Between isolation and integration: religion, politics, and the Catholic Irish in Preston, c.1829-1868

Abstract

Since the 1970s, case-studies have highlighted specific local contexts which informed variegated Irish migrant experience across nineteenth-century Britain. This article scrutinises how the Catholic Irish in Preston navigated their host society. Especially in public and organisational expressions of religion and politics, the Preston Irish were unusually closely connected to their host community. Preston's unusual confessional demographics and multifaceted political contestation offered the Catholic Irish opportunities for meaningful interventions in local society. Situating this case-study comparatively, this article posits four key interlinking factors shaping migrants' experiences of a nineteenth-century town: its size, broader immigration patterns, confessional composition, and labour politics.

Keywords

Irish diaspora, religion, politics, nineteenth-century, labour history

Introduction

In a special edition of this journal in 2009, Roger Swift celebrated considerable advances in the historiography of the Irish in Victorian Britain. Wide-ranging research spanning case-studies and broader syntheses, Swift argued, had superseded the earlier superficial 'monochrome' which had positioned the Irish as a monolithic and marginalised community. Swift's masterful survey of the field lauded scholars' appreciation of

> themes of change, continuity, resistance and accommodation in the creation of a rich yet diverse migrant culture within which a variety of Irish identities coexisted.[1]

As Swift's synthesis indicated, nineteenth-century Irish migration to Britain has indeed received vast historiographical attention. A panoply of localised case-studies have analysed how Irish migrants engaged with their host societies culturally, religiously, socially, and politically. Throughout the literature, the degree to which migrants integrated with their new surroundings has been contested. For example, to consider just one aspect of migrant identity and agency, case-studies have debated the implications of Catholicism for migrants arriving in England. For John Belchem, W. J. Lowe, Lynn Hollen Lees, and Mervyn Busteed, in their studies of the Irish in Liverpool, Lancashire, London, and Manchester respectively, Catholicism contributed to a hybrid Catholic-Irish identity, reaffirming migrants' essential Irishness and supporting social connections.[2] By contrast, Mark G. MacGowan's analysis of the Irish in Toronto from 1887 suggested that religious and lay education corroded

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[1] Roger Swift, 'Identifying the Irish in Victorian Britain: recent trends in historiography', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 27 (2009), p. 134.

[2] John Belchem, *Irish, Catholic, and Scouse: the history of the Liverpool Irish, 1800-1939* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), pp. 10, 19; W. J. Lowe, 'Lancashire Fenianism, 1864-1871', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 126 (1976), p. 162; Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish migrants in Victorian London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), p. 190; Mervyn Busteed, 'Identities in transition: Irish migrants in mid-Victorian Manchester', in D. George Boyce & Roger Swift (eds.), *Problems and perspectives in Irish history since 1800* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), pp. 80-94.

migrants' distinctive identity, assimilating the Irish in Canadian society.[3] More acutely, Mary J. Hickman posited that the Catholic Church studiedly 'denationalised' Irish migrants in Victorian Britain.[4]

The importance of local contexts in shaping migrant experience is borne out across the rich research on nineteenth-century Irish migration. The spatial specificity of detailed studies has helpfully furnished scholars with complex understandings of how migrants experience differed. Nuanced insights, sensitivity to local particularities, have abounded. In his forensic analysis of Irish migration to Wales, for example, Paul O'Leary found that many alienated migrants joined Fenian networks less to conspire in insurrection than to find comradeship and sociability.[5]

Following Swift's assessment of the epistemological potential of comparative case-studies, this article examines mid-nineteenth-century Preston. Exploring Catholic Irish migrant experience, it analyses the environment in which migrants arrived, and their agency in negotiating that environment. The study finds that Preston's exceptional preponderance of Catholics and its array of popular political movements offered multifarious opportunities for the Catholic Irish to engage meaningfully with their host society. Yet these connections were sometimes problematic: Anglo-Irish conflict occasionally emerged. Comparing and contrasting this case-study with the wider literature, this article posits four key interlinking factors shaping Irish migrants' experiences in a nineteenth-century urban settlement: its size, broader immigration patterns, confessional composition, and labour politics.

Mindful of these epistemological merits of situating case-studies of nineteenth-century Irish migration in comparative contexts, this article finds particular merit in the case of Preston. Like many other medium-sized urban settlements and textile towns, Preston witnessed a cotton boom with the attendant socio-political upheavals including industrial unrest, community disturbances, and the rise of the labour movement in the mid-nineteenth century. Yet the town's peculiar confessional demographics were untypical, and its size roots it firmly among medium-sized towns of population below 70,000, as distinct from the major cities of the period, such as Liverpool or Manchester.

Preston's substantial Catholic presence antedated the Irish immigration of the nineteenth century. In 1834, only 500 of the town's estimated 8,000 Catholics were Irish. Preston and its environs had been an epicentre of recusancy since the Reformation. Catholic patrons from across the north-west socialised, worshipped, and distributed alms through the Preston Catholic Charitable Society, founded in 1731.[6] By 1851, Preston was 'the most Catholic town in England', with Catholics comprising approximately one-third of the

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[3] Mark G. McGowan, *The waning of the green: Catholics, the Irish and identity in Toronto, 1887-1922* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999).

[4] Mary J. Hickman, *Religion, class and identity: the state, the Catholic Church and the education of the Irish in Britain* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1997), p. 12; Mary J. Hickman, 'Incorporating and denationalizing the Irish in England: the role of the Catholic Church', in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish world wide: history, heritage, identity – Volume 5: religion and identity* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), pp. 196-216.

[5] Paul O'Leary, *Immigration and integration: the Irish in Wales, 1798-1922* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 252.

[6] Michael Savage, *The dynamics of working-class politics: the labour movement in Preston, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 110.

population.[7] Investigating the impact of these peculiar confessional configurations, and in keeping with the majority of the comparable literature, this study is concerned particularly with Catholic immigration to the town.[8]

The preponderance of Catholics aside, Preston in the mid-nineteenth century bore the socioeconomic hallmarks of a medium-sized textile town experiencing industrialisation. After decades of continuous and significant population growth, by 1851 Preston's population was 49,262, placing it as Lancashire's third-largest town after Manchester and Liverpool.[9] Spurred by the development of the power-loom, the cotton industry continually dominated Preston's economy and labour market: in 1851, 32 percent of men and 28 percent of women over the age of 20 were employed in cotton manufacture. In May 1862, a report to the President of the Board of Trade noted the cotton famine's effects on the estimated 25,000 workers 'usually employed in the mills of Preston'.[10] Fairly typically for a northern cotton town, throughout this period Preston's population consistently had a slight gender imbalance, with a 3,706-strong preponderance of females in 1851. Of those 3,706 women, one-third (1,256) were employed in the cotton industry, while 53 percent (1,969) worked in domestic service.[11]

Table 1: Preston's population, 1821-1861[12]

Year	Population	Percentage rate of population increase (1 decimal place)
1821	25,234	n/a
1831	30,048	19.1
1841	39,416	31.2
1851	49,262	25.0
1861	56,488	14.7

Table 2: Males and females in Preston's population, 1821-1881[13]

[7] Andrew Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in every town: the provincial press in England, 1855-1900* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2018), p. 31.

[8] Important works by Graham Walker, Donald M. MacRaild, Geraldine Vaughan, and Ian Meredith have done much to address long-standing historiographical lacuna concerning Protestant Irish migration to nineteenth-century Britain. Graham Walker, 'The Protestant Irish in Scotland', in Thomas Devine (ed.), *Irish immigrants and Scottish society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1991), pp. 44-66; Donald M. MacRaild, 'Networks, communication and the Irish Protestant diaspora in northern England, c.1860-1914', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 23 (2005), pp. 311-337; Donald M. MacRaild, *The Irish diaspora in Britain, 1750-1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 90-109; Geraldine Vaughan, 'Irish Protestants in the west of Scotland, 1851-1914: an "invisible" community?', *Études irlandaises*, 30 (2005), pp. 177-191; Ian Meredith, 'Irish Episcopalians in the Scottish Episcopal diocese of Glasgow and Galloway during the nineteenth century', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 27 (2009), pp. 248-278.

[9] Margaret Ainscough, 'Local politics and the geography of the Victorian city: the activities of Preston Municipal Corporation in the nineteenth century', BA (Trinity College Cambridge, 1981), p. 2.

[10] Nigel Morgan, 'Social and political leadership in Preston, 1820-1860', MLitt (Lancaster University, 1980), no pagination.

[11] Ibid.

[12] GB Historical GIS/University of Portsmouth, Preston District through time | Population Statistics | Population Change, *A Vision of Britain through Time*. Available at http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10197260/cube/POP_CHANGE (accessed 20 June 2020).

[13] GB Historical GIS/University of Portsmouth, Preston District through time | Population Statistics | Males and Females, *A Vision of Britain through Time*. Available at http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10197260/cube/GENDER (accessed 20 June 2020).

Year	Male population	Female population	Female population surplus as percentage of total population (1 decimal place)
1821	12,342	12,892	2.2
1831	14,563	15,485	3.1
1841	18,999	20,417	3.6
1851	23,883	25,379	3.0
1861	26,615	29,873	5.8

Irish immigration was one of several factors in the town's population growth and socio-political transformation. Across Lancashire, with the exceptions of the booming port city of Liverpool and the industrial heartlands of the Manchester-Salford conurbation, Preston hosted the largest Irish-born population proportional to the town's size: the Irish-born community comprised 10.4 percent and 12.3 percent of Preston's population in 1851 and 1861 respectively. A considerable Irish presence was a feature common to towns across the county. By 1851, Lancashire was home to 191,000 Irish migrants – more than one-quarter of Britain's Irish-born population.[14]

Irish migrants arrived in an industrialising Preston experiencing unprecedented overcrowding and dire poverty. As early as the 1830s, 600 cellars were inhabited in the town,[15] and a considerable minority of handloom weavers' housing comprized back-to-back, single-fronted dwellings, with high occupancy rates bringing attendant health risks.[16] A survey of 1849 ranked Preston among the seven unhealthiest districts of Lancashire's twenty-one, with a life expectation of just 18.28 years for a 'labourer' and infant mortality rates of 55.5 percent among 'operatives' in the borough – contrasted to 17.5 percent for 'gentry'.[17]

Table 3: Preston's Irish-born population, 1841-1861[18]

Year	Preston's total population	Preston's Irish-born population	Irish-born population as percentage of total population (1 decimal place)	Irish-born population of England and Wales as percentage of the total population of England and Wales (1 decimal place)
1841	39,416	1,703	4.3	1.8
1851	49,262	5,122	10.4	2.9
1861	56,488	6,974	12.3	3.0

Table 4: Preston's Irish population in national context, 1851[19]

[14] John K. Walton, *Lancashire: a social history, 1558-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 252.
[15] E. C. Midwinter, *Social administration in Lancashire, 1830-1860: poor law, public health and police* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), p. 75.
[16] Geoff Timmins, 'Housing industrial workers during the 19th century: back-to-back housing in textile Lancashire', *Industrial Archaeology Review*, 35 (2013), p. 112.
[17] Livesey Collection, University of Central Lancashire, Preston (hereafter, LCU): George Thomas Clark, *Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry into the Sewerage, Drainage, and Supply of Water, and Sanitary Conditions of the Inhabitants of the Borough of Preston* (Preston, 1849), pp. 283, 311.
[18] Data derived from David Holding, 'Conflict and assimilation: Irish communities in Bolton and Preston, 1840-1914', PhD (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2002), p. 53.
[19] Colin G. Pooley, 'The residential segregation of migrant communities in mid-Victorian Liverpool', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 2 (1977), p. 366; Paul O'Leary, 'Mass commodity

Town	Irish-born population	Total population	Irish-born population as percentage of total population (1 decimal place)
London	108,548	2,362,236	4.6
Manchester and Salford	52,504	401,321	13.1
Liverpool	83,313	375,955	22.3
Birmingham	4,761	232,841	4.0
Durham	3,920	55,951	7.0
Preston	5,122	49,262	10.4
Gateshead	3,028	48,081	6.3
Merthyr Tydfil	3,051	46,378	6.6

As numerous historians' painstaking research into nineteenth-century Irish migration has demonstrated, a multi-layered understanding of how migrants experienced religious institutions and engaged with contemporary politics requires attention to the press, Boards of Guardians and municipal reports, and the archival records of friendly societies, churches, and political groups. Happily, substantial proportions of Preston's newspapers, which intensively documented local affairs, have been digitised.[20] Migrant voices rarely appear directly, but can sometimes be traced through correspondence to the newspapers, contemporary reports on grassroots politics and workplace disputes, and updates on judicial proceedings. Employing a basic chronology of major episodes in the town's history is fruitful for researching the press specifically and episodically.

Many of the Lancashire Archives holdings on Preston's friendly societies are administrative and bureaucratic, offering little insight beyond basic records of financial transactions. These sources tend also to be 'top-down' inasmuch as civic elites often spoke of the Irish community in vague, general, and sometimes dismissive tones. Since migrant voices are typically absent, reading 'against the grain' is required to trace subjectivities. Listening intently for these voices, qualified speculation is essential. The University of Central Lancashire's Livesey Collection is primarily beneficial to an historian of the temperance movement. However, these holdings also detail broader Whig and nonconformist political causes in which migrants played prominent roles, most notably the repeal movement and the campaign against impositions on the Irish Church.

Across two thematic sections, this article analyses migrant experiences in Preston between Catholic emancipation in 1829 and the Fenian scares of 1868. The first section assesses migrants' experiences of organized religion, specifically through the Catholic churches to which most migrants adhered. The second section scrutinizes migrants' varied political trajectories. Throughout, the article employs a bifocal exploring how migrants negotiated and navigated their host society. This approach draws upon Liam Clarke's conception of 'being diasporic' as

culture and identity: the *Morning Chronicle* and Irish migrants in a nineteenth-century Welsh industrial town', *Urban History*, 35 (2008), p. 242; Frank Neal, 'A statistical profile of the Irish community in Gateshead: the evidence of the 1851 census', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 27 (2009), p. 54.

[20] The *Preston Chronicle* (from 1831) and *Preston Herald* (from 1863) are available online, while the *Preston Guardian* (from 1844) and *Preston Pilot* (from 1831) can be accessed at the British Library and Lancashire Archives.

> an active, creative, metaphoric process by which travelling people consciously strive for constancies of feelings and belief… In the case of the Irish in Britain, this yields a paradoxical combination that is both negative as well as positive.[21]

Assessing both the environment in which migrants arrived, and how they negotiated that environment, the article delineates how Preston's size, broader immigration patterns, confessional composition, and labour politics informed Irish migrants' experiences in the town.

The Preston Irish and religion

Catholic Irish migrants arriving in Preston in the mid-nineteenth century joined a thriving religious community which constituted approximately one-third of the town's population.[22] Mass attendance fluctuated, with between 30 and 40 percent failing to attend regularly.[23] Yet the Church coordinated charitable and social initiatives and its representatives could confidently claim to be integral to Preston's past and present. On census day in 1851, the priest at St Wilfrid's reported that an aggregate sum of 6,000 worshippers had attended the three masses.[24] The figures were likely exaggerated, but the fact that a local Catholic priest thought the claim to be feasible suggests the strength and self-confidence of local Catholicism.

Preston Catholicism enjoyed rising civic prestige throughout the mid-nineteenth century. St Ignatius's opened in 1836, soon followed by the rebuilding and enlargement of St Wilfrid's in 1839. The imposing St Walburge's opened in 1854, a 314-foot spire being added in 1867.[25] The local Whig press celebrated the Catholic Church as a vibrant expression of civic pride. The *Preston Guardian* was lavish in its praise for St Walburge's, noting its sixteen stained-glass windows and a Catherine wheel window at the west end of the church which 'cannot fail being admired both for beauty of design and execution'.[26] The *Preston Chronicle* was similarly impressed, describing the new church's 'scale of mediaeval grandeur, worthy of a cathedral'.[27]

Enumerating worshippers on the final Sunday of March 1851, the religious census illustrated the exceptional significance of Catholicism in Preston. The limitations of these enumerations as historical sources have been the subject of considerable historiographical debate, and indeed Preston's returns included only 10 of the town's 17 Church of England buildings. Nevertheless, in comparative context, the returns of 1851 are informative for an overview of the confessional configurations of northern towns, as Table 5 illustrates below. Proportionally, Catholic worship in the town (35.8 percent) was marginally greater even

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[21] Liam Clarke, 'An examination of the mental health of Irish migrants to England using a concept of diaspora', *Advances in Mental Health*, 9 (2010), p. 232.
[22] Savage, *The dynamics of working-class politics*, 110; Tom A. Smith, *Catholics in Preston: from early to modern times* (Wigan: North West Catholic History Society, 2008), pp. 100-101.
[23] W. J. Lowe, 'The Lancashire Irish and the Catholic church, 1846-1871: the social dimension', *Irish Historical Studies*, 20 (1976), pp. 145-146.
[24] K. S. Inglis, *Churches and the working classes in Victorian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan-Paul, 1964), p. 125.
[25] Thomas R. Flintoff, *Preston churches and chapels* (Preston: Carnegie, 1985), pp. 38-40.
[26] *Preston Guardian*, 6 May 1854.
[27] *Preston Chronicle*, 11 February 1854.

than in Liverpool, and more than double the proportion of Catholic worship in comparably-sized Lancashire towns such as Blackburn, Salford, and Bolton.[28]

Table 5: Church attendance in English towns, 30 March 1851[29]

	Attendances as percentage of total attendances (1 decimal place)		
Town	*Church of England*	*Nonconformist*	*Catholic*
Blackburn	44.4	44.8	10.8
Salford	42.4	42.2	15.4
Bolton	41.7	45.2	13.1
Liverpool	40.7	26.8	32.5
Manchester	34.4	42.3	23.3
Preston	20.4	43.8	35.8

However, as Donald MacRaild has demonstrated, a substantial and pastorally active Catholic community did not guarantee unity among the migrant population, nor did it necessarily empower Irish Catholics: clergy were often eager to divert Irish migrants from radical or separatist politics.[30] Similarly, in Preston, the Catholic Irish population was heterogeneous and demonstrated factional tendencies: a Limerick-born builder's labourer living in Preston continually resisted pressures from his Irish landlord to join Ribbon networks in the town.[31] In 1836, a recent Irish arrival in the town, Peter Daly, committed an arson attack in an attempt to implicate seven other Irishmen who had apparently refused to welcome him into their social circles.[32]

It was not inevitable that a shared confessional allegiance would bring Irish migrants into meaningful contact with English Catholics. For Sheridan Gilley, the English-dominated Catholic hierarchy in Britain prioritised converting the native population above serving the immigrant Irish who 'invaded the confessionals and required of [Catholic clergy] a whole new range of responsibilities as chaplains to workhouses, prisons, and hospitals'.[33] In Preston, there were occasional indications of unease within local Catholic circles as to how to deal with the Irish minority among their flock. As late as 1895, the Preston Catholic publication *The Lancashire Catholic* featured jokes deriding the Irish.[34]

Broadly, the Catholic Church in Preston diverged from MacRaild's and Gilley's typologies, inasmuch as its wide-ranging pastoral and social provisions constituted a conduit by which Irish migrants connected with the local community. Irish women joined Preston's First Roman Catholic Female Society, which had been founded as early as 1805.[35] As well as

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[28] K. S. Inglis, 'Patterns of religious worship in 1851', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 11 (1960), p. 83 n. 1.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Donald MacRaild, '"Abandon Hibernicisation": priests, Ribbonmen and an Irish street fight in the north-east of England in 1858', *Historical Research*, 76 (2003), pp. 557-573.
[31] Kyle Hughes & Donald MacRaild, *Ribbon societies in nineteenth-century Ireland and its diaspora: the persistence of tradition* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), pp. 165-166.
[32] *Preston Chronicle*, 18 October 1836.
[33] Sheridan Gilley, 'English Catholic attitudes to Irish Catholics', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 27 (2009), pp. 226, 232.
[34] Andrew Hobbs, 'Reading the local paper: social and cultural functions of the local press in Preston, Lancashire, 1855-1900', PhD (University of Central Lancashire, 2010), p. 65.
[35] Lancashire Archives, Preston (hereafter, LA): DDPr/37/46.

holding an annual ball, St Augustine's hosted tea parties and musical extravaganzas.[36] There is also evidence to suggest social links between the town's several Catholic congregations, with an annual ball open to all local Catholics from 1844.[37] Choirs at St Ignatius's and St Wilfrid's joined forces for special occasions, such as a visit to Stonyhurst College in April 1844.[38]

Irish migrants contributed to Catholic Church leadership in the town. The officiating Jesuit priest at St Wilfrid's Roman Catholic Chapel from 1840, George Connell had an active civic role as a subscriber to Preston Dispensary alongside many of the town's influential patricians.[39] There were Irish priests at St Ignatius's, where the Reverend H. Mahon was preaching in 1839.[40]

Irish participation in the local Church was not limited to the priesthood; migrants also shaped community-oriented aspects of parish life. Patrick Leahane led St Ignatius's Square school in the mid-nineteenth century; Rose Kearney was head of the girls' school at St Augustine's; husband and wife Dion and Margaret O'Sullivan were heads of the boys' and girls' divisions of the schools at St Wilfrid's.[41] Migrants in Catholic leadership became well-known in the town. On the sudden death in 1854, aged fifty, of Thomas Barry, a native of Cork, the *Preston Chronicle* published an effusive obituary. From his arrival in Preston in 1838, Barry had served as superintendent of the Christian Brothers school, and, the paper claimed, 'won the sincere love of the boys and their parents'.[42] That Barry was recalled with such fondness, even amid the 'papal aggression' which outraged so many English Protestants in the early 1850s, illuminates not only his own popularity, but the potentially unifying agency of the Catholic Church for Irish migrants.

Likely encouraged by the presence of Irishmen among the town's clergy, Preston's Catholic community responded to Irish migrants' social and spiritual requirements, and engaged contemporary Irish politics. At a ceremony in July 1840 marking the consecration and opening of St Augustine's, 'The Shamrock' was sung and a toast drank to the health of Daniel O'Connell, suggesting a degree of approval among clergy for the repeal movement.[43] Throughout the disastrous potato famine of the late 1840s, every Preston Catholic church collected money, raising some £128 in January 1847 alone.[44] Irishmen such as Francis Brady enjoyed membership of the first Preston Roman Catholic Society from the early 1820s,[45] and local Catholicism became increasingly sensitive to the demands of its active Irish community: novenas held at St Walburge's and St Mary's in 1861 included panegyrics for St Patrick, the 'apostle of Ireland'.[46] Amid the Preston Guild celebrations of the same year, Catholic guilds brandished full-length portrait banners of St Patrick, subscribed 'St Patrick, pray for us', demonstrating the centrality of Irish culture to Prestonian Catholicism.[47]

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36 *Preston Chronicle*, 10 February 1852.
37 *Preston Guardian*, 21 December 1844.
38 *Preston Guardian*, 27 April 1844.
39 LA: QSP 3055/38.
40 *Preston Chronicle*, 25 May 1839.
41 LA: *Oakey's Directory of Preston* (1853).
42 *Preston Chronicle*, 28 October 1854.
43 *Preston Chronicle*, 1 August 1840.
44 *Preston Chronicle*, 30 January 1847.
45 LA: DDPr/37/34.
46 *Preston Guardian*, 23 March 1861.
47 LA: DDPr/138/108.

Newspaper reports also illuminate the Church's potential to engage English and Irish alike through its pastoral services. During Whitsuntide festivities in 1844, the Sisterhood of the Guild of Saint Ignatius and the Holy Guild of Saint Wilfrid processed through the town, before dining together in the Catholic schoolroom on Fox Street.[48] The choir at St Walburge's, for example, included both nationalities in its ranks.[49] These integrated community societies were central to Irish engagements with the host society. Paul O'Leary and Terence McBride found Catholic migrants in south Wales and Glasgow respectively forming their own friendly societies and temperance groups to build community cohesion and pride in the face of the host community's slurs and suspicions.[50] In Preston, much of the Catholic Irish sociability was *within* established fraternities and networks around the numerically strong and pastorally diverse Catholic Church.

As a substantially integrated component of Preston's confident and sizeable Catholic community, migrants did not experience the degree of sectarianism which Frank Neal and Philip Waller found in Victorian Liverpool and other northern towns. When Bolton and Manchester hosted a combined total of nineteen Orange lodges, there was just one in Preston.[51] Nevertheless, sectarianism flared episodically in Preston, usually orchestrated by Anglican churchmen forecasting the recrudescence of Catholic ascendancy nationwide. When England's Catholic hierarchy was re-established in 1850, twenty-two leading Prestonian clergy wrote to the *Preston Guardian* in 1850 to denounce the papacy's 'insolent invasion' of the 'prerogative of the Queen of England'.[52] Similarly, in 1852, when the Anglican hierarchy protested against 'papal aggression' and Lord Derby's government barred Catholics from processing through the streets with 'symbols of their religion', local Tory candidate Robert Townley Parker tapped into anti-popery in a populist election campaign which included a well-known anti-Catholic ditty.[53]

External influences were once again foremost in raising sectarian hackles in Preston in the late 1860s, stoking popular fears of Irish Republican Brotherhood conspiracies. Anti-Catholic lecturer William Murphy toured the north-west in 1867 and 1868. Frank Neal noted that Murphy and demagogues of his ilk contributed significantly to triggering minor disturbances in small Lancashire towns such as Ashton-under-Lyne and Oldham in 1868.[54] Murphy's incendiary oration galvanised sectarian feeling and provoked considerable Irish wrath in return: in Stoke, an Irishman who assaulted Murphy told the police that he was sorry not to have killed him.[55] It is not clear whether Murphy visited Preston, but he certainly commanded support from some conservative sections of local Anglicanism. A

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[48] *Preston Guardian*, 1 June 1844.
[49] *Preston Chronicle*, 5 August 1854.
[50] Paul O'Leary, 'Networking respectability: class, gender and ethnicity among the Irish in south Wales, 1845-1914', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 23 (2005), pp. 255-275; Terence McBride, 'The secular and the radical in Irish associational culture of mid-Victorian Glasgow', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 28 (2010), pp. 35-36.
[51] Frank Neal, *Sectarian violence: the Liverpool experience, 1819-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 28; P. J. Waller, *Democracy and sectarianism: a political and social history of Liverpool, 1868-1939* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1981).
[52] *Preston Guardian*, 16 November 1850.
[53] D. G. Paz, *Popular anti-Catholicism in mid-Victorian England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 203.
[54] Neal, *Sectarian violence*, 181.
[55] *Preston Herald*, 6 June 1868.

Prestonian admirer, William R. Bradshaw of the Emmanuel Conservative and Constitutional Association, admitted he had not met Murphy but

> should I ever have the opportunity of meeting with him, I would be only too glad to shake him by the hand, and wish him God speed, and I only wish we had a few more Murphys in Lancashire.[56]

Nationwide political furores, coupled with the high spirits of Whitsuntide festivals, sparked rioting in the predominantly Irish area of Preston around Moor Lane and Adelphi Street in June 1868. The trouble began at a moment of acute nationwide polarisation: the same day, fighting broke out in Stockton, for example.[57] In Preston, the rioting began when an Anglican procession marched through one of the town's few recognisably Irish districts, an area known as 'Paddy's rookery' and renowned as 'one of the roughest in the town'. According to reports, two Irishmen threw missiles at the marchers and a mass brawl ensued, with paving stones hurled by both factions and two local men shot and injured in the subsequent riots.[58] The borough's mayor, Miles Myres, swiftly banned large assemblies in the town.

Yet the polemical headlines of the rioting obscured a longer history of popular resistance to anti-Catholicism in Preston; the disturbances of 1868 took place at a moment of unusual intercommunal division and disquiet. A letter to the *Preston Pilot* in 1836 captured the nuances of local ecumenical politics. Responding to Catholic attempts at denominational block-voting in elections for councillors in Trinity Ward, a hostile correspondent perceived an invidious Catholic 'unholy enterprise' seeking 'subversion of the Protestant church, and the establishment of the popish religion in its stead'. Superficially, the letter suggested popular suspicion of Catholicism in the town, yet its rhetoric illuminated something quite contrasting. The anonymous writer clearly represented an ardent anti-Catholic standpoint, but their bitter frustration with their fellow townsfolk was most insightful. Primarily, the letter attacked the perceived credulity of the town's Protestants who were supposedly oblivious to the Catholics' scheme. In urgent tones, the writer begged to

> Let me then impress it upon the reader, *even if he is a reformer… he must not support the Roman Catholics in their system of reform…* be assured, that so long as the Roman Catholics declare themselves enemies of our national faith, they will see to work the destruction of the church… let us [not]… support them in this.[59]

The letter's implorations suggested a considerable degree of at least passive toleration, if not overt religious harmony, in 1830s Preston. The writer's embittered frustrations with an acquiescent Protestant majority indicated the limitations of anti-Catholicism in Preston.

Even during the 'papal aggression' controversy of the early 1850s, Preston's Whig newspapers often espoused balanced positions on Catholic politics. The *Preston Guardian* editorialized moderately, arguing against restrictions on Catholic practices despite Pope Pius IX's 'error of judgement':

> An error of judgement is not necessarily a transgression of right… We trust, therefore, that her Majesty's government… will not allow itself to be hurried into a course of coercive action for which there is neither legal plea nor moral justification.[60]

The *Guardian*'s criticism of anti-Catholic sentiment demonstrated concern for the religious and political liberties of Preston's substantial Catholic community: 'It is a thousand pities…

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[56] *Preston Herald*, 6 November 1869.
[57] *Preston Herald*, 6 June 1868.
[58] *Preston Herald*, 6 June 1868.
[59] *Preston Pilot*, 12 November 1836. Original italics.
[60] *Preston Guardian*, 9 November 1850.

that [anti-popery] agitators should thus be raised to an unwholesome premium'.[61] Evidently, sectarianism sporadically percolated Preston's politics, but local Catholicism boasted numerical strength, wide-ranging social and pastoral offerings, and a widely-held sense of civic pride. The Catholic Church in Preston addressed the spiritual needs of the local Irish and facilitated social connections with their English co-religionists.

The Preston Irish and politics

Since Lynn Hollen Lees and Dorothy Thompson, writing in the late 1970s and early 1980s, examined Irish migrants' participation in reform, radicalism, and Chartism, scholars have been especially attuned to migrants' agencies in working-class politics. Drawing on research from small and medium-sized manufacturing towns such as Ashton-under-Lyne, Barnsley, and Bradford, Thompson found 'a very considerable Irish presence' in Chartism,[62] a position supported by David T. Gleeson's work on Chartism across the region.[63] Lees argued that radical politics and reform movements provided pathways for the London Irish to engage with working-class initiatives for suffrage and workers' rights.[64] Joan Allen posited that Irish nationalists and radicals on Tyneside in the later nineteenth century enjoyed a 'working political alliance' with local political actors.[65] For Steven Fielding, Irish migrants' class solidarities with the English working classes did not necessarily erase their ethnonational distinctiveness.[66]

Irish activism in Preston's labour politics began with the Plug Plot movement of 1842. Over the following two decades, immigrants such as Michael Gallagher, Daniel O'Neil, A. P. Connor, and James Farrell campaigned tirelessly in the burgeoning labour movement. Mounting Irish involvement in Preston's working-class politics echoed earlier developments in Manchester, where Donegal-born weaver John Doherty founded the General Union of Spinners in 1829 and led a defiant campaign against the Coercion Bill of 1833.[67]

The specifically Irish political initiatives of Ribbonism and support for Daniel O'Connell's repeal movement gained less traction in Preston than in other industrial towns and cities in the north-west. The port city of Liverpool was a nodal point for Ribbonism, especially for those who had only recently arrived in England and required assistance in finding lodgings and employment. The research of John Belchem, Kyle Hughes, and Donald MacRaild has illustrated how Ribbonism's associative cultures forged social connections and mutual aid

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[61] *Preston Guardian*, 16 November 1850.
[62] Dorothy Thompson, 'Ireland and the Irish in English radicalism before 1850', in James Epstein & Dorothy Thompson (eds.), *The Chartist experience: studies in working-class radicalism and culture, 1830-1860* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 123.
[63] David T. Gleeson, 'Emigrants and exiles: the political nationalism of the Irish diaspora since the 1790s', in Donald MacRaild, Tanja Bueltmann & J. C. D. Clark (eds.), *British and Irish diasporas: societies, cultures, ideologies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 184.
[64] Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, 237.
[65] Joan Allen, *Joseph Cowen and popular radicalism on Tyneside, 1829-1990* (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 2007), pp. 79-80.
[66] Steven Fielding, *Class and ethnicity: Irish Catholics in England, 1880-1939* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993).
[67] R. G. Kirby & A. E. Musson, *The voice of the people: John Doherty – trade unionist, radical and factory reformer, 1798-1854* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975).

among migrants.[68] Its networks were considerably smaller in 1830s Preston, where a coterie of Irish labourers organised a lodge under the cover name of the Hibernicans.[69]

Preston had no mass repeal movement, although the affluent second-generation Irishman Edward Cooke was one outspoken sympathiser. Born to Irish parents in Walton-le-Dale on the south bank of the River Ribble in 1804, Cooke spent much of his long life in Preston. Identifying as a local 'gentleman' by 1877 – he owned several properties in the town, having made his living as a renowned musician – Cooke publicised his support for the repeal movement widely, and made personal acquaintance with O'Connell in 1839. Cooke's journals echoed the Irish 'liberator':

> The men of Ulster are not so degraded as to suffer this injustice [the Union] – we will not suffer it. The lovely land of our birth is the most beautiful on the face of the globe.[70]

The Irish were yet more aloof from the temperance movement which Prestonian dissenter Joseph Livesey pioneered in the 1830s, as Brian Harrison noted.[71] The temperance organisation's overwhelmingly Nonconformist character likely explains the Irish community's non-involvement: at the Conference to Promote the Temperance Reformation in April 1848, all of the Prestonian signatories belonged to dissenting congregations.[72] On occasion, in line with Donald MacRaild's perception of the Catholic Church in England policing an Irish community it feared becoming unruly,[73] Catholic clergy led temperance initiatives. In September 1844, for instance, the zealous Reverend Weston of Saint Wilfrid's proposed to administer the pledge to 700 Catholics.[74] Nomadic Irish priest Father Theobald Mathew became an icon for the temperance movement. His itinerant campaigning against alcohol was greatly publicized, and in 1845 Preston Temperance Society raised £59 to support this 'apostle of temperance'.[75] However, Irish pledges abounded only in the 1860s, when Catholic churches more systematically advocated teetotalism. The Reverend Brindle of Saint Mary's, for example, obtained more than 100 signatures on St Patrick's Day in 1861. The same year, the *Preston Guardian* specifically credited the 'Catholic clergy of this town' for the 'improved sobriety of the Irish'.[76]

It was in the protracted labour contestation and radical suffrage movements of the mid-nineteenth century that Preston's Irish Catholics were most notably engaged. Although Chartism was never as pervasive in Preston as it was in Manchester and other provincial towns, Irish involvement should not be neglected. A Chartist meeting in Preston in May 1839 elected Irishman Patrick O'Rourke as chairman, and O'Rourke's countrymen Murphy and Duff addressed the meeting to support a nationwide motion for the Chartists to send

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[68] John Belchem, '"Freedom and friendship to Ireland": Ribbonism in early nineteenth-century Liverpool', *International Review of Social History*, 39 (1994), pp. 33-56; Kyle Hughes & Donald M. MacRaild, 'Irish politics and labour: transnational and comparative perspectives, 1798-1914', in Niall Whelehan (ed.), *Transnational perspectives on modern Irish history* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 45-68.

[69] Hughes & MacRaild, 'Irish politics and labour', 51.

[70] LA: DDX 576/1/2.

[71] Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: the temperance question in England, 1815-1872* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1994), pp. 155-158.

[72] LCU: *National Temperance Advocate* (1848).

[73] MacRaild, '"Abandon Hibernicisation"'.

[74] LCU: *National Temperance Advocate* (1844).

[75] *Preston Chronicle*, 8 February 1845.

[76] *Preston Guardian*, 23 March 1861.

their National Convention to the monarch.[77] In 1839, the broader Chartist movement fractured on the issue of physical force between the factions of William Lovett and Feargus O'Connor. However, the schism appears scarcely to have affected the organisation in Preston. The Irish presence among Preston Chartists long antedated what David Goodway has termed the 'Irish-Chartist union' of 1848, by which Dublin's Chartists and nationalists reached rapprochement.[78]

Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, Irish migrants engaged socially and politically with English workers, demonstrating their comradeship through a sequence of labour struggles. During Plug Plot riots in Preston in 1842, the militia shot into a crowd of over 100 protesters, killing a seventeen-year-old Irish cotton stripper employed at Oxendale's mill, Bernard McNamara.[79] Irish politicisation extended beyond industrial action: Mr R. C. Allen was a vocal member of Preston Anti-War Association in the 1840s who connected his nationality with his political outlook. At a meeting in 1844, Allen proclaimed that 'as an Irishman' it was his 'pride and privilege to denounce war'.[80]

The major political dispute in mid-nineteenth-century Preston was the strike and lock-out of 1853 and 1854. This episode originated when Preston's cotton masters conspired to cut operatives' wages by ten per cent. Mill-owners had implemented similar cuts in 1839, 1842, and 1847.[81] By 1853, in an attempt to break the increasingly organised union movement, the cotton masters locked workers out. In their detailed study of the strike, H.I. Dutton and J.E. King broadly characterised the Irish in the town as hostile to the operatives' cause. Dutton and King also highlighted how cotton bosses 'imported' Irish blackleg labour to break the strike.[82]

Irish roles in the strike, and the political positions of the community more broadly, were more complex than Dutton and King implied. The Preston Irish played active roles alongside English workmates in the trade union movement. An Irishwoman, Margaret Moore of Dale Street, forbade her children from serving as blackleg labourers at Miller's works.[83] Some Irish trade unionists risked prosecution by openly expressing their contempt for strike-breakers. In April 1854 alone, two separate cases were reported of Irish women haranguing strike-breaking operatives outside one Preston mill.[84] Irish workers were also among the casualties when the Corporation Arms on Lune Street collapsed in October 1853. Striking operatives had packed the upstairs room to collect union relief payments when the building gave way, inflicting serious crush injuries.[85]

An Irishman, Michael Gallagher, served as secretary of the Operative Spinners and Minders Committee, the strikers' primary coordinating body. Gallagher was a committed protagonist throughout the struggle. At a meeting of the committee on 20 October 1853, Gallagher

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77 *Northern Star*, 25 May 1839.
78 David Goodway, *London Chartism, 1838-1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 65.
79 *Preston Pilot*, 20 August 1842.
80 *Preston Guardian*, 28 December 1844.
81 H. I. Dutton & J. E. King, *"Ten per cent and no surrender": the Preston strike, 1853-1854* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 86.
82 Ibid, 115, 177-181.
83 *Preston Guardian*, 4 March 1854.
84 *Preston Chronicle*, 1 April 1854; *Preston Guardian*, 22 April 1854.
85 *Manchester Examiner and Times*, 8 October 1853.

addressed a 300-strong crowd 'at considerable length' stipulating that the strikers 'must never submit to such degrading and humiliating terms' as the cotton lords offered. Until operatives were granted a 10 percent increase in pay, Gallagher vowed, 'we never shall lay down our arms – never, never, never!'[86] The degree of responsibility with which workers entrusted Gallagher demonstrates migrants' potential to occupy crucial positions in contentious working-class politics. For example, in January 1854, workers selected Gallagher to represent strikers in negotiations with cotton lord Thomas Miller.[87] Gallagher was central to the Preston labour movement in this formative epoch. As he put it in March 1854, the strike caused working-class English and Irish to be 'united together by the common bond of fraternal charity'.[88] The political spirit of emerging trade unionism in the town overrode differences of nationality.

When cotton bosses attempted to import Irish blackleg labour to Preston, they imitated tactics which had been regularly employed in previous decades, for instance at the sawyers' strike in Greenock in 1835. In Preston, trade unionists sympathised with impoverished Irish labourers, recalling Thompson's findings among members of Huddersfield Political Union during a comparable dispute.[89] In March 1854, an enormous crowd of Prestonians gathered at the Maudland station to witness the arrival of Irish would-be blackleg labourers, many of whom had been coerced by employers into travelling to the town. There is no evidence of a single outbreak of violence. Anticipating clashes, the police read the riot act at the station before the labourers arrived, but a correspondent to the *Preston Guardian* ridiculed this vigilance, insisting that 'there was no breach of the peace; in fact it was more like a fair'.[90]

An Irishman, John Burn recalled being brought to Preston from Manchester to work at Sharples & Co. in February 1854. On his arrival, Preston union men intercepted Burn and gave him food and drink at their headquarters on Lord Street, reasoning with Burn and ultimately persuading him to stand in solidarity with the strikers.[91] Weeks after Burn arrived, another fifty-four labourers took the same decision after enjoying the hospitality of the Preston spinners, who explained their position over a 'good substantial dinner of beef, bread, cheese, and ale'.[92] Preston unionists' dignified, even generous, treatment of Irish would-be 'knobsticks' suggested the potential for cordial relations and class unity. As Bernard Reaney argued in a percipient article of 1984, trade unionists in mid-nineteenth-century Britain recognised putative Irish strike-breakers not as economic competitors or ethnic rivals, but as exploited comrades: for British union organisers, the priority was to recruit the alienated Irish into the labour movement.[93]

The sharpest social fissures in mid-nineteenth-century Preston were based not upon ethnicity or nationality, but rather along class lines. In times of acute hardship, native operatives directed their anger primarily against their affluent (English) employers. The dominant perception of Irish migrants appears to have been one of sympathy tinged with

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86 *Preston Pilot*, 22 October 1853.
87 *Preston Guardian*, 21 January 1854.
88 *Preston Guardian*, 4 March 1854.
89 Thompson, 'Ireland and the Irish in English radicalism', 131.
90 *Preston Guardian*, 11 March 1854.
91 LA: DDPr/137/87a.
92 *Preston Pilot*, 4 March 1854.
93 Bernard Reaney, 'Irish Chartists in Britain and Ireland: rescuing the rank and file', *Saothar*, 10 (1984), p. 95.

bemusement. With meetings in Preston proscribed during the strike, operatives met in Droylsden in March 1854. Preston trade unionist Mortimer Grimshaw spoke emotionally about witnessing the Irish labourers' arrival: 'When those poor people from Belfast got to the station at Preston… I saw the poor creatures with tears in their eyes'.[94] Similarly, union leader George Cowell empathized with the Irish whose poverty and coercive employers had 'compelled' them to come to Preston. A Preston woman, one Mrs Fletcher, also defended the Irish, who 'were in the right' and had only 'come because they were obliged' by desperation.[95]

Most English workers reserved their ire for the town's wealthy cotton lords. An Englishman employed 'to obtain workpeople for some of the Preston masters', Joseph Mitchell was abused in the street and branded a 'slave master'. In a street confrontation, Cowell and his allies threatened Mitchell: 'that's the bugger; we'll do for him'.[96] Although a series of five contemporary political cartoons, 'The Preston Lock-Out Illustrated', portrayed Irish labour as naïve and prone to exploitation, they served principally to denounce English cotton masters. The images caricatured Irish labourers as folksy and nostalgic: one scene, 'The Mixing Room', depicted a figure 'dhraming I was in old Ireland… drinking the whiskey along with Kitty O'Ratagan'. Yet Irish characters were represented in a broadly sympathetic light: they shared the English operatives' hatred of the bosses, who they insulted with 'pug-ma-hone… may the devils skure [skewer] them'.[97] These illustrations presented the recruiters of blackleg labour as callous, self-serving individuals, with one boasting: 'I have half a crown for every knobstick I get to work, and I only give them sixpence each'.[98]

Amid the confusion of press reports detailing Irish migrants' arrival during the strike, a degree of hostility and obscurity persisted between English and Irish workers. In April 1854, an Irish operative for Messrs Swainson and Birley, Mary Ann McKenny accused one local man, Thomas Loxham, of striking her with a stick and calling her an 'Irish knobstick'.[99] Another Irishwoman, Mary Murray, complained that two Prestonians had kicked her in the street and branded her a 'bloody knobstick'.[100]

Nevertheless, by the 1860s, the rising profile in Preston of trade unionist Daniel O'Neil attested to migrants' capacity and propensity to engage with working-class politics. O'Neil's co-workers elected him to speak at shop meetings on behalf of the Operative Burial Society, to chair public meetings on industrial disputes, and to negotiate with cotton lords during the economic crisis of 1861 precipitated by the American Civil War. O'Neil also sat on the Amalgamated Trades Committee, where he worked alongside his fellow Irishman John Melaney.[101] Prestonian workers placed enduring trust in O'Neil, elected him to preside at a crucial meeting in the Spinners' and Minders' Institute in September 1867, in which local householders challenged the Property Owners' Association's proposals to increase rent rates in the town.[102] Similarly, A. P. Connor and James Farrell were entrusted to collect

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[94] *Manchester Examiner and Times*, 22 March 1854.
[95] *Preston Guardian*, 11 March 1854.
[96] LA: DDPr/138/87a.
[97] LA: DDPr/138/87b/4.
[98] LA: DDPr/138/87b/1.
[99] *Preston Chronicle*, 8 April 1854.
[100] *Preston Guardian*, 18 March 1854.
[101] LA: DDX/1089/2/1.
[102] *Preston Chronicle*, 5 October 1867.

subscription money for the Preston Powerloom Weavers' Committee in the mid-1860s.[103] By the time of the Lancashire cotton famine, the Preston Irish occupied numerous significant roles in local working-class politics.

After the strike and lock-out, the most significant political mobilisation among Preston's Irish migrants emerged during debates about Church reform in the late 1860s. The establishment in 1868 of the Preston Irish Liberal Association (PILA) evidenced the degree to which politicised migrants had engaged with Anglo-Irish politics and their networks and organisational expressions in Preston. The PILA regularly attracted more than 100 people to its weekly meetings. Rallying to support Gladstonian proposals to disestablish the Irish Church, the PILA integrated local Liberals and migrants with a special interest in Gladstone's Irish policies. Addressing the Association's first two meetings of July 1868, Irishman Mr Ryan welcomed Liberals of 'all nationalities'. Local men Messrs Crombleholme and Shorrock espoused solidarity with their Irish allies, echoing the Association's Vice-President Mr Flynn, who 'considered the Irish Church as by law established to be… a great injustice to the people of Ireland'.[104]

The PILA's activities demonstrated the social dynamic inherent in such an organisation. Mr Ryan told an early meeting in an Irish-owned public house that the organisation was 'cementing and consolidating the resident Irish in the borough… for the social and political elevation of the Irish people'.[105] Within weeks of its formation, the PILA was discussing opening two new branches elsewhere in the town. The organisation also reflected the subjective compatibility of Irish identity with aspirations to Liberal citizenship. Mr Ward received applause at a meeting in July 1868 when he said English men were welcome to join the PILA's branches since Preston Irishmen were advancing liberalism 'as English citizens and as Irishmen'.[106] In one sense, the town's Liberals instrumentalised Irish support for a major plank of Gladstone's reforms. Yet migrants' malleable political identities corroborate Mervyn Busteed's work on the Manchester Irish in the later nineteenth century, when innovative migrants 'adapted many of the established conventions and institutions' to express their sense of Irishness and their support for Home Rule.[107]

In the 1860s as in the 1830s, separatism did not pervade migrant networks in Preston to the extent that it did in, for example, Liverpool, Manchester, London, and Glasgow, where the National Brotherhood of St Patrick, founded in the 1860s, drew together like-minded nationalist migrants.[108] By 1864, the National Brotherhood branch in Preston appeared moribund, having never enjoyed the degree of activity or popular sympathy which Lowe found among the Irish in Liverpool, Manchester, and Salford.[109] In December 1866, local Liberals were at pains to dismiss talk of Fenianism in the town, amid unfounded rumours that Preston had served as a staging post for Irishmen mustering en route to Liverpool for military training.[110]

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[103] LA: DDX/1089/1/1.
[104] *Preston Guardian*, 4 July 1868; *Preston Guardian*, 11 July 1868.
[105] *Preston Chronicle*, 27 June 1868.
[106] *Preston Chronicle*, 11 July 1868.
[107] Mervyn Busteed, 'Resistance and respectability: dilemmas of Irish migrant politics in Victorian Britain', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 27 (2009), pp. 178-193.
[108] Terence McBride, 'Ribbonmen and radicals: the cultivation of Irishness and the promotion of active citizenship in mid-Victorian Glasgow', *Irish Studies Review*, 23 (2015), pp. 15-32.
[109] Lowe, 'Lancashire Fenianism', 163.
[110] *Preston Chronicle*, 15 December 1866.

In retrospect, concerns about supposed Fenian conspiracy in Preston said more about authorities' alarm at Fenian outrages in Manchester and London late in 1867 than about the town's Irish populace. The evidence for Fenian conspiracy in Preston was conjectural, but in this paranoiac zeitgeist rumour triggered draconian policing. The Watch Committee's decision to appoint thirteen new policemen to the town in January 1868 stemmed primarily from the curious case of one William Barry, an Irish private in the 107th Regiment at Fulwood Barracks, who was convicted of using seditious language in a pub row.[111] A soldier with seventeen years of military experience, Barry was intoxicated late one evening when another man chastised him for mentioning Fenianism. Barry responded aggressively and threatened to 'do for' his interlocutor and 'do for England'. He was alleged to have added 'to hell with the queen and the government' before his arrest.[112] The minor embarrassment of Barry's case aside, Preston served as a mere pit-stop for would-be Fenian revolutionaries – authorities reported Fenians travelling through the town's railway station en route to an aborted raid at Chester Castle in February 1867[113] – and not as an established hotbed of separatist ideology. As was often the case in later nineteenth-century Britain, authorities' overdrawn suspicions were at odds with the reality of an Irish community becoming increasingly integrated in British society.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Preston's demographics and confessional configuration, combined with a sequence of industrial protests and rising working-class political autonomy, provided multiple opportunities for meaningful Irish interventions in the town's religious and political life. Between 1829 and 1868, Irish migrants in Preston played key roles in the Catholic Church's pastoral, social, and spiritual provisions, and were active also in Chartism, labour politics, and Liberal networks. Preston's size, broader immigration patterns, confessional composition, and labour politics all combined with Irish initiatives and agency to shape migrants' variegated experiences in the town. These vital characteristics are key to understanding Irish migrants' heterogeneous careers in nineteenth-century Britain.

The comparative aspects of this analysis suggest that an urban settlement's size determined the degree of ghettoization and population clustering. In larger settlements such as Liverpool, Manchester, and London, it would appear that chain-migration patterns encouraged the Irish to congregate in particular corners of the urban sprawl.[114] By contrast, medium-sized and smaller towns like Preston, Gateshead, and Stafford were more easily traversed and the degree of community segregation was markedly less.[115] As Margaret

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[111] *Preston Chronicle*, 4 January 1868.

[112] *Preston Chronicle*, 1 February 1868. A slightly closer Prestonian connection to Fenian conspiracy in the military predated the Barry case by several years. The preeminent Fenian John Boyle O'Reilly, who moved from County Meath to live with relatives in Preston aged fifteen in 1859, worked for the *Preston Guardian* before enrolling in the 11th Lancashire Rifle Volunteers in 1861. O'Reilly returned to Ireland in 1863 and joined the Fenians the following year. I am indebted to Dr Máirtín Ó Catháin for this information.

[113] Lowe, 'Lancashire Fenianism', 172.

[114] Pooley, 'The residential segregation of migrant communities in mid-Victorian Liverpool', 364; M. A. Busteed & R. I. Hodgson, 'Irish migrant responses to urban life in early nineteenth-century Manchester', *Geographical Journal*, 162 (1996), p. 145.

[115] Neal, 'A statistical profile of the Irish community in Gateshead', 50-81; John Herson, *Divergent paths: family histories of Irish emigrants in Britain, 1820-1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 69, 310.

Ainscough observed, Preston's densely-packed populace occupied a compact centre, approximately one-and-a-half miles from east to west and one mile from north to south.[116] There was an Irish presence in almost all areas of the town, save the most exclusive and affluent districts.

This is not to say that there was not a degree of ghettoization in Preston. The overcrowded and unsanitary area around Foster's Square, segmented by Corporation Street and Maudland Road, was known in the 1850s as 'Little Ireland'. A transient Irish population contributed to a large population of lodgers in the area. In 1861, census enumerator John Hoghton broke with precedent to include in his report extended evocations of 'one of the poorest and most neglected districts in Preston': With only a few exceptions, Hoghton wrote, the

> Houses are all Cottages and many of them are sadly overcrowded, there being Lodgers at most of the Cottages, in many cases there are two families besides other Lodgers living in one Cottage, and in a few cases there are three distinct families living in one Cottage…[117]

Yet Hoghton, an experienced observer of urban Preston, regarded the Little Ireland area as untypical: 'few respectable persons would imagine that there was such an amount of misery and destitution in Preston'.[118] E. P. Thompson's assertion that the Irish 'if segregated in some towns… were never pressed back into ghettoes' rings true for the small and medium-sized towns of population 70,000 or less, Preston included.[119]

Broader patterns of inward migration to Preston also contextualised Irish migration. Irish arrivals barely accounted for a majority of the migrants arriving in the industrialising town. While the Irish-born population of Preston grew steadily through the mid-nineteenth century, rising to 12.3 percent of the town's population by 1861, the Irish in fact comprised a minority of Preston's migrants. In 1851, over 40 percent of the town's inhabitants were migrants from within ten miles. Only approximately 30 percent came from more than thirty miles away.[120] That the Irish did not constitute a singular 'alien' community in nineteenth-century Preston likely informed the relative ease with which migrants forged multi-layered identities: as Preston Irish and working-class radicals, for instance, or as Irishmen, Liberals, and British citizens simultaneously.

Preston's exceptional confessional demographics, with Catholicism enduring robustly, produced a very different politico-religious climate to that which Irish migrants experienced in Liverpool and Manchester, for instance. The Catholicism of most migrants arriving in Preston created opportunities for social integration with the host society. As priests, senior figures in religious organisations, and lay members of thriving Catholic congregations, migrants played important roles in institutions sympathetic to their needs and responsive to their national identity. Catholicism's numerical and cultural significance in Preston ensured

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[116] Ainscough, 'Local politics and the geography of the Victorian city', 2.
[117] 'Victorian Preston's "worst slum"', *Preston History*. Available at: https://prestonhistory.com/subjects/victorian-prestons-worst-slum/ (Accessed 12 April 2020).
[118] Ibid.
[119] E. P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1968), pp. 334, 342, 471-484.
[120] Graham Davis, 'Little Irelands', in Roger Swift & Sheridan Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939* (Savage, Maryland: Barnes & Noble, 1989), p. 107.

that Catholic migrants' experiences in the town differed considerably from, for example, the Stockport Irish, whose Catholicism acutely divided them from the local population.[121]

Furthermore, the industrial protests and popular activism which defined Preston's labour politics throughout these decades were also key to migrants' connections with the host community. Anglo-Irish relations in the town were not always cordial, but workers of both nationalities made common cause in growing trade unions, Chartism, and friendly societies. That activists like Michael Gallagher and Daniel O'Neil enjoyed such respect from their working-class comrades, English and Irish alike, who entrusted them with considerable responsibilities, demonstrates the depth of Preston Irish workers' social engagement. The commitment of Preston Irish to labour politics deviates from John Walton's broader assessment of nineteenth-century Lancashire, where Irish migrants' 'perceived willingness to accept low wages and undercut English labour was especially divisive'.[122]

In Preston, Irish migrants joined and adapted established religious and political institutions to fashion distinct but malleable and multi-layered identities. In contrast to John Herson's assessment of the Stafford Irish failing to form their own institutions and consequently assimilating and experiencing 'ethnic fade',[123] the Preston Irish could integrate closely with their host community while retaining a degree of autonomy. For instance, Irish labour activists shared a lexicon of class solidarity with their Prestonian comrades, but could also selectively champion specifically Irish political causes. English contemporaries celebrated Irish pioneers' contributions to trade unions, temperance, and church leadership while remarking upon their ethnic and cultural distinctions.

That the Preston Irish did not simply morph into their host society was also evidenced by the occasionally problematic aspects of Irish activities in the town. Especially at moments of heightened tension nationwide in Anglo-Irish politics or Anglican alarm at the perceived aggression of the Catholic Church in the mid-nineteenth century, sectarian political rhetoric emerged, tapping into an undercurrent of division and mutual suspicion in Prestonian society. As Donald MacRaild's study of the Irish in Victorian Cumbria suggested, hostile elements in the host society inadvertently reinforced Irish Catholic migrants' ethnonational distinctiveness.[124]

Alan O'Day's conception of 'mutative ethnicity' accurately reflects the processual, uneven, and contingent qualities of Irish migrant identity in Preston. For O'Day, migrants preserved their Irishness by adapting to particular social, political, and cultural contexts.[125] Irish experience in the town evolved throughout these decades. In 1837, for example, the mayor considered it necessary to assert that, contrary to popular opinion, the Irish were not to be

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[121] Pauline Millward, 'The Stockport riots of 1852: a study of anti-Catholic and anti-Irish sentiment', in Roger Swift & Sheridan Gilley (eds), *The Irish in the Victorian city* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 214.
[122] Walton, *Lancashire*, 183.
[123] John Herson, 'Migration "community" or integration? Irish families in Victorian Stafford', in Roger Swift & Sheridan Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in Victorian Britain: the local dimension* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), pp. 156-189.
[124] Donald M. MacRaild, *Culture, conflict and migration: the Irish in Victorian Cumbria* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), p. 15.
[125] Alan O'Day, 'A conundrum of Irish diasporic identity: mutative ethnicity', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 27 (2009), pp. 317-339.

regarded as 'aliens' but rather as 'our brethren'.[126] By contrast, by the late 1860s, the Vice-President of the nascent Preston Irish Liberal Association could confidently envisage the Irish and English in the town uniting to establish a large organisation.[127] Throughout this period, the Irish community became increasingly entrenched in the burgeoning social institutions of a vibrant working-class community.

As Karen O'Reilly has contended, understandings of migration necessarily reflect and affect social and economic relationships within and between origin and destination societies.[128] As such, the case of the Preston Irish contributes to a macro-discussion of the patterns and particularities of Irish experience across nineteenth-century Britain. Connected to a wide array of comparable studies, this case-study delineates four central contextual factors in a nineteenth-century urban settlement which informed Irish migrant experience. A British town's size, broader immigration patterns, confessional composition, and labour politics combined to shape the degree of opportunity for meaningful Irish participation in the host society.

[126] *Preston Chronicle*, 10 June 1837.
[127] *Preston Guardian*, 11 July 1868.
[128] Karen O'Reilly, *International migration and social theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 6.