

IRISH STUDIES IN BRITAIN

ISSN 0260-8154

For the teacher and the general reader.

AUTUMN/WINTER 1981

No. 2

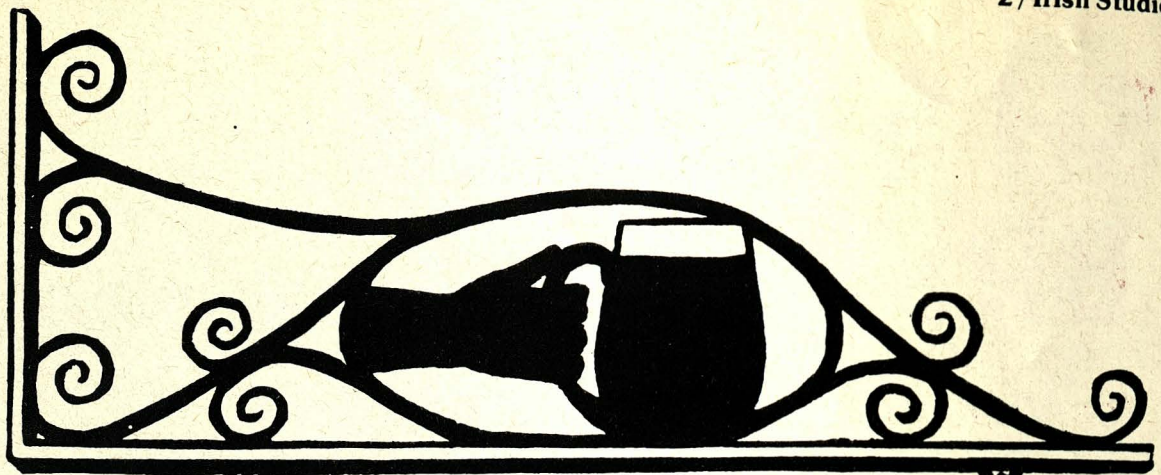
50p

THE ANTI-IRISH JOKE – THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND



**IRISH STUDIES IN THE EIGHTIES –
A SIGNPOST
MICHAEL DAVITT IN LANCASHIRE
+ news, developments, books, etc., etc.**

Anti-Land League "Punch" cartoon 1881 in Lewis P. Curtis' "Apes and Angels, The Irishman in Victorian Caricature" [David & Charles, 1971].



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Demographic trends indicate that the Irish population in this country which has remained static at nearly one million strong for over a century is undergoing a rapid and apparently irreversible decline. The reasons are not hard to find. A healthier economic climate at home at the same time as the reverse is happening in Britain has largely stemmed the haemorrhage of people from Ireland which had been a feature of Irish society since the Famine in the middle of the last century.

The maintenance of an identifiable Irish community in this country therefore is now no longer in the hands of the Irish-born in Britain but has become the responsibility of their children and grand-children. What are the chances of the Irish community remaining an identifiable one in such circumstances? Is such a thing desirable or necessary? The lessons we learn from history are not altogether reassuring. It remains a sad fact that, without any large-scale exceptions, all previous waves of Irish migration to Britain have lost their particular identity once the mantle was passed to their children born in this country. Why is it that the Healeys and Callaghans remain silent about their Irish heritage when they probably have more right, genealogically speaking, to claim it than the Reagans and even the Kennedys?

The Irish community therefore is going through a transitional phase. Whether it can survive the transition remains to be seen. Yet, paradoxically at a period when the Irish population in Britain is an ageing one, out of touch with realities and development in their home country where half the population is under 25; when it has no identifiable leadership (indeed never had) and when the Irish community's status and position is being increasingly highlighted and challenged (viz. the anti-Irish joke at one end of the scale and the Prevention of Terrorism Act at the other) and when relations between the neighbouring islands are at the most serious for perhaps the past sixty years more and more Irish people living in this country are becoming aware of what is loosely called their "heritage" or their "culture", that set of inherited experiences and traditions which somehow makes them feel slightly different from their English neighbours. Furthermore, many English (and Scottish and Welsh!) people have become aware of the different heritage and development of the neighbouring island and would like to know more about it.

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We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Cultural Relations Committee of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin, in the production of this publication.

TO AUTHORS

If you are working in, or are interested in, any field of Irish Studies and would like to contribute to this magazine, or if any of the articles in this issue stimulates you into making a response, please send all material (articles, letters, etc.) to the publishers. 'ISIB' has a policy of no censorship and will publish all material received (subject to space) in the belief that any disagreement with an article will result in alternative points of view being heard and that a healthy discussion will ensue. Copy date for next issue is mid-January, 1982, and for autumn 1982, mid-September.

TO ADVERTISERS

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Yet it remains a sad fact that such people, Irish and English, remain a minority and so the wide gulf of ignorance and prejudice continues to poison relationships between the countries. Many Irish people living in this country and the politically aware British left often complain that the British media fail to offer the background information necessary to understand what is happening in Ireland today. Yet large sections of the organised Irish community who could be giving the lead, are seemingly uninterested in or unable to promote the development of an understanding of Irish culture which could contribute towards bringing Irish and British together.

Even the British left, who one would expect to be sympathetic, seem not to be interested in doing more than sloganising and ensuring that further background explanation follows the "correct" ideological line.

How then can we break through the apathy of the British education system and urge that Irish Studies become an integral part of that system if we ourselves, the Irish in Britain and the "Friends of Ireland", remain so apathetic to the whole concept of developing a greater awareness and pride in the Irish heritage?

This is why surely it is wrong to concentrate the development of Irish Studies on a voluntary basis (this is not to ignore the pioneering and worthwhile work being carried out by many enterprising Irish societies and associations up and down the country). The Irish in Britain, despite their numbers, are largely an invisible community and therefore unless their needs are constantly drawn to the attention of the education authorities they will naturally get overlooked. The Irish in Britain are the largest ethnic minority in the whole of the EEC and of course, are ratepayers too. Unless there is sustained pressure on the education authorities and it is demonstrated that the Irish community (and indeed all those interested in Ireland) demand the introduction of Irish Studies on a statutory basis, then, human nature and scarce resources being what they are, the authorities will get away with paying lip-service — in short they will be let off the hook.

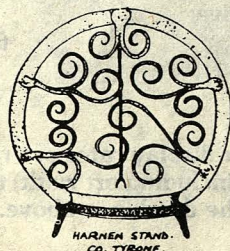
Finally, what is "Irish Studies", and why should people have the opportunity of studying it if they wish to? First of all a few notes on what Irish Studies is *not*.

Irish Studies is not the buttressing of romantic nostalgia of an Ireland that in Ireland itself is dead and gone.

2. It is *not* an opportunity to ram home to the English the iniquities of their rule in Ireland.

It is a coming together of both Irish and non-Irish in a neutral forum in a genuine attempt to learn more about the history and culture of the neighbouring island about which we hear so much but lamentably seem to *know* little and through such contact and discussion to become more knowledgeable of each other's cultures and the relationship between the two. It provides an opportunity where prejudices and misconceptions on both sides can be eradicated.

[If you disagree on the above interpretation of Irish Studies or indeed any of the above article, please write to the Editor. Correspondence will be published in the next [Spring 1982] issue.]



Following the success of last Easter's Irish in Britain History Workshop weekend at the North London Polytechnic when over 200 people heard and participated in a wide variety of lectures and seminars on the theme of the Irish contribution to the cultural and historical development of this country, the Irish in Britain History Group has now established monthly meetings (first Thursday of each month) at which papers will be read and discussions will take place on the subject of the Irish in Britain. The ultimate aim is the establishment of a resource centre in the London area and, in the interim, the publication of some of the papers read at the Easter workshop.

New members are particularly welcome. For further information telephone (01) 555 7584 or (01) 435 9233.

★★★★★

It's difficult enough trying to promote Irish Studies in highly-populated "Irish" areas in our cities so spare a thought for the Thameside Irish Circle in the Southend area of Essex, a part of the country not renowned for being particularly "Irish"!

Worried about the lack of Irish cultural activities in their area, particularly for younger people, the Circle was set up in 1979 to, in their own words, "develop the cultural, artistic and educational needs of the Irish community, and through them, of the wider community in which we live by preserving, passing on to the younger generation, and ultimately presenting to the general public, those skills and arts, culture and language of which we are all so proud. The Thameside Irish Circle hopes to present a more positive and enlightened side of Irish culture and life than is generally presented through the media."

The Circle sees its work in the field of promoting Irish music, dancing and language, in classes and in concerts, as an opportunity to present to local non-Irish people all that is best about Ireland and her cultural heritage, in order to counteract all the racist jokes and propaganda that the public are exposed to the media, day after day. It is also an opportunity to give Irish people back their self-respect sadly battered over the past few years.

The Thameside Irish Circle was founded because a few dedicated people in a not very Irish part of S.E. England felt that it was time that the general public were made aware that there is a very rich inheritance of tradition and culture amongst the Irish in Britain which seldom comes to public notice with of course the result that the general public has a somewhat unbalanced view of the Irish community in this country. Groups like the Thameside Circle are trying to correct the balance. May they be a spur to other isolated Irish communities up and down the country!

[For further information on the Thameside Irish Circle, contact Anna Broad, 47 Sandown Avenue, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex. Tel. 0702 331545.]

★★★★★

Green Ink, the workshop-based creative writing group (poems, plays, short stories, etc.) meets every alternate Thursday at the Irish Centre, 32 Camden Square, London NW1. New members are always welcome. For further information contact Patrick Reynolds on 01 359 3814.

★★★★★

Irish Studies in Britain/5

Readers will probably know how difficult it is to buy Irish published books in British bookshops. However there are hopeful signs that this poor state of affairs could be changing for the better. The Kilburn Bookshop in north-west London, for instance, has a comprehensive stock list of Irish published material and operates a mail order service.

Last year a group of Irish publishers formed "Pegasus", a grouping designed to establish better contact with bookshops and the book trade in Britain. It seemed that Irish publications were regarded as interesting and of good quality, but that only a limited number of titles were acceptable as being of general enough interest. In a way of getting around this problem of introducing Irish published books into the British market, a catalogue and book supply service was set up.

Briefly, the catalogue, "Irish Publications", lists over 500 publications from almost every publishers in Ireland, from large trade houses to the smallest local history society, and informing people about every single publication available.

Apart from being useful for reference, the catalogue is the working tool of a mail order Irish book service. People buying the catalogue will automatically go on file for any future mailings of information about Irish books. It is therefore possible to order unusual or limited interest titles as well as ordering mixed batches of books from different publishers. Any title in the catalogue can be ordered by sending a cheque for the listed price. For orders over £5 books are sent post free. The catalogue is available for £2 from Irish Publications, 5 Henrietta Street, Dublin 1. For the Kilburn Bookshop book list, send an SAE to 8 Kilburn Bridge, London NW6.

★★★★★

Irish books and publications are of course covered towards the back of the magazine, but it must be noted here that hardly a week goes by without a new book from the ever expanding Irish publishing industry arriving on our desk.

Notable additions include:

Class Conflict and Sectarianism by Henry Patterson, Blackstaff Press, £8.95.

Personality of Ireland by Estyn Evans, Blackstaff Press, £3.95.

Voices and the Sound of Drums: An Irish Autobiography by Patrick Shea, Blackstaff Press, £3.50.

Yes, We Have No Bananas, by Paddy Devlin, Blackstaff Press, £3.95.

Plantation to Partition, edited by Peter Roebuck, Blackstaff Press, £8.95.

Traditional Irish Recipes by John Murphy, Appletree Press, £4.50.

The Town in Ireland, edited by David Harkness and Mary O'Dowd, Appletree Press, £8.50.

The Old Gods [Irish Fairies] by Patrick Logan, Appletree Press, £6.95.

Turn Up the Lamp: Tales of a Mourne Childhood by J.S. Doran, Appletree Press, £5.95.

Irish Shopfronts by John Murphy, Appletree Press, £3.95.

My Lady of the Chimney Corner by Alexander Irvine, Appletree Press, £3.95.

Youth and Justice: Young Offenders in Ireland, Turoe Press, £7.25.

Who's Minding the Children?, Arlen House, The Women's Press, £2.00.

Bewley's by Hugh Oram, Albertine Kennedy Publishing, £3.60.

Irish Women's Diary and Guide Book 1982 Arlen House, The Women's Press, £2.00.

Women Artists' Calendar and Wall Diary 1982, Arlen House, The Women's Press, £3.00

Irish Cultural Activities London (ICAL) continues its work of promoting and co-ordinating Irish cultural and educational activities in the capital.

Two successful guest lectures have been held at the North London Polytechnic, the first by Prof. Breandan O Buachalla of UCD on the Irish cultural tradition, north and south, and the second by Prof. Gearoid O Tuathaigh on 'Ireland and Europe — an historical perspective'. Further lectures, aimed primarily at teachers who would like to introduce Irish themes into their classrooms, are to be held shortly.

Following the teachers' conference on Irish Studies in schools held in March at the ILEA Centre for Urban Educational Studies, a resource bank of slides, folders, books, tapes and other teaching materials has been compiled and is available to teachers and others in connection with this negotiations have taken place with schools in North and Central London to examine the feasibility of the introduction of Irish Studies into the curriculum.

Negotiations are also continuing with North London Polytechnic on the introduction of a Diploma in Irish Studies (ISIB No. 1 Spring 1981). It seems likely that such a course could start in October 1982.

There are now over 40 adult education classes in all aspects of Irish Studies in the London area and details are available in ICAL's publication "Irish Studies in London" (available from Addison Press, 83 Frithville Gardens, London W12, price 50p (including postage)). This magazine itself, is of course a testament to the growth of interest in Irish Studies in the London area over the past few years.

[ICAL can be contacted at 7 King Henry's Road, NW3. Tel. 01 586 1788. Chairman Brendan Mulker; Secretary Ann Fox.]

★★★★★

Also in the London area, BIAS (Brent Irish Advisory Service) has continued to promote Irish cultural and educational activities in North West London by presenting to the Multiracial Resource Centre at Brent Teachers' Centre, a substantial collection of books and other materials on modern Ireland and its culture. The materials include audio-visual aids, books, cassettes, wall maps and posters and among the subjects covered are Irish history, language, dance, music, games, cookery, crafts, drama, literature and art.

It is estimated that there are about 25,000 Irish born people in the multi-racial London Borough of Brent, forming almost 10% of its total population. Brent has approximately 10,000 children under 18 years born to Irish parents, and of these children some 7,500 are currently at school.

The new resources were donated with assistance from the Cultural Relations Committee of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin, and the Irish Embassy, London.

[Contact BIAS on 01 624 9991.]

★★★★★

A first class publication, "Irish Writing for Secondary Schools", is available from Danny Padmore, ILEA Centre for Learning Resources, 275 Kennington Lane, London SE11 (Tel. 01 582 4509). Price 30p.

★★★★★

**NORTHERN IRELAND:
HERITAGE AND PROBLEM**
A Residential Summer School
held in
**Magee University College,
Londonderry**
in
JULY 1982
organised by
**The New University of Ulster
Institute of Continuing Education**

Further details from:

Miss Cathy Francis,
The New University of Ulster Institute of
Continuing Education,
Magee University College,
LONDONDERRY BT48 7JL

Ref: 81/27

Many organisations and individuals contact us about speakers who would be able to come along and talk about setting up classes and approaching local education authorities as well as talking on specific subjects in Irish Studies. The following speakers have expressed their willingness to help in any way they can:

Ivan Gibbons, 83 Frithville Gardens, London W12. Tel. 01 749 2386. (Setting up Irish Studies courses.)

Bernard Canavan, 44 Tylney Road, London E7. Tel. 01 555 7584. (The Irish in Britain.)

Donal McGrath, 5 Victoria Mews, London NW6. Tel. 01 624 9991. (The Irish in Britain.)

Mike Murphy, 133 Maple Road, Surbiton, Surrey. Tel. 01 399 7624. (Irish Literature.)

Harry Bourne, 11 Sirinham Point, Meadow Road, London SW8. (Archaeology and Early Irish History.)

Mary Hickman, 20 Queens Gate Gardens, London W2. Tel. 01 262 0851. (Irish Studies in general.)

Ann Buckley, 4 Herschell Road, London SE23. Tel: 01 291 0856. (Irish Language, Irish Folk Music.)

Alan Parkinson, 49 Worthington Road, Tolworth, Surrey. Tel. 01 399 8770. (Sociology of N. Ireland)

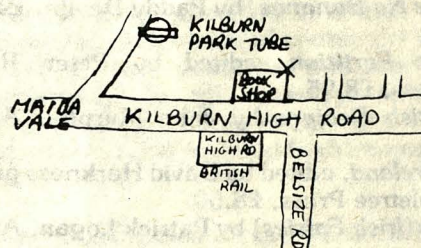
Helen O'Sullivan, 53 Highbury Park, London N5. Tel. 01 359 6905. (Irish Studies)

There are more tutors listed, as well as full information on the organisation of the Irish community in the Irish in Britain Directory published by Brent Irish Advisory Service, 9 Brondesbury Road, London NW6. Price £1 including postage.

★★★★★

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LETTERS

THE HARINGEY EXPERIENCE

We in Haringey, after months of struggle, have at last been formally recognized as a minority ethnic community (though the Irish in Haringey are estimated to be over 20,000 strong). We approached the local Education Dept. to see what support they could offer in helping to set up Irish language classes and Irish music classes. We were met with sniggers and giggles up and down the corridors laced with suitable 'witty remarks' as we waited to meet with the Chairman of the Education Committee. This behaviour, I believe, was more about the unconscious or otherwise racist attitudes generated by arrogance and ignorance and the damning subtleties of the 'harmless "Paddy" joke'. Haringey Adult Education Dept. did agree to run or help run the Music and language classes in the end. Our next aim is now to look at curriculum in the Haringey schools and see how they can more fairly represent our history and culture. Through our efforts and with the aid and assistance of the local authority we regard it as imperative to pass on to our children an awareness, depth of knowledge and pride in their Irish heritage so that we collectively acknowledge that being Irish and being proud of it is the most valuable contribution we can make to a harmonious multi-cultural British society.

With the troubles in Northern Ireland, the hunger strike tearing at our liberally minded conscience and the threat of the Prevention of Terrorism Act hanging over our heads and little comfort to be gained from the knowledge that our ultimate fall-back resource, Ireland, is suffering from increasing levels of unemployment and soaring inflation rates, is it any wonder why we the Irish like to keep our heads down and fade into the anonymous white background of British society? Some leaders and members of other minority ethnic groups often show a surprising lack of understanding of the Irish experience and predicament in Britain today. We are constantly accused of jumping on the bandwagon of ethnicity, and consequently taking free advantage of the hard-won machinery set up to meet the needs of the black communities, in particular. It warrants another time and greater space to ponder some of the reasons why the Irish in Britain have taken so long to organise and that we are only now beginning to assert that our cultural needs be recognized and that the State honour its responsibility to provide adequate resources so that our declared needs can be met.

Gearoid O Meachair
Haringey,
North London.

AN INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

Dear Sir,

My interest in Ireland arises from being half-Irish (father from Co. Clare) and half Anglo-Irish/Scottish. My family history is, in fact, 'The Irish Question' in microcosm.

When I came to prepare a doctoral thesis I chose Liam O'Flaherty (born 1896) to work on. He and my father were as young men close friends. O'Flaherty has kept no record of where and when his stories were published, at that time (the late 1960s) little research had been done into his work. I unearthed some twenty-five forgotten short stories and a novel. My research therefore contributed to the re-awakening of O'Flaherty studies, and publishing, which took place during the 1970s and is continuing.

My *Liam O'Flaherty the storyteller* (Macmillan 1976) will be reprinted as a paperback with up-dated bibliography in Autumn 1981 by Wolfhound Press, Dublin. I shall be editing the first collected edition of O'Flaherty short stories (Wolfhound 1982). A fully annotated bibliography of O'Flaherty's work is now being prepared by another scholar in London.

There is plenty of paperback material now available for student use, including a Longman Imprint volume of stories for schools, *The Wave and other stories*, with suitable background notes; two slim volumes of stories and *The Informer* from the New English Library; *Short Stories by Liam O'Flaherty*, from Wolfhound, Dublin, as well as several novels and an early autobiography from the same imprint.

★★★★★

In contrast to Liam O'Flaherty is the subtle work of Mary Lavin whose *Selected Stories* (Penguin), and *Tales from Bective Bridge* (Poolbeg Press, Dublin) are both in print. Critical background on Lavin is not plentiful. The *Irish University Review* 9, Autumn 1979, devoted a special issue to her; there are two American monographs on her, and some articles, all listed in my own study *Mary Lavin: quiet rebel* (Wolfhound, Dublin 1980). Some people took exception to this title, failing to see in what way Lavin rebels. The projected Constable Volume III of Lavin's collected short stories has been cancelled, but a collected edition of her stories from an American publisher is forthcoming.

I am at present working on the Belfast poet, Joseph Campbell (1879-1944), who started the first *School of Irish Studies* in New York; way back in 1935. One might well ask why it has taken so long to form something similar in Britain! Sr. Assumpta Saunders has already done Trojan work on Campbell. All you will find in print is contained in *The Journal of Irish Literature* 8, September 1979 (special issue on Campbell), and there is a small volume, *The Poems of Joseph Campbell* (ed. A. Clarke), Allen Figgis, Dublin 1963, available in some Dublin bookshops. Campbell has been strangely neglected. Apart from his poetry his part in the national revival was important.

Other current projects are researched into the scattered stories and essays of Kate O'Brien (1897-1974), whose novels are being reprinted by Arlen House, Dublin, starting with *The Ante-Room* (1980), to be followed by *The Last of Summer* and *Land of Spices*. *The Stony Thursday Book 7* (Limerick 1981) is a special Kate O'Brien number.

I am now collecting material for the first anthology of Irish women poets (from 1700 on) for Arlen House, Dublin. The choice is immense. The pattern emerging so far is an interesting reflection of Irish social history.

I warmly welcome Ivan Gibbons' initiative in launching *Irish Studies in Britain*, it should help some of us to work in less isolation, and reduce the widespread incomprehension still existing between the countries. Anything should be supported which may do that.

A.A. Kelly Ph.D.,
Boldre, Lymington,
Hampshire.

**IRISH HISTORY AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE,
LONDON**

Dear Mr Gibbons,

I have been much interested in the first issue of 'ISIB' and I enclose a cheque for £1 to cover a further year's subscription. Good luck with your brave venture.

My own course began because historians here have repeatedly asked me to initiate one and because as an economic historian by trade I felt that the amount of material that has appeared over the past few years at

last allows one to teach Irish economic and social history at undergraduate level.

I expected perhaps half a dozen students but was slightly embarrassed to get 14 during the first year. Some of them are of Irish descent, some are interested in the Northern Ireland situation, but the majority were interested in studying the economic history of another country.

I've much enjoyed teaching it (though this first year has been hard work) but not until one has attempted the task does one realise just how much still remains to be done by way of research.

The great surprise to me was the ignorance of even the best educated student of the most basic facts about Ireland. Irish myself, I would be deeply worried if I hadn't long known the basic facts of English topography. Such ignorance is almost universal among my students (or rather was last October!)

*David Tierney,
Department of History,
University College, London.*

P.S. Why not an advert from the AIB?
[Good question — Ed.]

AN ENGLISH STUDENT'S IMPRESSIONS OF A WEST LONDON IRISH STUDIES CLASS

Dear Sir,

One of the first points that I noted as a minority Englishman on a course predominantly attended by people of an Irish origin, was that while the English participants wished to find out more about the history and culture of Ireland in order to understand better the development and causes of the present 'Troubles', the major motivation of the Irish participants appeared to derive more from a wish to extend and understand their experiences of living in and then leaving Ireland in order to set up home in England. Indeed they generally seemed to be aware of the major strands of development of Irish history and how its history has affected their life-courses and chances, a characteristic not usually found in English people.

Certainly a knowledge of Irish history appeared to contribute fairly significantly to many of the Irish Participants' social consciousness and self image. Probably this was the result of Irish history being shaped significantly by external influences, particularly English domination and a consciousness that this domination was a major factor why they left their birth-places in order to live and work in another country.

In contrast Irish history is seen by English people as more a narrative of a development of a problems that has and continues to affect Britain. This divergence of perception is largely to be expected but should be noted.

Certainly as the course developed my initial impression that the N. Ireland situation was a problem with its roots deep in history was confirmed, though I found that I had underestimated the extent of British influence and control that had occurred during the course of Irish history while I feel that many of the Irish participants had underestimated the long past of the Ulster conflict as most of us were unaware that there had been serious sectarian rioting in Belfast throughout most of the 19th century.

When we looked specifically at the problem of N. Ireland a reasonable consensus developed within the group as to the causes and intractable nature of the conflict, and indeed an aura of fatalism descended when possible solutions were considered. In fact our common conclusion tended to be that while we agreed that the Catholic minority had been discriminated against and

repressed, we also recognised that solutions such as reunification, stated simply ignored the realities of the history and politics of the province, while solutions such as power sharing and integration of the schools and housing estates also presented often apparently insurmountable difficulties. At times I felt almost we were being too defeatist and blasé about accepting the present stalemate situation given the continuing loss of life and money expended in upholding it. However the more one examined the problem, the more apparent it became that it was characterised by two social groups with distinct incompatible goals and objectives and that the continuation of the conflict was inevitable if both groups are not prepared to compromise their objectives, though of course compromise is difficult where concepts of nationhood and identity are involved.

There was in fact more dissension within the group when the topic of Irish cultural identity and the position of 'The Irish in Britain' was considered. The speakers on these topics generally emphasised the separateness of being Irish and the need to develop Irish cultural forms. The problem of discrimination against the Irish immigrant and the stereotyping of the Irish were also discussed. Although I would not attempt to deny the importance or the desirability of preserving Irish cultural identity or that the Irish in Britain do suffer discrimination, I felt that the emphasis chosen when examining these topics at times tended to veer towards self absorption.

For example I feel that there is a contradiction implicit in an analysis which emphasizes the need to develop consciousness of the separateness of the Irish identity at a time when the forces producing particular Irish cultural forms such as a social structure derived from a backward agricultural economy and the influence of the Catholic Church are disappearing or weakening because of economic and social changes, experienced by much of W. Europe earlier. I felt that the expressed fear that Irish people in England are increasingly not working to preserve their Irish identity was stated, while the main factor causing this tendency was not fully considered. That is that the most important cultural identity Irish people feel in Britain is a common experience of being forced to leave a largely rural society of close social relationships in order to earn a living in an impersonal urban society, of another country, and that this cultural identity must inevitably weaken over time because of adaptation to the host country and the integration of the second generation into English society.

Similarly I considered that the claim that the Irish are discriminated against in England was overstated in that I feel that the problem of discrimination is largely confined to working class, unskilled Irish migrants who suffer the mainly common experience of discrimination that most unskilled newcomers suffer in arriving and establishing themselves in a host urban centre. However there is an exception in the shape of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and I was surprised to hear first hand accounts of people obviously not remotely connected with terrorism being detained under its provisions.

In short I felt that the emphasis on re-exerting Irish national identity was more a result of a felt ambivalence derived from deciding whether one is an Irishman living in England or an Englishman who happens to come originally from Ireland.

An issue which I though could be more profitably examined in depth is to analyse how Irish society can reap the benefits of economic and social advance whilst reserving its close knit and integrated social structure as this is an issue of interest and importance to both English and Irish society with many lessons to be learnt.

*John Newton,
Acton, London W3.*

IRISH STUDIES IN THE EIGHTIES –

A SIGNPOST

Noel O'Connell

The enthusiasm and desire for a deeper understanding of Irishness in the eighties evokes at once for me a comparison with the 1880s when the same need inspired Frank Fahy to found a Junior Literary Society in Southwark because the children were growing up Irish in name only and cheated of fullness and richness of their heritage. From the mean, teeming streets of Southwark, his meetings drew in the children and their parents, themselves equally in need of illumination. The vitality of the community attracted to it all the leading writers of the day and, in 1891, the Southwark Society became the Irish Literary Society under the Presidency of W.B. Yeats who determined at once a broad perspective, not confined to literature but covering history, music and natural history and resources. Within a short time the Irish Literary Society was instrumental in the formation of the London Gaelic League, the Irish Texts Society and the Irish Folk Song Society, all of which were able to call on leading academic and professional practitioners and produce a corpus of new knowledge to which we can still refer back.

Frank Fahy could never have expected his modest Sunday school to flower into a virtual open university. In 1980 the challenge is as real and as daunting and must needs be met by an equally expansive response based essentially on a wide spectrum into which all the bands coalesce – language, music, literature and history. But by comparison with 1880 there is an added dimension now. No longer is it sufficient to engage in Irish Studies for our own sake only but as a prelude to a greater contribution and input to the complex and confused society we are now all part of. There is a danger in the pursuit of Irish studies on their own without relevance to the nearby cultures on which they impinge and which in turn form and shape what comes to be Irishness. This is particularly true in England where exclusiveness alienates us from parallel movements to which we have contributed so much in their formation and from which we could rightly expect appreciation in return. The Catholic Church and the Labour movement are two obvious examples of institutions owing much to an Irish past and presence – but there are others, less obvious but closely connected; the Universities, the Arts and Industry all derived powerful stimulus from Irish imagination and drive. But to harness this mutual dependence is a mammoth task. One sees the patterns of Celtic intertwining repeated in studies and institutions interlinked, not just between Ireland and England but between Ireland and the European countries too.

But is it fair or reasonable to expect such a response from Irish studies in England at the present time? The teachers and organisers are under heavy pressure and even sympathetic Local Authorities are pressed by a philistine government to reduce and diminish adult education wherever possible. We must look to new sources to meet the demand. At the higher levels of education there would seem to be a field in which an Irish University could busy itself through a chair of Irish Studies and Influence, ideally acting jointly with a sensitive English University. London University springs to mind as an with wide experience of teaching and sponsoring courses all over the world through its external degrees. And London University has already in its service numerous Irish scholars. In Ireland one could look for response perhaps to the West where Galway

stands so close to the living heritage, or perhaps to the East where the University seems specially gifted to draw together the diverse sinews of our complicated past. A University which extended its patronage to Martin O'Cadhain would surely accept this wider challenge. Its courage to do so in this day and age would surely draw generous support in both countries especially perhaps from Institutions operating happily in both countries. The establishment of a chair of Irish Studies would give a goal for activities at other levels and could be the catalyst for including such studies in the curricula of the primary and secondary schools. What tolerance and understanding would flow from such a flowering. What riches are untapped. In the meantime, the hard-pressed teachers must continue, inspired primarily by the enthusiasm of the students. In the present political vacuum clichés and non-sequiturs scurry about like particles in an atom, endowed with the same explosive potential. It is time to stand back and take a hard look. Increasingly, attention is being drawn to the special relationship existing between the two islands, so it would seem right to explore and develop that relationship so that neighbours could understand each other better. A University is the only institution suitable for the apex of such studies which need objectivity and independence above all else. The results of the studies may disappoint or surprise students with too rigid preconceptions. That a chair of Irish Studies might be regarded as a luxury in these times and too remote from the cultural interface where most harm is done is an objection that hardly warrants rebuttal. Certainly no other discipline would accept such a limitation and Anglo-Irish misunderstanding is surely a major obscenity ranging from crude jokes at one extreme to denials of human rights on the other. The prize is peace and mutual respect and it demands the greatest input at the highest level. Once established, such a chair would release the primary and secondary levels from their present straitjacket and a quick flowering could be expected, not just from those schools where Irish children and Irish teachers are already numerous but also from schools now unacquainted with the startling richness and imagination of Irish culture at present passing them by in a world where disillusion with the trivial and the mundane is widespread. 'What if the dream comes true?' Now is the acceptable time to take up the challenge.

[Noel O'Connell is President of the Irish Literary Society and Hon. Secretary of the Irish Texts Society.]

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IRISH STUDIES IN COVENTRY – INTERIM REPORT

Tom Arkell

Establishing the Project

This pilot project on the development of Irish cultural studies for children (aged mainly 9 to 11) in English primary schools began in January, 1981 and is scheduled to last for twelve months. It is being carried out by the University of Warwick in co-operation with the Coventry L.E.A.

Because final confirmation of the project was not received until the end of November, no detailed preparation was possible before the project began. December was devoted to appointing Mrs Anna McCabe as the teacher who would work half-time on the project throughout the year and to arranging for Mrs Nora O'Donoghue to teach Irish music for at least one afternoon a week. In the very short time available the establishment of the project was made possible only by the exceptional understanding and sympathetic support of the officers of the Coventry L.E.A.

St. Osburg's School

With the enthusiastic support of Mrs. McCabe's headmaster, Mr. J.G. Keogan, for the first two terms, the project's work was concentrated exclusively in her own school, St. Osburg's. Because there was not time for advanced planning, both the teachers and children of the three top classes in St. Osburg's have been used as very willing guinea-pigs on whom various somewhat nebulous ideas have been tried out in the early stages in particular enthusiasm was offered as almost the only substitute for adequate teaching materials.

The project's long-term aim is to recommend ways in which topics with a whole, or partly, Irish content can be integrated within the ordinary curriculum of a primary school. It does not plan to develop a package of idea-contained Irish studies material. So far a range of ideas and topics have been tried out to see which appear most suitable for 9-11 year olds and which lend themselves best to inclusion in a school's normal curriculum. Inevitably, therefore, the work in St. Osburg's was conducted in an artificial situation because there the emphasis was on a continuing Irish studies theme. Mrs. McCabe's and Mrs. O'Donoghue's separate reports on their own activities give a clear and detailed picture of the work that was undertaken in St. Osburg's.

Visit to Ireland

This work was greatly helped and encouraged by many people, especially those in Ireland with whom the three members of the project team made contact on a visit to Ireland from 16th to 26th February.

During the first week we were the guests of the District Inspectors of Primary Schools, Mr. John Dennehy and Mr. Pat Kitterick, who had arranged an intensive and very stimulating series of visits for us to nine different primary schools in and around Dublin, Athlone and County Roscommon. We were made extremely welcome in all of these schools, which are listed separately together with the names of many of the teachers whom we met. We were deeply impressed both by the interest shown in our project and by the skill and dedication of the teachers whom we saw. By the end of the week we had received a vivid and very privileged inside picture of the flourishing state of many Irish primary schools.

During the rest of our stay, we visited separately further schools and colleges in Galway and Limerick and Corduff School, Aughavas, Co. Leitrim (Principal: Mr. Michael Whelan). We also met and discussed different aspects of our project with several lecturers and others actively engaged in curriculum development, research and other relevant aspects of education. All were remarkably generous in providing ideas, materials and offers of further help; in particular, Professor John Heywood and Miss Susan Parkes of the department of Teacher Education, Trinity College, University of Dublin, where Mr. Arkell stayed as their guest.

Towards the end of the summer term these Irish links were consolidated by a two-day visit to Coventry by Mr. Pat Kitterick on 25th and 26th June. He spent some time in St. Osburg's with each of the three classes involved in the project to discover what they had been doing in their Irish studies and also attended a concert that included music, dance and a play based on the childhood of Cuchulainn that was devised by Mr. John Alcock of Warwick University. In addition to visiting Sacred Heart School, more briefly, Mr. Kitterick was taken by Mr. M. Feeley to Broad Heath Primary School and the Minority Group Support service headquarters at Southfields to help him appreciate the wider context of multi-ethnic education in Coventry within which the Irish studies project is operating, Mr. Kitterick was also joined for part of his visit by two English H.M.I.s, Mr. J. Singh and Mr. J. Rose.

Mr. Kitterick was an appreciative witness of some of these first faltering steps towards introducing more systematically the study of aspects of Irish culture into the curriculum of some English primary schools. He was both tolerant of our more obvious failings and most encouraging for our future endeavours. More particularly, he advised us to avoid an exclusive concentration on Irish studies but to develop thematic approaches within a broader multicultural context and not to spread our efforts too wide over a range of topics or tackle individual disciplines like History or Geography as they were taught in Ireland, but to develop more limited patch studies with their own inner logic and relevance for children in English schools. He was also very keen to see the development in due course of reciprocal visits between children in English and Irish schools.

Future Plans

In the autumn term the project will work for two afternoons a week in each of two different Coventry primary schools — Corpus Christi and Sacred Heart. It is intended that the two classes in Corpus Christi will develop links with two schools in Cork and that the top class will engage in a comparative study of Coventry and Cork while the third year class will tackle themes like migration and stories. In Sacred Heart it is planned that the two classes will correspond with schools in Dublin and the topics which they will tackle will include comparative studies of stone buildings in England and Ireland in the top class, and of water, river and sea, etc., in the third year class.

[Tom Arkell is director of the above EEC Irish Cultural Studies Project.]

THE SAME OLD JOKE

Colm Kerrigan

As an Irishman who has lived in London for most of his life, Irish jokes have always irritated me, none more than those told by Irish comedians. Realising that Irish jokes and stories would never go away, I tried to find an explanation for their popularity and to see what, if anything, they might tell about the position of Irish immigrants in the capital city of their traditional enemy. I found no satisfying explanation, but the discovery that my compatriots in London have had to endure these jokes for several hundred years has made me more tolerant. Such are the rewards of knowledge. But let me begin with a few examples.

Entering a sea-battle, and English and an Irish sailor promised each other that if one of them should receive an injury, the other would carry him to the ship's surgeon for immediate treatment. Early in the engagement the Englishman had a leg shot off, whereupon his companion slung him over his shoulder to carry him to the surgeon. On the way, unknown to the Irishman because of the noise of battle, the Englishman had his head blown off. The corpse was dumped before the surgeon.

'What did you bring him in here for, Paddy?' shouted the harrassed surgeon. 'Can't you see he's had his head blown off?'

'The liar!' said the Irishman, 'he told me it was his leg.'

The story is taken, not from the latest book of Irish jokes, but from a pamphlet entitled *Pitts' Effusions of Wit and Humour*, published in 1839. Pitts was a printer of street literature and his premises were near the then Irish quarter of St. Giles-in-the-Fields. It was here, in fact, that one of the earliest Irish settlements in London was established in the seventeenth century when immigrants first began to arrive in substantial numbers. They were attracted to St. Giles by the generous system of poor relief for which the parish was noted. The area became a notorious slum, the despair of social reformers, and was partly swept away with the building of New Oxford Street in the eighteen forties. By then, of course, there were Irish colonies in other parts of London, like the East End, Southwark, Deptford and Bermondsey, areas where the attraction was the demand for labour rather than generous relief.

The date of my second Irish story is slightly earlier and the location was a street called the Ratcliff Highway, situated near the heavily populated Irish areas of Wapping and St. George's-in-the-East. One of the many inns on the Highway had the familiar sign of a white swan over its door. An Irishman, presumably drunk, was supposed to have mistaken the swan for a goose from his native land. Though not all that outrageous an error, the event was thought hilarious by the bird-fancying East Londoners, and the establishment was promptly renamed to commemorate the event. Later, the name of the inn was celebrated in a well-known sailor's ballad, which, purporting to be a warning against this centre of vice, probably served more as an advertisement for it:

*You jovial sailors, one and all,
When you in the Port of London call,
Mind Ratcliff Highway and the damsels loose,
The William, the Bear, and the Paddy Goose.*

The ropemaker turned playwright Joseph Reed lived just off the same Ratcliff Highway in the eighteenth century and his play *The Register Office* is the source for my final Irish story. Patrick O'Carroll has left his master who, 'with his dam English tricks', was forcing him to

yoke the mules by the necks rather than by the tail, this latter being the traditional Irish custom. His native way is defended by Patrick with gusto and logic:

'You know that when the Trashers is fasten'd to the Tail, all the rest of the Body is free; and when all the Carcash but the Tail goes along, the Tail must certainly follow it.'

It would be foolish to speculate too much on what stories like these might tell us about the position of Irish immigrants in London in the past and Londoners' attitudes towards them. A few possibilities might be usefully explored, however, and a few tentative suggestions put forward.

Eruptions in the apparently insoluble political situation in Ireland might have helped create the atmosphere for the reception of these Irish stories, just as the political situation since 1969 helped their recent revival. When *The Register Office* was successfully produced on the London stage in the seventeen sixties the peasants of Munster were organising themselves into the Whiteboy movement, going around at night destroying the property of landlords in a protest against enclosures which deprived them of peat for their fires and grazing land for their cattle. John Pitts' Irish sailor was made to exhibit his stupidity at a time when disillusionment with the Act of Union was leading to a massive popular campaign throughout Ireland for its repeal. Added to this, from the Londoner's point of view, was the support among the Irish in London for these and other causes inimical to English involvement in Ireland, although this support was rarely militant enough to worry the Government.

But could it be seriously argued that Reed in his play was trying to show that the peasant was too idiotic to have his political grievances heard, or that Pitts was suggesting that, with Irishmen as dumb as his sailor, rule from Westminster must continue for ever? Or that the jokers of the Ratcliff Highway set out to prove that a race incapable of distinguishing a swan from a goose could hardly be trusted to tell good government from bad? Evidence of what the writers or the wits intended is clearly unavailable, but the matter seems far too complicated for such a simple explanation. Despite the long drawn out wars with France, why was there no tradition of Frenchman jokes? A partial answer might be that while there were few Frenchmen in London, apart from prisoners of war, there were thousands of Irishmen. I am suggesting, then, that explanations of the popularity of the Irish joke might relate more to the impressions Londoners had of the Irish they encountered as people rather than as representatives of a persistently troublesome part of Britain.

The contrast between what Londoners might hear about the Irish from travellers' tales and what they could see with their own eyes is borne out by the incident in Reed's play. The Irish practice of ploughing by the tail was an actual issue. The method, determined by the small fields, and the small plough and harrow best suited to tilling them, may have seemed natural to peasants working the land, but it outraged their fox-hunting betters in Ireland and in England. The native London worker, however, may have been more tolerant and less hypocritical, and his everyday observation of the immigrant from rural Ireland offered him no evidence that they were particularly cruel to animals. The Irish

practice of keeping pigs indoors was clearly inappropriate to life in crowded tenements in St. Giles or Seven Dials, but it suggested cruelty to the inhabitants of the slums, not to the pigs. Also, what animal-loving Londoner, working class or otherwise, could fail to be moved by the spectacle, described by Frederick Rogers in *Labour and Literature*, of the donkeys looking out of the ground-floor windows of the Stepney Irish?

The housing conditions of the Irish in London were of course appalling, but, like their poverty, were not that much worse than those of the majority of London's 'labouring poor'. Their drinking habits were also shared by their neighbours. When the Irish temperance leader, Fr. Mathew, visited London in 1843, many native Londoners attended his crowded rallies and joined the thousands of Irish who took the pledge. The reputation for violence associated with drinking, however, seems to have been peculiar to the Irish. Mayhew records an inn-keeper as saying he would prefer to have 'twenty poor Englishmen drunk in my tap room than a couple of poor Irishmen', so quarrelsome and violent were they. Fifty years later Charles Booth noted an Irish tenement block in East London known as the 'Fenian Barracks' whose occupants specialised in sending large numbers of injured policemen to hospital. For the most part, however, their quarrels were confined among themselves and, in any case, sending policemen to hospital would hardly have lowered the Irish in the esteem of the native East Ender.

As Catholics the Irish immigrants may have been disliked or mistrusted by their Protestant neighbours, but there is little evidence to suggest that the Irish poor were victims of any discrimination on religious grounds. When the anti-Papist Gordon rioters pulled down mass-houses and attacked the homes of some prominent Catholics, they made no attempt on the houses of the Irish poor, despite the fact that these constituted the largest concentration of 'Papists' in London.

The stupidity of the Irishman is the central point of all three stories related earlier. Yet nothing I have said so far about the Irish in London in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would be sufficient to identify them as being much different from other poor Londoners, natives or immigrants. What was it then that enabled ordinary Londoners to associate the Irish so readily with stupidity? With the political situation as a background, I suggest that the association was made possible partly by the nature of the occupations the Irish in London were engaged in and partly by their isolation from other Londoners.

Like their accommodation, the jobs the Irish could find were determined by necessity rather than choice. They took what they could get. Being mostly country people raised on the land, very few of them had skills that would permit them entry into skilled employment. In her recent study, Dr. Lynn Hollen Lees has shown that the men found work as bricklayers' labourers in the building industry, general labourers, costermongers, riverside workers and, among the women, domestic service and the rag trade were the main occupations. The association with occupations requiring brawn rather than brain must have helped considerably towards creating a climate in which the Irish could be seen as lacking the intelligence to do anything 'better'.

But many native Londoners of the poorer classes were employed in the same occupations. It would have been difficult for these to have laughed at the Irish without, in a sense, laughing at themselves. There are two answers to this. In the first place, only some of the local Londoners were employed in unskilled jobs whereas it seemed that virtually all the Irish were so employed.

Secondly, it may well be that many of those who were competing with the Irish for these unskilled jobs, namely, the least skilled section of the London working class, were glad of the opportunities for subtle revenge involved in labelling the Irish as stupid. This is all the more so as the competition from the Irish was often unfair. Being used less in Ireland, they were willing to undercut the local labourer to gain employment. As unionisation of unskilled workers did not get off the ground until the late nineteenth century, there was little the displaced native could do except ridicule the Irish for being willing to work for so little. Occasionally they went further. When St. Leonard's Church, Shoreditch, was being rebuilt in 1736, Irish labourers were employed at a lower rate than local workers who had been laid off. There was rioting in the streets and an inn where the Irish used to eat was pulled down. Order was restored by troops and the Irish were laid off as soon as the job in hand was completed.

The isolation of the Irish from other Londoners was a factor both at home and at work. While there were some Irish in all parts of London, most lived in the crowded inner city parishes, often in exclusively Irish streets or blocks. These ghettos cut them off to a great extent from London life going on around them. Newcomers from Ireland usually lodged with relations already here. At work, servants and costermongers would have regular dealings with other Londoners, but some, like coal-heavers or dockers, working in all-Irish gangs, had minimal contact with their English neighbours. Not actually knowing them, Londoners judged the Irish by external appearances, and these suggested a collection of people fit for nothing but drudgery and demanding no more than the basic means of survival. That they had little choice but to do the jobs they did and live in the hovels they lived in, were matters far beyond the understanding of the average Londoner.

What, finally, did the Irish think of their neighbours' poor view of them? John Pitts took advantage of the location of his printing works near the Irish quarter of St. Giles to sell street ballads with titles like *The Irish Haymaker*, *Shamrock Shore* and *The Irish Butcher's Frolic*. How would his story about the stupid Irish sailor have gone down with his customers? An astute businessman, he would have been unlikely to print anything that might cause them to stop buying his sheets. From this we might assume that the Irish in London had accepted their role as figures of fun. Dr. Sheridan Gilley has shown that their songs abounded in references to the symbols of backwardness (mud-cabins, pigs, etc.) that Englishmen liked laughing at. But was this just a defence against the pain of being ridiculed? A way of depriving his English tormentor of his pleasure, in fact, for there is little fun in ridiculing people who make fun of themselves. Looked at in this light, the spectacle of the Irish comedian telling Irish jokes may not be as pathetic as it seemed at first.

Three relevant books on this subject are:

- Lees, Lynn Hollen, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Immigrants in Victorian London* (Manchester 1979)
- Gilley, Sheridan, 'English Attitudes to the Irish in England, 1780-1900' in Holmes, Colin, *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society* (London 1978)
- Curtis, L. Perry Jnr. *Apes and Angels: the Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Newton Abbot 1971)

[Colm Kerrigan, a member of the Irish in Britain History Group, has been a teacher in East London for the past fourteen years.]

IRISH JOKES: NO CAUSE FOR LAUGHTER

John Kirkaldy

The next time that anybody who is Irish or is of Irish extraction is tempted to shrug off the latest Irish joke, he or she should pause to consider. For anti-Irish humour has a long history and its purpose is a lot more than raising a cheap laugh.

The stereotypes it involves are well-known, the Irish being depicted as stupid, lazy, violent, priest-ridden and alcoholic; above all else, they are viewed as inferior to the more intelligent and superior WASP. Some of the confusions within western society are demonstrated if Asians, Blacks or Jews are substituted in these stories for the Irish; there would be many, particularly of a liberal inclination, who would be offended at such a blatant display of racism. (This is not an academic exercise, many Irish jokes turn up in other countries in different guises, e.g. Polack jokes in the United States, Newfie jokes in Canada or Van der Merwe jokes in South Africa.)

It is, of course, the troubles in Northern Ireland that have prompted the return of the Irish joke in all its crudity. The 'latest' example concerns the Irish terrorists who demanded a million pounds and two parachutes before agreeing to return a hi-jacked submarine. Robert Taylor shows that a survey of jokes used by comics on the popular television series, *The Comedians*, revealed that Irish jokes comprised the second largest category following those about Pakistanis (1). Irish jokes are a staple part in the repertoires of many other English comedians (2), including the Two Ronnies and Morecambe and Wise, to say nothing of that professional Irishman, Dave Allen. Anti-Irish humour has also been a constant stand-by in situation comedy, such as *Life Begins at Forty*, *Robin's Nest* and *Me Mammy*.

It is most important to understand that there is little or no basis in reality for the stereotypes displayed in Irish jokes. There is no statistical evidence to support the notion that the Irish are any more stupid or intelligent than any other nation. Richard Stivers, in an exhaustive study of American stereotypes and Irish drinking, found that the Irish were no better or worse than any other migrant group when it came to alcohol. (3) (Irish drinking patterns and attitudes towards alcohol were, however, sometimes different to other groups.) Southern Irish crime figures, when compared to those of Britain, are much lower for murder, assault, robbery with violence, rape and burglary.

English laughter and derision concerning the Irish echo down through history. The images and stereotypes displayed in Irish jokes are based on long-held English assumptions and have been chronicled from the twelfth century by historians, such as L.P. Curtis Jr., Ned Lebow and Patrick O'Farrell. (4) The intensity of these feelings has been exacerbated by the geographical proximity of Ireland to England and the continuing violent interaction between the two countries in every century since the English crown first invaded in 1171. Since the nineteenth century these images have been reinforced by large-scale migration of the Irish to England. (5) Anti-Irish images are not confined to one class: many working-class Englishmen resent Irish migration, as they fear competition for employment. It would be impossible to list every vice that the English have ascribed to the Irish but they range from incest and cannibalism to rampant promiscuity. Lebow has traced an unbroken line of consistently hostile imagery in the writings of British historians, going back to the first to write a history of Ireland, Giraldus Cambrensis. Charles Kingsley, the author of *The Water Babies* and a social reformer in England, writing to his wife in 1860 commented: 'But I am haunted by the human chimpanzees that I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country... But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not mind so much but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours.' Beatrice and Sydney Webb, two founders of the Labour Party, wrote to their friend, Graham Wallas, about their honeymoon in Ireland during 1892: 'We will tell you about Ireland when we come back. The people are charming but we detest them, as we should the Hottentots...' Other historians to write in a similar vein include David Hume, Edmund Spenser, J.A. Froude and Thomas Macaulay but the list could be greatly extended. Curtis in his book, *Apes and Angels*, has shown how Victorian cartoons and caricatures often depicted the Irish as simian devils with protruding lower lips, shallow jaws and fang-like teeth.

Not all English images of the Irish were hostile. There were a few English writers, such as Thomas Comerford, who were anxious to be less partisan. Even the most biased Englishman could patronisingly admit that on occasions Paddy could be an amusing fellow with his wry sense of humour and wayward lack of logic. In times of crisis, the English felt sure that there were Irishmen in the background who saw the wisdom of the imperial connection. These were symbolised during the nineteenth century in *Punch* cartoons by the weeping figure of Hibernia. Even those Irishmen who spoke or acted like Englishmen were, however, looked down upon or, in the



last resort, treated as outsiders. English imagery of the Irish was directly related to current circumstances in Ireland: during the relatively few periods of calm, the English viewed them in a more positive light, although still with indifference and condescension; while in terms of stress, they reacted with anger and contempt.

What use traditionally had such English stereotypes of the Irish? Firstly, they justified English intervention into Irish affairs. If the Irish were violent and barbaric, then the English were needed as a civilising influence. Secondly, these stereotypes legitimised any measures the English found necessary to establish their rule: a violent people obviously required violent methods to subdue them and a fatal pattern of violence and counter-violence was established from the start of Anglo-Irish relations. A similar process can be observed in nearly all colonial situations; it enables the coloniser to overcome any feelings of guilt about the real reasons for colonisation — political aggrandizement and economic exploitation. Images of colonised people, therefore, stress their inferiority whether they be chinks, dagoes, gooks, niggers, wogs or Paddies. If the people concerned are seen as inferior or scarcely human, then the gap between values at home and those in the colonies can be bridged. It can even be argued that the coloniser has a duty, as in the 'White Man's Burden', for example, to spread and extend imperial rule.

The Irish joke took this process to a logical conclusion. It popularised, familiarised and spread the fable of Irish inferiority and English superiority. It used jester's licence to exaggerate and propagate the already manifest absurdities, to English eyes, of the Irish. If the Irish did not like this process, they could, by an ironic twist, be accused not only of being inferior but also of lacking a sense of humour. *Punch* proved an accurate indicator of Victorian anti-Irish humour and the Irish joke was one of its stocks-in-trade. During times of relative harmony between the two countries a vast procession of Irish waiters, priests, farm labourers, gillies, boatmen and the occasional eccentric Anglo-Irish squire could be assembled in its pages to illustrate the Irish lack of logic and their peculiar attitudes towards life. These characters were, naturally enough, usually contrasted with sane and sensible Englishmen. The Irish joke was further popularised by the stage Irishman, a standard figure of fun in the English theatre from the time of Shakespeare, and who displayed all the familiar characteristics. (6)

In times of stress the full force of the negative stereotypes could be rekindled and English prejudice fully exhibited. Mr Punch was convinced in a typical outburst in 1849 that the Irish were 'the missing link between the gorilla and the Negro': an image that was to reappear continually in Victorian England. The Irish joke also suggested that the Irish needed not be taken seriously at all. The election to Parliament in 1918 of the Sinn Féiner, Arthur Griffith, while still in gaol, moved the English novelist, Ian Hay, to declare: 'The redeeming feature of Irish politics lies in the fact that the grimmest tragedy is never far removed from the wildest farce.' The very word 'Irish' itself had a number of humorous if derogatory meanings in Victorian England: 'to weep Irish' meant to feign sorrow; to 'go to an Irish wedding' denoted emptying a cesspool; and to 'get up one's Irish' described losing one's temper. To this day 'Irish' is used in England as an adjective to denote anything that is illogical, unclear or unordinary in any sense.

Given this history, the present crop and format of Irish jokes comes as no surprise. All the old stereotypes with the minimal amount of updating, such as the wellies, are once again back to delight the English. Irish jokes are not harmless bits of fun but are deeply offensive, racist

and political. A concentrated campaign is needed to counteract this never ending flow but so far there has been little done (for example, Terry Wogan took a brave stand in a television show in 1977). Given the tragedy of Northern Ireland, any laughter from the Irish joke must rign very hollow.

[Dr. John Kirkaldy is a sociologist working at the Open University and the Polytechnic of North London. He is currently engaged on a book which analyses the impact of Northern Ireland on Britain and British political institutions.]

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Robert Taylor, *New Society*, 28 November 1974. Irish jokes are discussed by Andrew Brown, 'Anti-Irish Jokes', ed. *The Campaign for Free Speech in Ireland, The British Media and Ireland*, 1979; Liz Curtis and Alastair Renwick, *Socialist Challenge*, 9 March 1978; and Sarah Nelson, *Fortnight*, 19 December 1975 and 9 January 1976. Anti-Irish cartoons and the present troubles will be discussed in a forthcoming article in *Éire-Ireland* by the author of this paper; it is due to appear in the autumn edition of 1981.
- (2) Throughout this paper the word 'English' is used unless it is obviously incorrect e.g. British army or Government. The Irish have traditionally thought of their oppressors as the English and to use British would mean incorporating Scottish and Welsh terms of reference; this would be particularly controversial in a period of growing separatist feelings in those countries. The term 'Brits' has, however, gained considerable usage during the present troubles.
- (3) Richard Stives, *A Hair of the Dog: Irish Drinking and American Stereotype*, University Park, Pennsylvania, 1977.
- (4) I wish to acknowledge my general indebtedness in this section on historical imagery to L.P. Curtis Jr., *Anglo-Saxons and Celts*, Bridgeport, 1968, and *Apes and Angels*, Newton Abbot, 1971; Ned Lebow, 'British Historians and Irish History', *Éire-Ireland*, viii, Winter 1973, 4, and *White Britain and Black Ireland: The Influences of Stereotypes on Colonial Policy*, Philadelphia, 1976; and Patrick O'Farrell, *England and Ireland since 1800*, London, 1975.
- (5) See Sheridan Gilley, 'English Attitudes Towards the Irish in England, 1780-1900', ed. Colin Holmes, *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society*, London, 1978; John Archer Jackson, *The Irish in Britain*, London, 1963; and Kevin O'Connor, *The Irish in Britain*, London, 1972.
- (6) G.C. Duggan, *The Stage Irishman*, Dublin, 1937.

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MICHAEL DAVITT'S LANCASHIRE APPRENTICESHIP

John Dunleavy

Michael Davitt, the founder of the Irish Land League, died seventy-five years ago in Dublin. His place in the land agitation, with its implications for the eventual freedom of his native country, is assured: less well-known is Davitt's contribution to the campaign for the social, economic, and political emancipation of the industrial wage earner. At the time of his death contemporaries placed his work for labour on a par with his efforts to promote the welfare of the tenant farmer. The Blackburn *Northern Daily Telegraph's* editorial was not untypical in stating:

"...He accomplished great works as a pioneer land reformer. The labour cause in England and Scotland, as well as in Ireland, in the colonies and in the United States of America, had no truer friend, no more ardent advocate than Michael Davitt."

Recognition of Davitt as a friend of labour came from tributes paid to his memory by trade unionists and Labour M.P.s at the time of his death in 1906.

Attention to this neglected aspect of Davitt's career was discussed by Dr. T.W. Moody in a paper, 'Michael Davitt and the British Labour Movement', (*Trans. Royal Historical Society*, vol. III (5th series), pp. 53-76), as long ago as 1952. Apart from brief mentions in trade union and labour histories, however, Davitt's role as a labour spokesman, still less his first-hand experience of industrial life, have gone unexplored and unrecorded. An attempt to make good this latter omission was made by the present writer in a booklet, 'Michael Davitt and Haslingden', (Haslingden Local History Society, 1979); this article is concerned mainly with Davitt's experiences in industry during the 1850s and 1860s.

On being evicted from their Mayo holding in 1850, the Davitts made their way to the Lancashire town of Haslingden, an old community then experiencing unprecedented growth due to the introduction of the cotton trade. Wool, engineering, and stone quarrying provided additional employment for the growing population. The opening of the railway had given added impetus to trade.

In common with most newcomers, Davitt at the age of nine found employment in the cotton industry, being engaged as a "bobbin tenter" or doffer. The tenter's task was to replace full bobbins on the spinning frame with empty ones; Michael had been promised 2s. 6d. (12½p) per week for his services, but the mule spinner who had hired him spent the money on drink instead. After four weeks without receiving any payment, Michael left.

Harsh as this treatment might appear worse was to follow, for at his next place of work Davitt was horrified one day when his friend, John Ginty, was caught up in the belt shaft, taken over the shaft, dashing his head on the stone floor. An inquest ruled that the cause of death was an accident. Davitt's parents were so discomfited by this episode that they insisted Michael seek work elsewhere.

Michael Davitt was ten when he found a job in yet another textile establishment. Some reports state he worked a twelve-hour day, though according to the law he was not eligible for full-time employment until he was thirteen. Certainly his new employer seems to have had little regard for the welfare of his young employee, for one day Davitt was ordered to tend a machine normally operated by an adult. A skein became entangled in the

machinery, and in trying to untangle the thread, Davitt's right arm became trapped between the rollers and was so badly mangled before the machine could be stopped that the arm had to be amputated some days later.

Davitt's first, brief encounter with industry brought home a number of lessons which were to remain with him for the rest of his life. Some employers were undoubtedly negligent, placing little value on the safety or even the lives of their workers, while others clearly were unjust, not troubling themselves to ensure that employees least able to protect themselves received a fair reward. The whole system, it is clear, was heavily weighted in favour of the industrialist, such laws as there were appeared to safeguard his interests, often at the expense of the operative. Any resentment Davitt may have harboured against the factory owners must have been further compounded by his own accident, because he never received any compensation.

If the working conditions encountered by Michael Davitt left much to be desired, he now discovered that there were employers who took a real interest in the welfare of their workers. One of these, a public-spirited cotton manufacturer who was responsible for many unostentatious acts of charity, on learning of Davitt's plight, came forward and offered to pay the fees necessary to resume his education. Michael thus had the advantage of a second spell of learning at the best school in the district, the Wesleyan Day School. While there he became a firm friend of the headmaster and made the acquaintanceship of senior boys who later became leading figures in politics and industry.

After four years of schooling, Davitt found a position with the town's postmaster. At the outset he acted as an errand boy and newsseller; then he progressed to serving at the counter and doing a certain amount of bookkeeping; and finally, to the surprise and delight of his employer, he demonstrated that he was capable of performing tasks in the printing department despite his handicap.

Davitt's enterprise and adaptability led to the development of a warm friendship and sympathy with the postmaster and his family. Time and time again he demonstrated that he was possessed of above-average talents: many of the customers, for instance, were Irish-speaking, so Michael obligingly taught his employer a number of Gaelic phrases. Both shared a common interest in poetry, some of their effusions appearing in print. The postmaster's 'Acrostic' on the Prince Consort being published in the Tory *Bacup and Rossendale News*, while Michael's, of a very different tendency, were welcomed by the nationalistic *Irish People*. Political and religious differences were not allowed to stand in the way of friendship.

During his five years at the post office, Davitt's political views matured. His poems were but one symptom of his nationalist sympathies, for at the age of seventeen he joined the revolutionary Irish Republican Brotherhood. After Ireland, movements for change and reform gathering pace in the 1860s, influenced him greatly: demands for a wider franchise, the ten hour working day, and universal elementary education. Attempts at self-help cannot have gone unnoticed, Haslingden proving a fertile ground for co-operative stores, building societies, trade unions, and a multitude

of friendly societies. Given his place of employment, he was extremely well-situated to develop informed views on current affairs; messages, newspapers, and visitors arriving daily, while he had ready access to books at the Haslingden Institute library.

Because of his Fenian activities, Davitt was sentenced to fifteen years penal servitude in 1870, and of his term he served close on eight years. The rigours of gaol life in Victorian Britain were often enough to break a man, but it says much for Davitt's force of character that he not only survived, but emerged from his incarceration a much stronger person intellectually. Imprisonment gave him an opportunity to dwell not only on the denial of freedom to his native country, but the injustices tolerated in a modern industrial society. From his Haslingden days he knew that men, women and children were obliged to work long hours for meagre returns, that operatives were sometimes maimed, even killed, in machinery accidents which could be prevented, and that because of the demands made by industry on the individual, people were unable to avail themselves adequately of educational and recreational amenities. Davitt therefore resumed his public life in 1878 committed to the ideal of social justice, a principle capable of universal application and one which Davitt was to adhere to until the time of his death.

On his release he threw himself into the land agitation established the Land League, and had the satisfaction of seeing many of his aims realised in the Land Act of 1881. In the following year the League was wound up and Davitt was free to turn to other matters, and, numerous as these were, his attachment to the Labour cause claimed a large portion of his time. Just as the Irish tenant farmer had gained much by supporting the Land League, so Davitt believed the wage earner must also exert himself to secure a better life. First and foremost was the need for organisation; individually the worker could achieve little: as the member of a trade union his economic and social position would be improved. Secondly, Davitt fostered the idea of workingmen seeking election to the House of Commons. As he observed, the aristocracy, professional men, industrialists, were all represented, whereas the most numerous group in society, the wage earner sent only a handful of men from its ranks to speak for it at Westminster. And finally, such a group should press for the enactment of laws to improve the lot of the industrial labour force: a more effective regulation of working conditions, minimum rates of pay, and compensation for accidents, among others.

Davitt sat as member of Parliament from 1892 until 1899, during which period his views on the Labour Question were much sought after. His bid to reach a wider audience by editing and publishing the weekly *Labour World* bankrupted him. The return of a significant number of Labour M.P.s in the 1906 election gave him a great deal of satisfaction in what proved to be the last year of his life.

Hence, not only are the Irish people indebted to Michael Davitt for his part in setting Ireland on the road to freedom, but the British industrial worker equally has cause to honour the memory of the one-time Lancashire cotton operative who championed the fledgling labour movement.

[John Dunleavy is a Lancashire history teacher currently working in Abingdon, Berks.]



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We continue our policy of publicising books and other materials that will facilitate the teaching of Irish Studies in this country. As in the first issue, the following list is by no means exhaustive, rather being the end product resulting from a canvass of Irish publishers whose materials unfortunately are often unknown and unattainable to many in this country, a situation though that has been improved upon since even the first issue (see earlier in the magazine).

SLIDES

Produced by the National Library of Ireland, these "Documents of Irish History" from the collections of the National Library are intended for use in the study of various aspects of Irish history and culture dating from the Norman invasion to the twentieth century. There are 245 slides in all and they cover such topics as agriculture and industry, architecture, battles, boats and ships, costume, elections, eminent Irish people, landlords, maps, sport and entertainment, transport and travel, weapons. The slides are obtainable from the Centre for Educational Technology, Robert Emmet House, Dundrum Road, Milltown, Dublin, from whom a full list is available.

[We would like to thank Dr. Bearnárd Ó Dubhthaigh of the Irish Department of Education for providing information which helped us compile this list.]

BOOKS

In the following list of books, the title appears first followed by the author or editor. The publisher's name appears in capital letters (a directory of addresses is included at the end of this section). The price is given either in Irish pounds (IR£) or otherwise in pounds sterling. Please note that these prices are a guide only; VAT has recently been increased in the Republic of Ireland and this has invariably meant an increase in book prices. The Irish *punt* is generally worth about 80p sterling but is subject to fluctuation.

In this issue we continue our policy of publicising books which provide a general introduction to various aspects of Irish life and culture for the layman or teacher new to Irish Studies. We again concentrate on books published in Ireland as well as material on the Irish in Britain. Because of lack of space our survey of books and other teaching materials produced by specifically educational publishing houses in Ireland has largely been postponed until later issues.

THE IRISH IN BRITAIN

We are grateful to Bernard Canavan and the Irish in Britain History Workshop for producing the following directory. Where fuller details are not available in the list below we suggest you contact the History Workshop on 01 555 7584.

The Murphy Riots: A Victorian Dilemma, Arnstein, W.C., *Victorian Studies* 19 (1) 1975. pp. 51-71.

The London Irish; A Study in Political Activism 1870-1910, Benjamin, H.W., Princetown, 1976. (Ph.D. Thesis.)

Migrant Labour in British Agriculture in the Nineteenth Century, Collins, E.J.T., *Econ. His. Rev.* 29 (1) 1976.

Fergus O'Connor and the Northern Star, Epstein, J.A., *Inter. Rev. Soc. His.* 21 (1) 1976.

No Irish Need Apply: Patterns of Responses to Ethnic Discrimination in the Labour Movement, Gitelman, H.M., *Labour History* 14 (1) 1973.

The Irish in Nineteenth Century Lancashire 1830-71, Granath, A., M.A. Thesis, Lancaster University.

The Lancashire Irish and the Catholic Church: The Social Dimension 1846-71, Lowe, W.J., *Ir. Hist. Stud.* 20 (78), 1976.

Social Agencies Among the Irish in Lancashire During the Mid Nineteenth Century, *Soathar* 3 May 1977.

The Irish in Lancashire, 1846-71; A Social History, *Ir. Econ. Soc. Hist.* 2. 1975. Thesis abstract.

Irish Workers on Tyneside in the Nineteenth Century, Mac Dermott, T.P., *Essays in Tyneside Labour History* (Ed) McCord 1077.

Irish Nationalism in Liverpool, O'Connell, B., *Éire-Ireland* 10 (1) 1975.

The Irish in Britain, O'Connor, K., Gill & MacMillan, 1974.

Home Rule and the Liverpool By-election of 1880, Rossi, J.P., *Ir. Hist. Stud.* 19 1974.

The Irish Presence in the North of England 1850-1914, Steele, E.D., *Northern History* 12 1976.

Irish Navvies in the North of England 1830-50, Treble, J.H., *Journal of Transport History* 6, 1973.

The Impact of the Irish Question on the British Labour Movement, 1916-21, Ware, C., M.A. Thesis 1976, Warwick University.

The Irish in Manchester, 1832-49, Werly, J.M., *Ir. Hist. Stud.* 18, 1973.

Irish Nationalism and Radical Politics in Scotland, Wood, I.S., *Scot. Lab. Journal* 9 June 1975.

English Attitudes to the Irish in England 1789-1900, Gilley, S., Senior Lect. *Econ. Soc. Hist. Univ. Sheffield, Immigrants and Minorities in British Society* 1978 (Ed) Colin Holmes.

The Irish and the London Dockers, Lovell, *Bul. Soc. for the Study of Lab. Hist.* 1977.

Orange & Green and Militancy: Sectarianism and Working Class Politics in Liverpool 1900-1914, Andy Shallice, 23 Glover Street, Birkenhead, *North West Lab. Hist. Soc. Bulletin* 6 1979-80.

Irish Travellers in Britain, David Smith, 81 Narsborough Road, Corby, Leicester.

Irish Children and Under Achievement in British Schools, Mary Hickman.

A Union to Build: the Story of UCATT, Leslie Wood, Lawrence & Wishart.

T.P. O'Connor and Liverpool Politics, Brady, L.

The Railway Navvies, Coleman, T.

Passage to America, Coleman, T.

The Irish in Britain, Jackson, J.A.

Exiles of Erin; Irish Migrants in Victorian London, Lynn Lees, Manchester University Press 1979.

Irish in London, Ryan, L., Professor of Soc. Maynooth, Ph.D. Thesis.

The English Face of Irish Nationalism, O'Day, A., Poly of North London, Gill & Macmillan.

Irish Women and their Experience of Living in England, Mary Lennon, *Spare Rib* May 1980.

The Irish Influence on the Early British Democratic Movement, and the Origins of the Politics of insurrection 1793-1803, Wells, R., Brighton Poly.

The Irish and the London Docks, Terry McCarthy.

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Irish in Londons: East End, Colm Kerrigan, 38 Ridgedale Street.

Catholic Church and the Irish Poor, Raphael Samuel. The Experience of Emigrating, Bob Scully, New York University.

Irish Catholics in England: Some Sociological Perspectives, M. Hornsby-Smith, Lecturer in Soc. Univ. Surrey.

The Irish in the East End, Chaim Bermant, *Point of Arrival*.

The Irish in Colchester, Souad Amimour, c/o Paul Thomson.

The Irish in the Ford Car Plant, Dagenham, Tersa Sliney, c/o Paul Thomson.

Irish Integration in Britain, Mike Cunningham, 2 Appollo Way, Perry Barr, Birmingham B20, Ph.D. Thesis. Irish Weavers in London, Gerry Hamilton.

The Irish Presence in the North of England, 1850-1914, Steele, E.D., *Northern History* 12 1976.

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Grandchildren of the Dead End (Pat McGill), Brothwick, A., *Scotland's Magazine* 70 1974.

Women in Ireland before Emigration, Anne Wickham, Thesis. Dublin.

Aspects of Irish Immigration into two Scottish Towns during the mid 19th Century, B. Collins, *Irish Econ. Social History* 6, 1979.

Some Irish Poor in Lambeth 1834-46, *Irish Ancestor* 10, 1978.

Social agencies among the Irish in Lancashire during the mid nineteenth century, W.J. Lowe, *Saothar* 3, May 1977.

Irish Workers on Tyneside in the Nineteenth Century, T.P. MacDermott, *Essays in Tyneside Labour History* 1977.

Irish nationalism in Liverpool, B. O'Connell, *Éire-Ireland* 10 (1) 1977.

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Railway navvies on the Pennines 1841-71, D. Brooke, *Journal of Transport History* 8, 1975-6.

The Irish Community in Fulham, 1841-71, Margaret Nora Owen.

Democracy and Sectarianism (Politics in turn of the century Liverpool). P.J. Weller, Liverpool University Press.



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Early Irish Art; Maire de Paor; DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS; IR£2.50.

Geography of Ireland; Joseph P. Haughton & Desmond A. Gillmor; DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS; IR£2.25.

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