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**Transcript**

Pamphlet on London’s Irish Community – some

general points for consideration

First & foremost the pamphlet would need to

be popular not only in written style but also in

its overall layout & design. It would need to

include many visuals such as pictures, graphics,

cartoons, etc. - as these can often highlight

particular points more vividly than even the

most colourful narrative.

The overriding would be to promote a

clearer understanding of ‘The Irish Experience’

in London. Obviously the present situation would

need to be put in its historical context, and

that would need to be done in such a way

as to demystify many misunderstandings which

are often perpetuated on the subject of

Ireland & Anglo-Irish history. The pamphlet

should thus be geared not only to a potential

London Irish readership but also to interested

parties amongst the ‘host’ Community and

amongst London’s other Ethnic Minorities.

Production of the pamphlet should result from

a continuing dialogue between the Researcher

and B.W.I.C as an organisation.

Wherever appropriate the pamphlet should

highlight the many parallels which exist

between the experience of the Irish in London

(on the one hand) and that of other ‘colonised’

minorities in the city. Not to make crude

analogies, but at the same time, not to ignore

similarities which too often have been seen

as mere coincidence or ‘historical accidents.’

While this would need more careful

discussion I would suggest a format

which is broadly chronological but could

also include space for important themes

to be covered in more detail. As the

format should be popular which I would

argue means the text should be broken

up into smaller units as opposed to a long

‘turgid’ text. This I would argue, leaves

us able to include “stories” within the

overall narrative (eg. one or two short

biographies pinpointing the contribution of

particular Irish men & women to the needs of

Irish people & the overall quality of life

in London).

The pamphlet would need to steer clear of

viewing this history as a series of dates &

events that unfurl almost on their own accord.

We should look at those major

Factors which impinged on the life of Irish

people in London, but also the ways

in which Irish people, against considerable

odds, have attempted to shape their own

Lives and the Lives of their children.

Unlike past studies of immigrant populations

in Britain – Material Conditions of Life

and attitudes must be viewed as inextricably

linked. Too often anti-Irish sentiment has

been viewed as unconnected to the subordinate

position of Irish people both in their own

country and in Britain. Racism isn’t just a

problem of attitudes but reflects wider unequal

distributions of power in society at large.

While looking at Irish people on a London

wide basis it would be useful to include

material of special relevance to Irish people

and local study groups in particular are

an in depth study of Irish people on a

borough by borough basis would be beyond

the scope of this pamphlet, none-the-

less a brief summary of major sources /

resources unearthed might help facilitate

Further ‘Local’ Irish Studies, which are crucial

If the full extent of ‘The Irish Contribution’ is

ever to be understood. I’m suggesting that

the pamphlet could be (A) a significant piece

of research in its own right, but also (B) a catalyst

for future research.

*Brian Parsons.*

Rough Outline for the Pamphlet

Introduction

Brief Outline of B.W.I.C. aims & objectives, etc.

why the pamphlet has been produced, what

we hope to achieve by its publication. Why

the position of the Irish in London has been

previously ignored or given scant recognition

Why the Irish Came Here?

Brief Outline of Irish Settlements prior to the

Victorian era. Emigration is rarely a question

of ‘Free Choice’ or in the Irish context a

response to so called “natural” disasters.

Why have Irish people been the Country’s

leading export. The dire affects of British

Colonial Rule in Ireland need to be clearly

& concisely outlined. It would also be

logical to include at this stage a potted

history of how anti-Irish RACISM in general

& particular stereotypes of the Irish (eg.

as stupid, lazy, wild, naturally violent, etc.)

were already firmly established PRIOR to

large scale Irish immigration to Britain.

Racism is not created as a response to

Immigration – that myth has to be exploded.

The Victorian Era

Why the Irish ‘chose’ London. Where they

settled and why? How the expansion of

Industry & its infrastructure (Roads, Canals,

Railways) affected the geographical

location of Irish Communities. The economic

plight of the Immigrant – the search for

cheap accommodation. The cultural factors

which brought together ‘Irish Communities’ and

the importance of family & county ties in

Ireland. The position of Irish men and women

on the labour market & outside of it. The

role of the Irish on the Industrial & Geographical

expansion of London. How particular Irish

Communities grew around particular trades.

The Dire social conditions of the Irish in

London at this time – poverty, degradation,

disease – health & safety – the attitude of the

authorities (police, judiciary) – ‘host’ Community to

Irish. Parallels with today’s anti-black racism.

Irish/blacks cause of poverty/disease/crime, etc.

Use of official reports on public health reports

which draw attention to dire state of existence

for many Irish in London (eg. the piggeries and

potteries). Also the racist assumptions about the

Irish found in many such reports, eg: -

‘The Irish Emigration into Britain is

an example of a less civilised population

spreading themselves, as a kind of substructure

beneath a more civilised community; and

without excelling in any branch of

industry, obtaining possession of

all the lowest departments of manual

labour’ (Report on the Irish Poor, published in 1830?)

Attitude of various sections of ‘host’ population to the

Irish (eg. Press, Employers, fellow workers, etc.). The

responses on Irish people on the way they were

viewed/treated. Similarly the effect of anti-Irish

racism in fracturing working class solidarity.

‘The ordinary English worker hates the

Irish worker hates the Irish worker

as a competitor who lowers his standard

of life. In relation to the Irish nation he

feels himself a member of the Ruling nation

so turns himself into a tool of the aristocrats

& capitalists of his own country against

Ireland, this strengthening their domination

over himself. He cherishes religious, social and

national prejudices against the Irish Worker! His

attitude towards him is much the same

as the ‘poor whites’ to the ‘niggers’

in the former slave states of the USA.’ (Marx)

The affects of Nationalist Upsurge in Ireland on Irish in London

The forms of social/political/cultural organisation

formed by London’s Irish Community in this period.

The role of influence of the church and similarly

the affects of anti-Catholicism on the Irish (Gordon

Riots and after). The particular problems of Irish

women – dual effects of Racism & Sexism.

The ‘dream’ of a return to Ireland and of a passage

to the New World and its affect on the self

organisation in London.

Small Section Covering 1st World War/Civil War/

Partition/2nd World War

This would include a brief examination of the

changing FACE of employment, housing in the

interwar years - the ways in which Irish neutrality

affected attitudes of ‘host’ community afterwards.

Irish Immigrants.

The Irish in London Today

Covering the period since the 2nd World War.

Post War economic expansion – increase in State/Govt.

intervention in social/economic planning. Expansion

of service industries, Welfare State, etc. need for

‘cheap’ labour force (Irish & New Commonwealth)

Changes in Irish Settlements in London. Slum

clearances. The position of the Irish on the housing

market – ‘No Blacks, no Irish need apply’ The

myth that the contemporary Irish suffer little or

No discrimination has to be exploded – there is

more than ample data to back this up.

Civil Rights & after. The return from Condescenion

to overtly hostile stereotypes. The P.T.A. –

surveillance – crisis of identity, etc.

‘Must have been about nineteen,

When I landed on the shore,

With eyes as big as headlights …

Like the thousands and thousands

who came before

I was going to be something.

Smiled at the man scrutinising my face

As I stepped down off the gangway

… Living under suspicion

Putting up with the hatred and fear in their eyes

… In their eyes, we're nothing but a bunch

of murderers’

Paul Brady ‘Nothing but the

Same Old Story’

Many aspects of life examined in the ‘Victorian era’

section would need to be considered once more.

We should ask (& answer) to what extent 1st / 2nd

generation Irish are able to better themselves

(what sociologists called upward social mobility), -

can the Irish be safely subsumed within a

‘White UK’ classification? Comparisons with

position of ‘host’ community other ethnic

minorities would be useful here. Also for

those Irish who sought/achieved ‘upward

social mobility’ – how this affected their

Irish identity. The Crisis of identity – invisibility

& “assimilation”. The various responses to

the pressures/stereotypes from the ‘host’ community.

Individually but also in terms of social/

political/cultural organisation.

‘In the beginning the anti-Irish

feeling bothered me a lot and I used

to keep quiet on buses and things

because of the shit you’d get if they

heard an Irish accent. Now I’m more

able to confront people.’

(Mairead. Student/mother

SPARE RIB, May 1980)

The Hunger Strikes in 1981 and the subsequent

resurgence in nationalist feeling – affect on

self organisation & combativity of Irish in

London. Increase in secular organisation – decline

of church’s influence. Youth culture & 2nd

generation Irish. Attitude of GLC. The future.

*Brian Parsons*