapshot of Irish criminality in Bristol in 1881; adding to both historical understanding of the Bristol Irish, and to the wider understanding of the Irish experience in Britain.

Despite having a significant Irish population, the Bristol Irish are one of the least studied of the major Victorian cities. Dresser and Fleming have shown how the Irish constituted an important minority in the city throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They highlight how the majority of the Irish were unskilled and ‘competed with the English poor for the worst jobs in the city’ and particularly after 1815, were stereotyped as a ‘rough community, prone to drunkenness and violence’¹³. Large’s study of census enumeration records from 1851 concentrates on the settlement patterns and occupations of the Irish. He identifies the Irish as a sizable minority in the immediate post famine period, and that two thirds of the Irish lived in the poor slum areas around the ancient city.¹⁴ Furthermore Large identifies that the chief occupation of the Irish in 1851 was

¹² Swift, R ‘Heroes or Villains?: The Irish, Crime, and Disorder in Victorian England’ in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal concerned with British studies*, Vol. 29 No. 3 pp415

¹³ Dresser, M & Fleming, P. *Bristol ethnic minorities and the city 1000-2001* Pp76

¹⁴ Large, D., ‘The Irish in Bristol in 1851’ in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* pp40

labouring, and whilst there was no Irish ghetto there was a distinct tendency for the Irish to concentrate in particular streets in courts.¹⁵

What is clear from both these studies is that in the Irish constituted a sizeable minority well into the mid Victorian period, moreover that these Irish were much like those in other British cities of the time, largely poor, living in the worst areas and either unemployed or undertaking in unskilled labour. My own study of Irish settlement and labour patterns from the 1881 census data however has shown that by 1881 the numbers of Irish in Bristol had dwindled, and among those that remained there was evidence of upward social mobility. Unlike in 1851, the Irish were increasing spread out across the city, with the highest concentration of migrants in one parish only 15%, and were partaking in not only unskilled labour, but also semi skilled and some skilled jobs.¹⁶ Together these studies give the impression of an Irish population which was innately poor and segregated in pre famine and immediate post famine period, yet which by 1881 had undergone significant socioeconomic mobility and had become increasingly integrated into the host population.

In light of these findings it therefore becomes important to look at other aspects of the Irish, outside of the census data, in detail. Dresser and Large mention Irish criminality, Dresser notes the Irish had a reputation for being ‘the roughest of Bristol’s rough working class’,¹⁷ and Large tentatively suggests the Irish were overrepresented in the Bristol gaol. However neither offers an acceptable measurement of the degree of Irish criminality in Bristol. The usefulness of analysing Irish criminality in Bristol in 1881 is therefore twofold. Firstly by specifically analysing Irish criminality and disorder in Bristol this study is focusing on an important aspect of Irish social history in Bristol which other studies have only dealt with tentatively. Secondly by situating this study in 1881, this study can also provide further qualitative evidence that by 1881 the Irish were becoming increasingly integrated in Bristol host community. Moreover this study aims to add to the growing literature on the diversity of the Irish experience in Britain. By looking specifically at Irish criminality in a city which is outside the major centres of Liverpool, Manchester, London and Glasgow, this study will support the argument that Irish ethnicity was mutative and was transformed as a result of differing socioeconomic and cultural factors.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Smith, M. ‘Integration or segregation: An analysis residential settlement patterns in late Victorian Bristol from 1881 census enumeration records.’ Unpublished BA History Special Field Project, University of Bristol, pp14

¹⁷ Dresser, M & Fleming, P. *Bristol ethnic minorities and the city 1000-2001* Pp119

Studies of Irish criminality in Britain have not followed one particular set methodology; each study had been limited by the availability and condition of primary sources. Neal and Mulkern both rely on local press reports of crime, and the frequency of the Irish in these reports to trace the levels and type of Irish crime, whilst Finnegan's work on York, Swift's work on Wolverhampton and Lowe's work on Lancashire towns have used quarter sessions and magistrate's records to assess the overrepresentation of the Irish in crime.

The availability of records in Bristol is not perfect, magistrate records and quarter sessions which have been used in other towns unfortunately make no reference to the nationality of those in court. However Bristol does possess a complete and accurate register of all those who were under trial before being committed to its prison in Horfield 1881 - 1923. These records provide detailed information of the offence, sentence, occupation, nationality and religion of those who were trialled, and is extremely useful in providing a picture of both the extent and nature of Irish crime in Bristol. It will enable me to determine the numbers of Irish in prison compared to non Irish, and therefore establish the overrepresentation of the Irish in crime. It will also be able to establish what crimes the Irish most commonly committed, and how this compares with the most commonly committed of all the prisoners. Moreover through an analysis of the occupations of both the Irish and the non Irish prison population I will be able to see the extent to which criminality was related to socio economic factors rather than ethnicity. The prison data however is not without its pitfalls. In 1881 many of the Irish in Bristol would be second generation and therefore whilst they would have been perceived in Bristol as culturally Irish, on the prison data they will appear as English. This is one of the most common problems that historians face when looking at Diaspora studies, and some historians have suggested using Roman Catholic as a proxy for Irish. However Bristol's Irish population in 1881 contains both Catholic and Protestant Irish, and equally the English population in Bristol is by no means exclusively Protestant. Whilst it is evident that many of the second generation Irish in the records may be Roman Catholic, using Roman Catholic numbers as a substitute for Irish is too inaccurate for we can only speculate the actual number Catholics who would be perceived as culturally Irish.

Thus in order to provide a more accurate picture of Irish criminality this study shall support the prison records with several supplementary sources. It will cross reference the prison records with census data from 1881, allowing me to compare the two data sets and

establish the overrepresentation of the Irish. Most importantly information from the census on the socio-economic position of the Irish in Bristol will help in explaining the relationship between the Irish and crime in Bristol. This study shall also examine a number of contemporary sources. Press reports from *The Bristol Mercury* will provide an overview of how the Irish and crime were perceived in Bristol, providing a useful comparison to other studies of press reports in different towns. Furthermore information from 1884 '*Report On The Condition Of The Bristol Poor*', and from the Bristol philanthropist Mary Carpenter's work on the education of destitute children in Bristol, will be used to provide both a picture of how the Irish and Irish crime were perceived.

This study will be split into several chapters. Firstly through an analysis of contemporary press reports and other sources of contemporary opinion outlined above the study will build up a basic picture of how Irish crime and the Irish in Bristol in general were viewed in the second half of the nineteenth century. Secondly I shall undertake a basis analysis of the prison records, establishing the extent to which the Irish were overrepresented in records of crime, and comparing this with other studies of Irish criminality. Thirdly through looking at the crimes committed by both Irish and non Irish I shall determine the extent to which the Irish were well known for particular offences, assessing how this fits with other historical observations of Irish crime. Fourthly through an analysis of the occupations of both the Irish and non Irish in prison, and through cross referencing with census data I shall argue that socioeconomic factors not ethnicity was the prime determinant of crime in Bristol. Lastly I shall tie my research together and offer explanations, focussing on the unique position of the Irish in Bristol, and arguing that Irish criminality in Bristol in 1881 is a representation of their increasing integration into the host community. This chapter shall also place my study in the context of the Irish Diaspora as a whole, validating the argument that the Irish experience was extremely diverse and is in no way as homogenous as contemporary commentators such as Thomas Carlyle would have us believe.

Chapter 2 - Contemporary Perceptions of the Irish in Bristol in 1881

Contemporary perceptions of the Irish and Irish crime in the 19th century are seen by Historians as being largely negative, as Swift outlines ‘contemporary Victorians saw the link between Irish immigration, crime and disorder in England as axiomatic’.¹⁸ Before analysis of Irish criminality in Bristol it is therefore first important to understand how the Irish were viewed specifically in Bristol around 1881.

Press reports had a formative role in both the creation and representation of anti-Irish discourse. The press was vital for the dissemination of information about events happening both locally and abroad and local newspapers were the primary source of news for most readers. The press therefore provides an important starting point in evaluating contemporary opinions of the Irish as it provides a clear picture of the state of anti Irish discourse. For example Frances Finnegan study of Irish crime in York highlights how newspaper reports described the Irish as ‘riotous mobs’ with headlines such as ‘another Irish riot’¹⁹. Equally national newspapers such as *The Times* reported unfavourably on crimes committed by the Irish, one instance reporting on a crime in 1850 states that ‘a fearful outrage by a band of Irish immigrants has taken place, a beer shop was sacked, its inmates maltreated, two police officers frightfully beaten; and an inoffensive Englishman so injured that he expired at the general infirmary.’²⁰

However reports in the *Bristol Mercury* 1876-1884, four years either side of my study, lie in stark contrast to the prejudice and often blatant racism exhibited in national and other local newspapers. Instead the *Bristol Mercury* exhibits a large indifference towards the Irish. Mentions of the Irish within the paper in the period are largely confined to reports on the situation on the Irish mainland, focusing on the issues of Home Rule and The Irish Land Act. Specific reports on crime within the *Bristol Mercury* made no mention towards the ethnicity of the perpetrators. The only time that the nationality of a perpetrator is mentioned is the article ‘An Irish Murder near Birmingham’ in December 1880; however whilst indentifying that the culprit was an ‘Irish labourer’ and that the murder was ‘connected to a supposed Fenian outrage at Sheffield’, it is only repeating a report from the *Birmingham*

¹⁸ Swift, R ‘Heroes or Villains?: The Irish, Crime, and Disorder in Victorian England’ in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal concerned with British studies*, Vol. 29 No. 3 pp399

¹⁹ Finnegan, F. *Poverty and Prejudice: A study of Irish Immigrants in York 1840-1975* pp135

²⁰ ‘Riot Robbery and Murder and Leeds’ *The Times*, November 22, 1850

Post, and the paper stops short of describing the Irishman in question negatively.²¹ Instead *The Bristol Mercury* can actually be seen to be positively reporting the Irish in Bristol. It reports of meeting of ‘The Irish Society’ at the Victoria Rooms, a national philanthropic society aimed at educating Irish speaking people both with England and Ireland, outlining that the master of the association had ‘spoke of the support which the society has received in from Clifton and Bristol’.²² Similarly the paper reports on ‘*The Distressed Irish Ladies Influential Meeting in Clifton*’, highlighting how a meeting was held in Clifton, including the Mayor and two local MPs, which agreed to raise and donate money from the inhabitants of Bristol and Clifton for relief of distressed ladies in Ireland.²³ These two reports indicate that far from being a hot bed of anti-Irish sentiment Bristol appears rather sympathetic toward the plight in Ireland and the willingness of organisations to both hold their meetings in Bristol, and to fundraise in Bristol indicates that the anti Irish discourse so strongly exhibited in other cities throughout England may not be evident in Bristol in 1881.

The Bristol Mercury can also be seen to be actively promoting qualities of the Irish. In an article titled ‘*Irish Lace Making*’ published in January 1884, the paper commends the skills that many of the Irish possess, ‘proof of the ability and taste of the race as it exists is visible everywhere’, arguing that an exhibition of Irish lace making in Bristol ‘afforded an opportunity for a display of skill in embroidery, of which many Irish women avail themselves’.²⁴ Furthermore the paper in an article entitled ‘*Irish Patriotism*’, reprints an Irish nationalist poem from the paper ‘*The Nation*’ along with the papers claims that it will ‘warm every true man’s heart’. Rather than immediately dismissing the poem, *The Bristol Mercury* lets the reader make his own judgement; ‘in what direction their hearts will be warmed – if they are warmed at all – readers must judge for themselves.’²⁵ What emerges from the study of *The Bristol Mercury* is that its reports and commentary are far from the anti-Irish prejudice found in other papers at the time. It does not link crime in Bristol to the Irish, instead the presenting a balanced and more often than not neutral opinion of the Irish.

This contemporary opinion of the Irish in Bristol is also supported by other sources at the time. The 1884 ‘*Report into the condition of the Bristol Poor*’, commissioned by the

²¹ ‘An Irish Murder near Birmingham’ *The Bristol Mercury and daily Post*, December 11th 1880

²² ‘The Irish Society’ *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, May 14th 1878

²³ ‘Distressed Irish Ladies Influential Meeting in Clifton’ *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, February 2nd 1882

²⁴ ‘Irish Lace Making’ *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, January 24th 1884.

²⁵ ‘Irish Patriotism’ *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, March 22nd 1879.

clergy of Bristol to enquire into the condition of the poorest classes in Bristol makes no specific reference to the Irish poor.²⁶ Despite the Irish occupying up between 5-15% of the population in some of the poorest parishes,²⁷ the report does not distinguish between the Irish and the non Irish poor. In the chapter titled ‘Intemperance’ dealing with the drinking among the lower classes, something which the Irish are strongly linked with in Victorian society, the report whilst outlining that ‘poverty immorality and crime are largely brought about by drunkenness’, identifies this as a issues which infects the lower class as a whole and makes no reference ethnic differences related to drinking or drink related crime.²⁸

The closest contemporary accounts of Irish crime to 1881 in Bristol come from the philanthropist Mary Carpenter, who helped educate children of the lowest classes in Bristol throughout the second half of the 19th Century. Carpenter’s paper to the 1861 ‘Select Committee on the Education of Destitute Children’ sights that ‘the bulk of the (Irish) families are known thieves; they keep in a gang together and in fact they rule the city, for the police dare not meddle with them’.²⁹ What is important to remember however is that Carpenter’s writings come from her experiences in Bristol in the 1850s, a time when the population of the Irish was twice the percentage of the population (3.4%) than it was in 1881 (1.7%) and in the aftermath of the migration of poor unskilled Irish into Bristol, a period in which they would of been much more heavily concentrated in the poorest areas, and much more likely to be driven to crime. By 1881, twenty years after Carpenter’s report and thirty years since the main period of Irish migration into Bristol, not only had the Irish population decreased, but there was also increasing evidence of upward social mobility among the Irish.³⁰

What emerges from the contemporary accounts around 1881 is a picture of the Irish in Bristol which belies the usual negative discourse which surrounded the Irish migrants and in particular Irish crime at the time. When compared to other cities of the time the frequency of pro-Irish meetings reported in Bristol coupled with the media neutrality towards Irish grievances give the impression of an Irish population that are better integrated into the host

²⁶ Committee to Inquire into the Condition of the Bristol Poor. *Report of the Committee (appointed February 8th, 1884) to inquire into the condition of the Bristol Poor*

²⁷ Smith, M. *Integration or segregation: An analysis residential settlement patterns in late Victorian Bristol from 1881 census enumeration records.* pp6

²⁸ ²⁸ Committee to Inquire into the Condition of the Bristol Poor. *Report of the Committee (appointed February 8th, 1884) to inquire into the condition of the Bristol Poor* pp70-86

²⁹ Manton, J. *Mary Carpenter And The Children Of The Streets* pp74

³⁰ Smith, M. *Integration or segregation: An analysis residential settlement patterns in late Victorian Bristol from 1881 census enumeration records.* pp8

population than elsewhere. It appears that in the last quarter of the century contemporary opinion in Bristol did not define the Irish and crime as symptomatic of each other. This lack of ethnic stereotyping in both the reports into the poor and in local newspapers indicates social problems in the city, including crime, could be seen by contemporaries as a result of socio economic factors and not ethnicity. This therefore provides a useful starting point for analysis of the prison data and directs my analysis towards two key questions. To what extent did the realities of Irish crime in Bristol represent the apparent contemporary opinion? How far can Irish crime and crime in general in Bristol be attributed to socio-economic factors rather than ethnicity?

Chapter 3 - Initial Analysis of the Prison Records

Between 1st January 1881 and 31st December 1881 a total of 2250 people were committed to the Horfield Prison Record Book. This book was an accurate register of all those who were under trial before being committed to the Bristol prison in Horfield, fined, or released. Of the 2250 records, the Irish accounted for 152 of these, 6.8% of the total population, with the English accounting for 2009 (89.2%) and all other nationalities accounting for 82 (3.7%).³¹ When used in conjunction with the census data from 1881, what becomes immediately clear is that the Irish are overrepresented in the prison statistics, accounting for 6.8% of the prison records, yet only 1.7% of the total population for Bristol.³²

The overrepresentation of the Irish in the crime figures comes as a small surprise given the impression of contemporary opinion found from the newspapers and reports around 1881. Contrary to the lack of evidence of a link between the Irish and crime the raw data suggests that the Bristol Irish in 1881 were more likely to be involved in crime than the rest of the population, an analysis more in line with that found in other cities with Irish populations. However whilst the Irish are overrepresented it is too simplistic to suggest that this represents that there was an ethnic link between the Irish and crime. Firstly the percentage of the Irish in records, 6.8%, is nowhere near as high as the 40% cited by Neal in Liverpool in 1848 when the Irish only accounted for 25% of the population;³³ similarly it is not as high as the 16% found in York in 1871.³⁴ Whilst it is fair to say that the figure for Liverpool is bound to be higher both as it was the epicentre for Irish migration in Britain and was recorded in the 1850s when Irish crime was at its height across Britain, York was a town of similar size Irish population to Bristol and only ten years earlier than this study. Thus it is important to recognise that whilst the Irish are overrepresented in Bristol, the percentage involved in crime is not as high as that found in other cities. Moreover Swift identifies that the Judicial Statistics for England and Wales 1861-1901 indicate that in 1881 Irish born prisoners occupied 12% of all committals³⁵, and thus the percentage of Irish in the crime statistics in Bristol is not as high as the national average.

³¹ Horfield Prison Management Record: Nominal Register, (Vol 1 1881-1882)

³² 1881 Census for England and Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man

³³ Neal, F. *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience 1819-1914* pp111

³⁴ Finnegan, F. *Poverty and Prejudice: A study of Irish Immigrants in York 1840-1975* pp133

³⁵ Swift, R 'Crime and the Irish in nineteenth century Britain', in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. (eds), *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939* pp402

It is possible to explain this simply by the fact that the Irish occupied a relatively smaller number of the population in Bristol in 1881 compared to other cities, for example whilst York has roughly the same amount of Irish they occupied a higher percentage of the population (7.2%)³⁶. Thus the Irish whilst occupying less of the population, were just as likely as the Irish in other cities to commit crime more often than the native population. However this explanation it lies in contrast to the press reports which contradict the image of Irish overrepresentation in crime. It therefore is important to examine factors as to why the Irish might be overrepresented outside of their ethnicity.

One important explanation is the socio economic position of the Irish in Bristol in 1881. J Tobias outlines how the majority crime in large cities in Victorian Britain was contained within a ‘criminal class’ made up of the unemployed destitute and lower classes,³⁷ and that ‘Bristol seems in a small way to have shared the characteristics of London and Liverpool’³⁸. Furthermore Swift outlines how there was general discrimination and police prejudice against the criminal sections of working class society,³⁹ a view supported by the Mary Carpenter who argues ‘whatever moral delinquency exists in the higher and middle classes of society the avenging hand of the law falls almost exclusively on the lower class.’⁴⁰ Whilst I have identified that the by 1881 some of the Irish in Bristol had undergone upward socioeconomic mobility, they still constituted a disproportionate percentage of people in the poorest areas.⁴¹ The parishes of St Stephen and St Nicholas which neighboured the harbour side contained 4.5% and 3.2% Irish respectively, whilst some of central parishes of St John and Christchurch contained 7.1% and 15% Irish respectively.⁴² These figures are much closer to the 6.8% of the Irish in the Horfield records, and it was from these areas which the majority of Bristol’s ‘criminal class’ would have come from. In light of this therefore it becomes possible to suggest that the overrepresentation of the Irish was a representation of their greater numbers in the poorer lower classes compared to the population as a whole; and this will be explored more fully in chapter five. It would be naive to draw conclusions on Irish crime based solely on an analysis of the raw number of Irish in the records. Thus in

³⁶ Finnegan, F. *Poverty and Prejudice: A study of Irish Immigrants in York 1840-1975* pp133

³⁷ Tobias, J. *Crime and Industrial Society in the 19th Century* pp52

³⁸ Tobias, J. *Crime and Industrial Society in the 19th Century* pp145

³⁹ Swift, R. ‘Crime and the Irish in nineteenth century Britain’, in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. (eds), *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939* pp410

⁴⁰ Sindall, R. *Street Violence in the Nineteenth Century: Media Panic or Real Danger* pp23

⁴¹ 1881 Census for England and Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Also see appendix 1 and 2 for full overview of Irish parish percentages.

⁴² 1881 Census for England and Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man

order to determine the extent to which Irish crime in Bristol was either based in ethnicity or in other socioeconomic factors a more detailed analysis of the types of crime the Irish committed is needed.

Chapter 4 - Detailed Analysis of the Prison Records

Roger Swift outlines that studies of Irish crime have shown that the Irish were ‘highly concentrated in the often interrelated categories of drunkenness, disorderly behaviour, and assault, and to a lesser extent petty theft and vagrancy’,⁴³ and to a large extent the Bristol Irish follow much of this pattern. Of the 152 Irish offenders in 1881 almost 80% were prosecuted under the categories mentioned by Swift. The majority of these, 65 (42.7%), were prosecuted for being drunk, with 18 (13.1%) prosecuted for assault, 14 (9.2%) prosecuted for larceny (petty theft) and 15 (9.9%) prosecuted for vagrancy.⁴⁴ The only notable exceptions outside of Swifts categories were the 4% prosecuted for Absconding from/Misconduct in Warehouses, and the 4% prosecuted for contempt of court orders.⁴⁵ In contrast to this of the 30 people prosecuted for fraud forgery or embezzlement, none were Irish, and out of the 52 people prosecuted for illegal trade only one man was Irish.⁴⁶ Furthermore it appears despite the Irish propensity for drinking, antisocial behaviour and fighting, these crimes rarely became more serious, with only three Irish prosecuted for malicious wounding/damage and no Irish prosecuted for the more serious crimes of burglary, rape, attempted rape, or murder.⁴⁷ Interestingly it is also worth noting that no Irish women were prosecuted for prostitution, something that Finnegan outlines was also the case in York, where the Irish ‘contributed little to prostitution.’⁴⁸

The picture of Irish crime in Bristol generated by these statistics is much like that of the Irish in other smaller towns in Britain. They are almost overwhelmingly concentrated in the categories which relate to antisocial behaviour and petty crime, and in many ways match the contemporary opinion of the Irish in Britain, as drunken, disorderly vagrants. However this image does not fit in with the impression given by the contemporary reports in Bristol, and in order to better understand the nature of Irish crime in Bristol and determine whether Irish crime can be differentiated, we must first compare the crimes with that of the of the whole population.

⁴³ Swift, R ‘Crime and the Irish in nineteenth century Britain’, in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. (eds), *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939* pp403

⁴⁴ Horfield Prison Management Record: Nominal Register, (Vol 1 1881-1882). Also see Appendix Fig.5

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸ Finnegan, F. *Poverty and Prejudice: A study of Irish Immigrants in York 1840-1975* pp134

Whilst the majority of the Irish crimes were concentrated in the categories of drunk, assault, antisocial behaviour, larceny and vagrancy, so was that of the whole population, with the above crimes accounting for 66% of all prosecutions.⁴⁹ This figure is not too far from the 80% of Irish crime which the categories constituted. Indeed for many crimes the whole population was either just as or more likely to be prosecuted than the Irish population. For example Larceny accounted for 15.2% of all prosecutions, yet only 9.2% of Irish prosecutions and the percentage figures for vagrancy, antisocial behaviour and assault among the whole population are almost identical to that of found for the Irish population.⁵⁰ The only key crime which the Irish are significantly overrepresented in is drunkenness, with it accounting for 26% of all prosecutions, yet 42.7% of Irish prosecutions, with the Irish accounting for 11% of all those prosecuted for drinking.⁵¹ This is almost ten times higher than their percentage of the population of Bristol (1.7%)⁵² and almost twice as high as the percentage of Irish in the prison data (6.7%).⁵³

What emerges from this comparison is an Irish population who whilst almost exclusively prosecuted in a small number of anti social and petty crimes, actually are not that different from the whole population. Aside from the obvious example of drinking, the only exceptions that can be found is that the Irish were unlikely to be involved in either serious crimes such as murder, rape, and malicious damage, in what can be described as ‘intellectual crimes’ such as forgery, fraud, embezzlement, or in prostitution. This therefore brings into question whether the Irish crime in Bristol can be differentiated as being unique to the Irish, and dependant on their Irish ethnicity. Historians have highlighted how the Irish often occupied a disproportionate number of the working class populations in town, and how the working class were likely to form the majority of the ‘criminal class’. It is therefore important to evaluate the extent to which Irish crime can be explained by the socio economic position of the Irish in Bristol in 1881.

⁴⁹ Horfield Prison Management Record: Nominal Register, (Vol 1 1881-1882) Also see Appendix fig.4. and fig.5

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² 1881 Census for England and Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man

⁵³ Horfield Prison Management Record: Nominal Register, (Vol 1 1881-1882)

Chapter 5 - Socioeconomic Explanations

Henry Mayhew writing in London in 1863 argued that:

‘the reason there appears to be a greater proportion of the Irish among the thieves and vagrants of our own country, admits a very ready explanation; the Irish constitute the poorest of our people’⁵⁴

Mayhew’s argument has been supported by a number of historians looking at Irish criminality. John Stack outlines how the disproportionate nature of the Irish sent to prison is easily explained by the fact that the Irish ‘live more desperate lives than their neighbours’⁵⁵ and Swift highlights that the majority of Irish crime in Wolverhampton took place around Stafford street an area ‘characterised by appalling overcrowding, disease and alcoholism, and general squalor.’⁵⁶ To understand the Irish overrepresentation in crime statistics, it therefore becomes important to examine the socioeconomic position of the Irish in Bristol in 1881 in detail.

The Irish in Bristol in 1881 whilst only accounting for 1.7% of the whole population, accounted for 4% of the total population of the seventeen central parishes and one extra parochial district, and these parishes contained over 50% of all the Irish in Bristol.⁵⁷ Moreover as mentioned earlier in the parishes of St Augustine, St Stephen and St Nicholas which boarded the northern side of floating harbour the Irish accounted for around 5% of the total population.⁵⁸ Whilst there is significant evidence of increased socioeconomic mobility among the Irish, with an Irish presence in all but three of the parishes in Bristol and over 24% of the whole Irish population living in the wealthy parish of Clifton, there is still evidence of a significant working class poor population of Irish (over 50%) who live and work in the central districts close to the harbour side.⁵⁹ Large identifies that in 1851 the majority of the Irish who lived in the central districts did so because of the proximity to labouring and portering work.⁶⁰ Whilst to a lesser extent than 1851, in 1881 this still holds true. Of the whole population of Bristol 7097 are labourers, with the Irish accounting for 392 (5.5%) of

⁵⁴ Swift, R. ‘Crime and the Irish in nineteenth century Britain’, in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. (eds), *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939* pp405

⁵⁵ Ibid. pp403

⁵⁶ Swift, R. ‘Another Stafford Street Row: Law, Order and the Irish presence in mid-Victorian Wolverhampton.’ in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* pp180

⁵⁷ 1881 Census for England and Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Also see Appendix 1 and 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Large, D., ‘The Irish in Bristol in 1851’ in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* pp40

the labouring population and labourers alone equal 15% of the whole Irish population.⁶¹ Moreover the parishes with the highest proportion of Irish also tend to be dominated by labourers. For example Christchurch located close to the floating harbour and the parish with the highest percentage of Irish, 60% of the Irish men of working age are labourers.⁶² Furthermore analysis of the Irish settlement patterns on a street level reveals that the Irish clustered around streets which contained people of the same socio economic status. To use Christchurch as an example again over 75% of the Irish lived on two streets within the parish, on one of these streets 'Wellington Street' there are 15 Irish men of working age, 11 of whom are a labourers, of the 32 non Irish men of working age on the street, 23 are labourers. In both cases labourers account for around 70% of the total.⁶³ What is clear is that in Bristol in 1881, the Irish at both the parish and street level lived and worked alongside other labourers from the native population and accounted for a much higher proportion of the poor labouring population (5.5%) than they did for the population as a whole (1.7%).

In light of these findings it is therefore important to re-examine the Horfield Prison data. Of the 2250 people prosecuted in 1881, 889 (40%) were labourers, considering labouring was a male only profession and there were 1721 males in the prison data, labourers accounted for 52% of all male prosecutions.⁶⁴ Of the remaining prosecutions, 732 are unskilled, 329 are unemployed, 217 semi skilled and only 83 can be classed as professional or skilled workers.⁶⁵ A similar picture is found for the Irish, of the 152 Irish prosecuted, 78 were labourers, again around 50% of the total. Of rest of the Irish prosecuted, 40 were involved in unskilled work, 21 were unemployed, 11 were involved in semiskilled professions, and only one man, was involved in skilled/professional employment.⁶⁶ It is therefore obvious that that the majority of those prosecuted in Bristol in 1881 come from the poorest sections of society, and the Irish are no different. Analysis from the census data shows that the Irish account for between 4-15% of the Bristol's poorest parishes and 5.5% of the labouring population alone.⁶⁷ It therefore should come as no surprise that the Irish account for 6.8% of prosecution in the prison records. This is a reflection of their overrepresentation in the poorest sections of society rather than as a result of their ethnicity.

⁶¹ 1881 Census for England and Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Horfield Prison Management Record: Nominal Register, (Vol 1 1881-1882)

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ 1881 Census for England and Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

Thus whilst it has been shown that the Irish were experiencing upward social mobility and increasing integration in 1881, the continuing presence of poor Irish workers in central Bristol means that the Irish remained overrepresented in statistics of crime.

Labouring was the most common profession among the working class in Bristol and almost 50% of the Irish prosecuted were labourers, and thus a comparison of the prosecutions of the Irish with those of the labouring population as a whole provides further evidence to support the theory that Irish crime was not primarily influenced by ethnicity. As we have already outlined 80% of Irish prosecutions were in the categories of drunkenness, anti social behaviour, assault, petty theft and vagrancy.⁶⁸ A similar picture emerges for all labourers, with 70% of all prosecution in the same group of crimes.⁶⁹ Furthermore much like the Irish only 0.9% of all labourers were prosecuted for the ‘intellectual crimes’ of fraud, forgery or embezzlement.⁷⁰ The only notable differences between the prosecutions of all the labourers and the Irish was that the Irish remained twice as likely to be prosecuted for being drunk (42.7% of all Irish prosecutions) than the labouring population as a whole (21.7% of all labourer prosecutions).⁷¹ This comparison is a clear indication that the majority of Irish crime was as a result of the socioeconomic situation of the Irish. The Irish were no more likely to be prosecuted for assault, antisocial behaviour, vagrancy, and larceny as the labouring population from which over 50% of their perpetrators came from. Therefore the idea of the Irish as more criminal than other nationalities in Bristol simply does not hold true. The overrepresentation of the Irish in certain crimes is merely a reflection of their overrepresentation in Bristol’s poorest populations.

The only exception where the Irish can be seen to be noticeably different from the host population is prosecutions for drunkenness. It is thus fair to say that whilst Irish crime as a whole was more a representation of their socioeconomic position than their ethnicity, those of Irish birth in Bristol retained a distinct cultural association with drinking. This however is not surprising as despite the integration of the Irish into the Bristol society, drinking was engrained into Irish culture. As Swift highlights public houses and beer shops ‘served important social, cultural and economic functions for Irish people’ and that ‘contractors

⁶⁸ See Appendix fig.5

⁶⁹ Horfield Prison Management Record: Nominal Register, (Vol 1 1881-1882). Also see Appendix fig.6

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

commonly paid Irish labourers in public houses.’⁷² Whilst it is impossible to tell the extent to which this held true in Bristol it is fair to say that the Irish criminal statistics would suggest that the Irish maintained a strong association with drinking. However as this is the only crime which the Irish are significantly overrepresented in it would be naive to suggest that this equates to an Irish culture of criminality. Instead it is more likely to be a representation of the fact that drinking formed an important part of Irish life even to those who in all other aspects were integrated and lived alongside the host population.

⁷² Swift, R ‘Crime and the Irish in nineteenth century Britain’, in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. (eds), *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939* pp404

Chapter 6 - Conclusions

Analysis of the Horfield prison records reveals that the Irish were overrepresented compared to their percentage of the whole population. However further analysis their prosecutions accompanied by an analysis of their socioeconomic position from the census data reveals that their percentage of the total number of prosecutions was actually an accurate representation of their socioeconomic position in Bristol in 1881. The Irish whilst being increasingly dispersed and integrated throughout Bristol in 1881, maintained a presence in Bristol's poorest areas and occupied a significant proportion of Bristol's unskilled jobs, and this was fairly reflected in both their proportion of prosecutions and the types of crime they were prosecuted for. Aside from the Irish tendency to be prosecuted for drinking more often than the rest of the population there is no evidence to suggest an ethnically Irish crime problem in Bristol. The contemporary reports from Bristol around 1881 belie the negative stereotype of the Irish found in Britain in the 19th century and the prison records only reinforce this view. Crime in Bristol much like any other Victorian city was dominated by the working class and the Irish were just as likely to commit crime as the non Irish in the same socioeconomic situation.

When compared to other studies of British cities it is evident that Irish criminality in Bristol has much more in common with cities outside the major Irish populations of Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow and London. Belchem describes how Irish crime and sectarian violence in Liverpool continued to escalate throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th century.⁷³ However both Swift in Wolverhampton and Mulkern in Coventry highlight that by last quarter of the 19th century the percentages of Irish in the crime statistics were diminishing,⁷⁴ a trend mirrored in Bristol. Mulkern identifies that in Coventry this was the case because the most disorderly among the Coventry Irish were immigrants who arrived as young men in the 1840s and 1850s and worked as casual labourers.⁷⁵ He argues that by the 1880s 'the worst of the disorderly Irish were growing old and dying off' and that their

⁷³ Belchem, J., *Irish, Catholic and Scouse. The history of the Liverpool Irish, 1800-1939* pp186-197

⁷⁴ See Mulkern, P. 'Irish Immigrants and Public Disorder in Coventry 1845-1875' in *Midland History*, Volume 21 pp119-136 and Swift, R. 'Another Stafford Street Row: Law, Order and the Irish presence in mid-Victorian Wolverhampton.' in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* pp199

⁷⁵ Mulkern, P. 'Irish Immigrants and Public Disorder in Coventry 1845-1875' in *Midland History*, Volume 21 pp130

offspring 'have either left the city or assimilated to the extent that they were less inclined to violence and created fewer disturbances.'⁷⁶

The picture of Irish criminality in Bristol is very similar to that found in Coventry. Large identifies how the majority of the Bristol Irish also arrived in the pre famine period and that the Irish population in Bristol both as an absolute figure and percentage of the total population peaked in 1851.⁷⁷ Furthermore unlike towns in Lancashire and the North East Large identifies how the famine did not swell the Bristol Irish's numbers significantly as Bristol's economy 'did not exert any great magnetic attraction as a source of employment in the latter half of the 19th century.'⁷⁸ It can therefore be argued that the lack famine Irish arriving in Bristol meant that the Irish had a different mentality when compared to the northern British cities. Graham Davies outlines how migrants arriving in Liverpool in the famine period were the 'poorest of the poor' who's only choice was to migrate and who throughout much of the 19th century had a sense of 'temporary presence'.⁷⁹ This sense of temporary presence lent itself to the clustering of Irish migrants and the fostering of a strong ethnic identity. It is fair to say that the maintenance and preservation of this identity manifested itself in socioeconomic, cultural and religious tensions both within the migrant community and with the host community, with one of these manifestations being the increasing representation of the Irish in criminal offences. In contrast the migrants who arrived in Bristol did so before the famine and whilst often poor did not face the same levels of desperation of the famine migrants and did not have the same sense of 'temporary presence'. Moreover Davies identifies that Irish migrants were 'more easily absorbed into the variegated labour market in Bristol'.⁸⁰ In 1851 whilst the two thirds of the Irish lived in the ancient city, there was no single well defined Irish ghetto in Bristol⁸¹. As a result of the scale, timing and nature of Irish migration to Bristol, the Bristol Irish were able to better integrate and assimilate into the host population. The hardships and prejudice faced by migrants which was responsible for the overrepresentation of Irish crime throughout most of Victorian Britain did not exist to the same extent and therefore Bristol did not feature a centre of major Irish crime.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Large, D., 'The Irish in Bristol in 1851' in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* pp38

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Davis, G., 'The Irish in Britain, 1815-1914', in Bielenberg, A (eds) *The Irish Diaspora* pp20

⁸⁰ Davis, G., *The Irish in Britain 1815-1914* pp67

⁸¹ Large, D., 'The Irish in Bristol in 1851' in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* pp41

By the time of this study in 1881, the Irish were even greater assimilated into Bristol, and this goes a long way to explaining why Irish were not overrepresented in crime statistics. Whilst it is evident that a significant number of the Irish still lived and worked around the central parishes, within these parishes they remained relatively spread out, only making up over 5% of the total population in two of the central parishes.⁸² Moreover at street level the Irish did not exhibit a tendency to cluster together, with the highest percentage of Irish in one street in the whole city only 20%.⁸³ This is far from the average of over 50% that Papworth identifies in the four 'core Irish streets' of Liverpool.⁸⁴ Thus Bristol in 1881 was increasingly integrated did not have an Irish quarter or even an Irish street. Swift highlights how the Irish were concentrated in 'Stafford Street' and 'Caribee Island' in Wolverhampton in the 1850s and that this was a 'breeding ground for crime and disorder.'⁸⁵ It is thus important to recognise that the lack of a particular Irish district or street in Bristol played an important role in reducing ethnic tensions and as a consequence Irish criminality.

Vaughn and Penn's analysis of migrant communities in Leeds and Manchester outlines that over time migrant families possessed increasing socioeconomic mobility and were likely to integrate with the host population.⁸⁶ By 1881, almost forty years after peak period of Irish migration to Bristol there is increasing evidence of socioeconomic mobility among some of the Irish. Over 40% lived in the three parishes outside the centre, and labouring and portering only accounted for 15% of all Irish occupations, a statistic down from 36% identified by Large.⁸⁷ Furthermore there is evidence of Bristol Irish in the political cultural and religious elite. Clifton contains 37 Irish who identify themselves as Landowners, and also includes Irish magistrates, surgeons and dentists.⁸⁸ What is clear is that the Irish in Bristol 1881 despite maintaining a significant working class element were increasingly assimilated into the host community; they were more spread out, and occupied an increasing variety of jobs, many of which were skilled and semi skilled. Thus the nature of the Irish population in Bristol was different to that in other cities; they were far more integrated into

⁸² 1881 Census for England and Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Papworth J. *The Irish in Liverpool 1835-71: Segregation and Dispersal* pp353

⁸⁵ Swift, R. 'Another Stafford Street Row: Law, Order and the Irish presence in mid-Victorian Wolverhampton.' in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* pp182

⁸⁶ Vaughan, L. & Pen, A., *Jewish Settlement Patterns in Manchester and Leeds 1881* in *Urban Studies* Vol. 43, No.3, pp 668

⁸⁷ Large, D., 'The Irish in Bristol in 1851' in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* pp43

⁸⁸ 1881 Census for England and Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

the host population and were far less 'visible' thus the opportunities for anti Irish discourse or anti Irish sentiment to inflame was minimal.

The lack of Irish crime in Bristol in 1881 is well explained by Alan O'Day's recent work on mutative ethnicity. O'Day argues that everywhere the original meaning of Irish ethnicity was transformed, and that it 'thrives and persists when it meets perceived needs'. In cities like Manchester and Liverpool swarmed with famine migrants ethnicity thrived as it was a 'vehicle for communal defence and interests',⁸⁹ and this was represented in increasing Irish crime. Irish ethnicity in Bristol however did not mutate in the same way. Having arrived in the pre famine period they did not experience the same level of prejudice or hardship faced by migrants in other parts of the country and integrated far better into the labour market. Whilst the Irish constituted a large proportion of the working class, they did not cluster in parishes, streets and courts, instead living alongside native workers of the same socioeconomic situation. As a result it can be argued that a strong ethnic identity among the Irish failed to materialise, hence the relationship between the Irish and crime in Bristol was primarily determined by the Irish socio economic position within Bristol and not their ethnicity.

Another important reason that the Irish crime in Bristol did not manifest itself as it did in other cities in Bristol was because of the lack of religious conflict. Belchem sights how in Liverpool 'sectarian violence became institutionalised in working class life', that 'Home Rule struggles of the 1880s were fought out on the street.'⁹⁰ Similarly Swift identifies how 'anti Catholicism contributed to the most serious clashes between the English and Irish in the period' and that it was responsible for two serious disturbances in Wolverhampton in 1858 and 1867.⁹¹ In Bristol however, despite it being a staunchly protestant city which had one of the highest levels of church attendance in the country, there is little evidence of religious hostility towards the predominantly catholic Irish.⁹² Pamela Gilbert's examination of the development of the catholic community in 19th century Bristol outlines that 'there was never widespread violence in Bristol against the Irish Catholics as there was in places such as

⁸⁹ O'Day, A., *A Conundrum of Irish Diasporic Identity: Mutative Ethnicity* pp 324

⁹⁰ Belchem, J., *Irish, Catholic and Scouse. The history of the Liverpool Irish, 1800-1939* pp188-9

⁹¹ Swift, R. 'Another Stafford Street Row: Law, Order and the Irish presence in mid-Victorian Wolverhampton.' in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* pp189

⁹² Davis, G., *The Irish in Britain 1815-1914* pp69-70

Stockport and Wolverhampton.’⁹³ It is therefore likely that the lack of catholic persecution in Bristol both eased ethnic tensions and aided Irish integration, and at a time when sectarian tensions dominated many cities in Britain played a key role in maintaining relatively low levels of Irish criminality.

Whilst not as important as other factors it is worth noting that the professionalism of provincial policing in Bristol also played a role in maintaining low levels of Irish criminality. Swift highlights that the representation of Irish in the criminal statistics has to be set in the context of the growth of provincial policing, outlining that the Irish were often overrepresented in crime statistics as they were targeted by English police who were ‘under pressure to achieve results.’⁹⁴ He has shown how Wolverhampton had a particularly high amount of anti-police violence in the 1850s as the police tried to exert their authority on the growing Irish presence. In contrast Graham Davies highlights that newly established Bristol police were well regulated and professional and ‘significantly contributed to public order in the city.’⁹⁵ Whilst the integration and assimilation of the Irish had a more significant impact on Irish crime it remains important to understand that factors such as the lack of prejudice shown by the provincial police in Bristol only served to help the process of integration.

In conclusion this study of Irish criminality in Bristol in 1881 belies the Victorian perception of the Irish as the harbingers of crime and disorder. A study of the Horfield Prison records along with the 1881 census and contemporary reports reveals that crime in Bristol was shaped primarily by socioeconomic conditions and not ethnicity. Whilst the Irish feature in the prison records they are on the whole just as likely to commit crime as their native neighbours from the same socioeconomic position. This conclusion lies in contrast to popular perception of Irish crime and adds further evidence to the argument that Irish crime was not as homogenous as contemporary commentators would have us believe. Most importantly it adds weight to the arguments put forward by historians of the Irish Diaspora that Irish criminality was as much the result of the prevailing socioeconomic, cultural and religious conditions of the host city then the ethnicity of the migrants. On a local scale this conclusion provides further evidence to support the argument that by 1881 the Irish had become increasingly integrated in to Bristol social, cultural and economic life, and provides us with

⁹³ Gilbert, P. *In the Midst of a Protestant People: The Development of a Catholic Community in Bristol in the Nineteenth Century* Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Bristol pp91

⁹⁴ Swift, R. ‘Another Stafford Street Row: Law, Order and the Irish presence in mid-Victorian Wolverhampton.’ in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* pp409

⁹⁵ Davis, G., *The Irish in Britain 1815-1914* pp70

an important counterweight to the heavily studied cities in the North West. Moreover contributing to the wider field of Diaspora studies this work supports Alan O'Day's theory of mutative ethnicity, and shows us that ethnic communities react and adapt to different areas different ways; something which remains important to remember at a time in which immigration and its consequences continue to influence the current political and cultural landscape. This study has also raised further questions; most notably it had identified that whilst the Irish were increasing integrated into the Bristol host community, and were not overrepresented in the crime statistics as a whole, they retained a strong association with drink related crime. Thus further study is needed into the development and the cultural aspect of Irish drinking in towns and cities in Britain outside of the major Irish centres, and the extent to which there propensity for drinking continued to exist despite increasing assimilation in the later 19th century.

In 1881 it would be wrong to discuss criminality in Bristol in terms of the Irish or non Irish; instead crime in Bristol was determined by the socioeconomic circumstances of those involved and was almost exclusively the preserve of the lower or 'criminal' classes. The Irish whilst providing a noteworthy number of these classes did not provide a disproportionate number of criminals and thus Thomas Carlyle's claim that the Irishman constituted 'the readymade nucleus of degradation and disorder'⁹⁶ simply does not hold true for Bristol in 1881.

⁹⁶ Swift, R. 'Another Stafford Street Row: Law, Order and the Irish presence in mid-Victorian Wolverhampton.' in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* pp179

Appendix

Fig.1– Distribution of Irish migrants in Bristol’s central parishes.

Key: Parish Name, Number of Irish, (% of total parish population occupied by Irish)

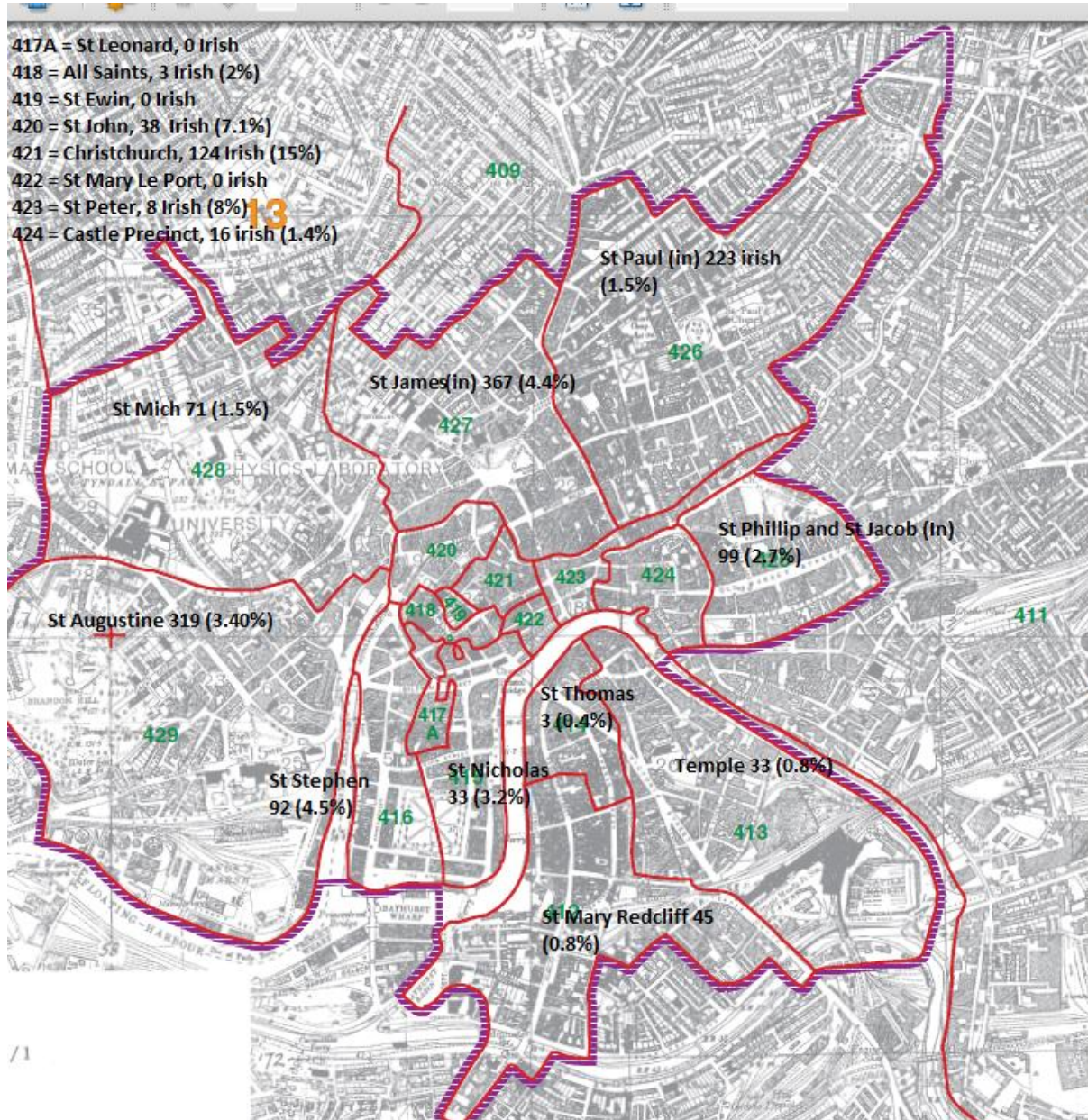


Fig.2 – Distribution of Irish migrants in Bristol's outer parishes

Key: Parish Name, Number of Irish, (% of total parish population occupied by Irish)

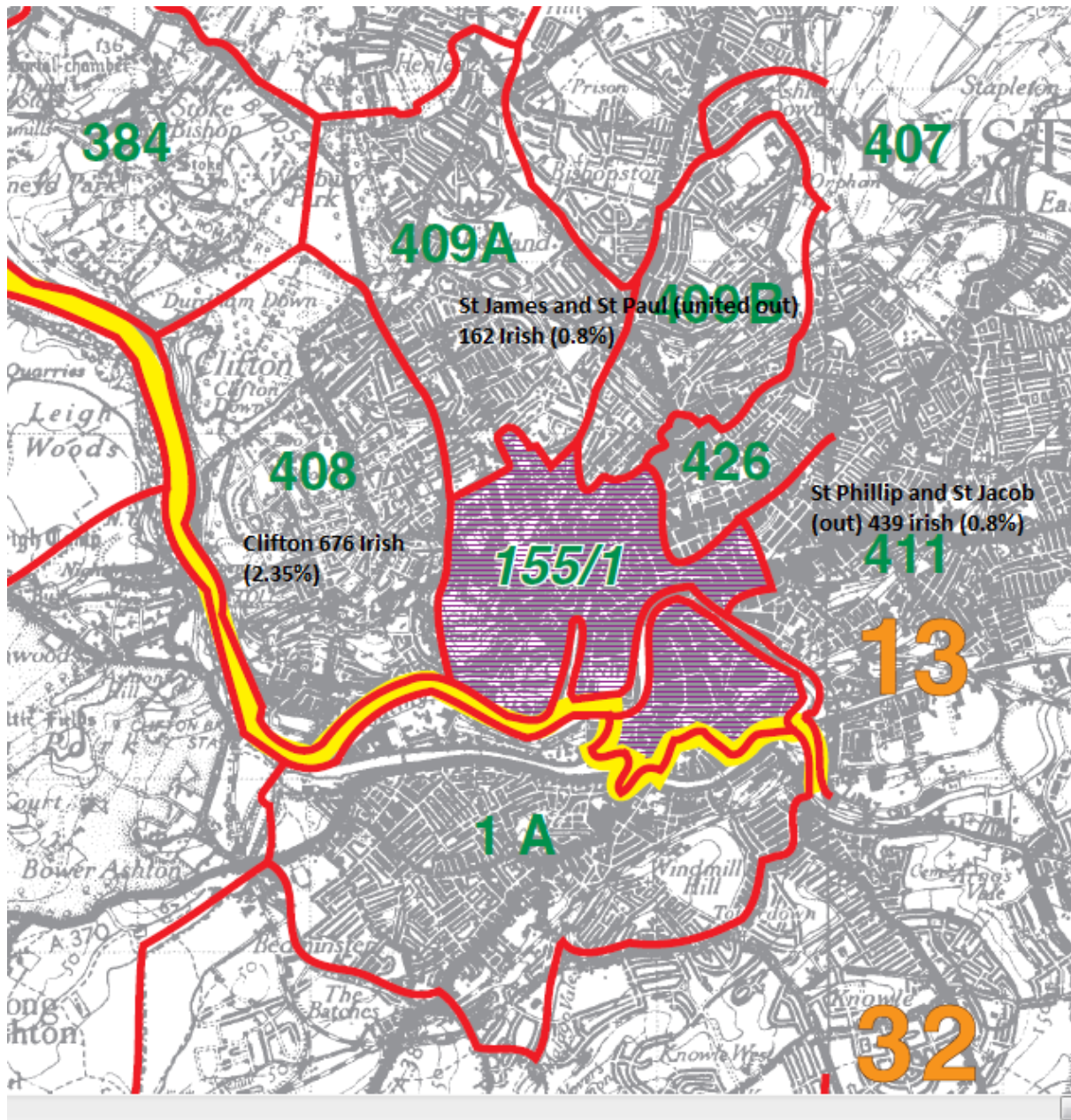


Fig.3 Breakdown of Nationalities in the Horfield Prison Records

Total Population = 2250	% Out of Total population
English 2009	(89.2%)
Irish 152	(6.8%)
Scottish 16	(0.7%)
Welsh 44	(2%)
Other 22	(1%)

Fig.4 Breakdown of all prosecutions in the Horfield Prison Records

<u>Crime</u>	<u>Number Committed</u>	<u>% of Total Crimes (2250)</u>
Absconding from /Misconduct in	84	3.7
Animal Crimes*	22	1
Anti Social Behaviour **	99	4.4
Assault	203	9
Assault on Female	46	2
Assault on Police	33	1.5
Attempted Rape	1	0.04
Attempted Suicide	10	0.5
Burglary	3	0.1
Breaking and Entering	17	0.75
Bastardly Act	10	0.5
Contempt of Court Order	68	3
Deserting Army	10	0.5
Drunk	589	26
Elementary Education Act	28	1.2
Forgery/Fraud/Embezzlement	30	1.3
Illegal Trade***	52	2.3
Larceny (petty theft)	342	15.2
Malicious Damage/Wounding	46	2
Manslaughter	2	0.1
Murder	2	0.1
Neglecting Family	62	2.8
Non Payment of Rates	19	0.8
Rape	3	0.1
Stealing	95	4.2
Trespassing	12	0.5
Prostitution	26	1.2
Vagrancy (inc. Begging and	176	7.8
Wandering Abroad	14	0.6
Other/Unknown/Ineligible/Released	143	6.4

*Cruelty to animals, keeping without Licence etc.

** Indecency, Threatening Language, Disorderly, Nuisance.

*** Illegally Hawking, Illegally Pawning, Obtaining Goods by False Pretences.

Fig. 5 Breakdown of all Irish prosecutions in the Horfield Prison Records

<u>Crime</u>	<u>Total Number Committed by whole population</u>	<u>Number Committed by Irish</u>	<u>% of total Irish crime</u>	<u>% of Irish compared to total number in who committed the crime</u>
ALL CRIMES	2250	152	100	6.75
Absconding from /Misconduct in	84	6	4	5
Animal Crimes*	22	0	0	0
Anti Social Behaviour **	99	6	4	4
Assault	203	16	10.5	7.9
Assault on Female	33	2	1.3	6
Assault on Police	46	2	1.3	4.3
Attempted Rape	1	0	0	0
Attempted Suicide	10	0	0	0
Burglary	3	0	0	0
Breaking and Entering	17	2	1.3	11.8
Bastardly Act	10	0	0	0
Contempt of Court Order	68	6	4	8.8
Deserting Army	10	3	2	30
Drunk	589	65	42.7	11
Elementary Education Act	28	2	1.3	7.2
Forgery/Fraud/Embezzlement	30	0	0	0
Illegal Trade***	52	1	0.7	1.9
Larceny (petty theft)	342	14	9.2	4.1
Malicious Damage/Wounding	46	3	2	6.5
Manslaughter	2	1	0.7	50
Murder	2	0	0	0
Neglecting Family	62	2	1.3	3.2
Non Payment of Rates	19	0	0	0
Rape	3	0	0	0
Stealing	95	6	4	5.7
Trespassing	12	0	0	0
Prostitution	26	0	0	0
Vagrancy (inc. Begging and	176	15	9.9	8.5
Wandering Abroad	14	3	2	21
Other/Unknown/Ineligible/Released	143	0	0	0

*Cruelty to animals, keeping without Licence etc.

** Indecency, Threatening Language, Disorderly, Nuisance.

*** Illegally Hawking, Illegally Pawning, Obtaining Goods by False Pretences.

Fig.6 Breakdown of all prosecutions for Labourers

<u>Crime</u>	<u>Total Number Committed by whole population</u>	<u>Total committed by Labourers</u>	<u>% of total labourers crime (899)</u>	<u>% of labourers compared to total number who committed the crime</u>
ALL CRIMES	2250	889	100	40
Absconding from /Misconduct in	84	60	6.7	71
Animal Crimes*	22	1	0.1	4.5
Anti Social Behaviour **	99	34	3.9	34.3
Assault	203	105	11.6	5.8
Assault on Female	33	15	1.6	45
Assault on Police	46	32	3.5	69.5
Attempted Rape	1	-	-	-
Attempted Suicide	10	1	0.1	10
Burglary	3	-	-	-
Breaking and Entering	17	9	1	52
Bastardy Act	10	4	0.45	40
Contempt of Court Order	68	20	2.2	29
Deserting Army	10	4	0.45	40
Drunk	589	195	21.7	33
Elementary Education Act	28	12	1.3	42
Forgery/Fraud/Embezzlement	30	8	0.9	26
Illegal Trade***	52	5	0.55	9
Larceny (petty theft)	342	160	17.8	46.8
Malicious Damage/Wounding	46	19	2.1	41
Manslaughter	2	-	-	-
Murder	2	-	-	-
Neglecting Family	62	2	0.2	3.2
Non Payment of Rates	19	5	0.55	26
Rape	3	-	-	-
Stealing	95	56	6.2	58.9
Trespassing	12	11	1.2	91
Prostitution	26	-	-	-
Vagrancy (inc. Begging and	176	80	8.8	45.5
Wandering Abroad	14	10	1.1	71
Other/Unknown/Ineligible/Released	130	51	5.6	39

*Cruelty to animals, keeping without Licence etc.

** Indecency, Threatening Language, Disorderly, Nuisance.

*** Illegally Hawking, Illegally Pawning, Obtaining Goods by False Pretences.

Bibliography

Archival Sources:

Horfield Prison Management Record: Nominal Register, (Vol 1 1881-1882). Bristol, Bristol Records Office, Ref 41405/Mgt/Nm/1/1

Other Primary Sources:

1881 Census for England and Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man (Enhanced Version) - <http://ahds.ac.uk/history/collections/nineteencentury-census.htm>. Depositor: Schurer, K., University of Essex. Department of History. Original Producer: Genealogical Society of Utah, Federation of Family History Societies

Historic Parishes of England and Wales : an Electronic Map of Boundaries before 1850 with a Gazetteer and Metadata - <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/collection>. Depositor: Kain, R.J.P. (University of Exeter)

‘An Irish Murder near Birmingham’ *The Bristol Mercury and daily Post*, December 11th 1880. Issue 10164 – www.newspapers.bl.uk/blcs

‘Distressed Irish Ladies Influential Meeting in Clifton’ *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, February 2nd 1882. Issue 10521 -www.newspapers.bl.uk/blcs

‘Irish Lace Making’ *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, January 24th 1884. Issue 11137 - www.newspapers.bl.uk/blcs

‘Irish Patriotism’ *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, March 22nd 1879. Issue 9625-www.newspapers.bl.uk/blcs

‘The Irish Society’ *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, May 14th 1878. Issue 9358 - www.newspapers.bl.uk/blcs

‘Riot Robbery and Murder and Leeds’ *The Times*, November 22, 1850. Issue 20653 – www.archive.timesonline.co.uk

Committee to Inquire into the Condition of the Bristol Poor. *Report of the Committee (appointed February 8th, 1884) to inquire into the condition of the Bristol Poor* (Bristol 1885)

Secondary Sources:

Belchem, J., *Irish, Catholic and Scouse. The history of the Liverpool Irish, 1800-1939* (Liverpool, 2007)

Davis, G., *The Irish in Britain 1815-1914* (Dublin 1991)

Davis, G., 'The Irish in Britain, 1815-1914', in Bielenberg, A (eds) *The Irish Diaspora* (London 2000)

Dresser, M & Fleming, P. *Bristol ethnic minorities and the city 1000-2001* (London 2007)

Engels, F *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844)

Fielding, S. *Class and Ethnicity: Irish Catholics in England 1880-1939* (Buckingham 1993)

Fitzpatrick, D. *Irish Emigration 1801-1921* (Dublin 1990)

Finnegan, F. *Poverty and Prejudice: A study of Irish Immigrants in York 1840-1975* (Cork 1982)

Gilbert, P. *In the Midst of a Protestant People: The Development of a Catholic Community in Bristol in the Nineteenth Century* Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Bristol, (1995)

Heinrick, H. and O'Day, A (eds.) *A Survey Of The Irish In Britain (1872)* (London 1990)

Jackson, J. *The Irish in Britain* (London 1963)

Large, D., 'The Irish in Bristol in 1851' in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* (Kent , 1985)

Livingstone, K. *Nothing but the same old story: The Roots of Anti-Irish Racism.* (London 1885)

Lucassen, L. *The Immigrant Threat: The Integration of Old and New Migrants in Western Europe since 1850* (Chicago 2005)

Manton, J. *Mary Carpenter And The Children Of The Streets* (London 1976)

Mulkern, P. 'Irish Immigrants and Public Disorder in Coventry 1845-1875' in *Midland History*, Volume 21 pp119-136 (Birmingham 1996)

Neal, F. *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience 1819-1914* (Manchester 1988)

O'Day, A., *A Conundrum of Irish Diasporic Identity: Mutative Ethnicity* (London 2009)

Papworth J. *The Irish in Liverpool 1835-71: Segregation and Dispersal* (Liverpool 1981)

Pooley, C.G., 'Segregation or integration? The residential experience of the Irish in mid-Victorian Britain', in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. (eds), *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939* (London, 1989)

Sindall, R. *Street Violence in the Nineteenth Century: Media Panic or Real Danger* (Leicester 1990)

Smith, M. *Integration or segregation: An analysis residential settlement patterns in late Victorian Bristol from 1881 census enumeration records*. Unpublished BA History Special Field Project, University of Bristol, (2010)

Swift, R. *The Irish in Britain 1815-1914: Perspectives and Sources* (London 1990)

Swift, R. 'Crime and the Irish in nineteenth century Britain', in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. (eds), *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939* (London, 1989)

Swift, R. 'Another Stafford Street Row: Law, Order and the Irish presence in mid-Victorian Wolverhampton.' in Swift, R. & Gilley, S. *The Irish in the Victorian City* (Kent , 1985)

Swift, R. 'Heroes or Villains?: The Irish, Crime, and Disorder in Victorian England' in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal concerned with British studies*, Vol. 29 No. 3 pp399-421 (1997)

Tobias, J. *Crime and Industrial Society in the 19th Century* (Oxford 1967)

Treble, J. *Urban Poverty in Britain 1830-1914* (London 1979)

Vaughan, L. & Pen, A., *Jewish Settlement Patterns in Manchester and Leeds 1881* in *Urban Studies* Vol. 43, No. 3, 653-671 (London 2006)

Walker, W. *Juteopolis: Dundee And Its Textile Workers 1885-1923* (Edinburgh 1979)

Whelan, L. *Class Culture and Suburban Anxieties in the Victorian Era* (Abingdon 2010)