Introduction

In recent years studies of the Irish diaspora have flourished, with the growth of work on the Irish in Great Britain particularly notable. Within this body of work there has long been a focus on nineteenth-century Irish movement across the Irish Sea, and some notably fine overviews have been produced.[1] Certain themes have constantly recurred. One is focused on the causes of the outflow from Ireland, often accompanied by analysis of the extent to which Britain was a relatively attractive destination. In both cases emphasis is on economic factors, supplemented by political, socio-cultural and personal considerations. A second theme is the temporal and regional pattern of settlement in Britain, noting how the level of emigration fluctuated with varying economic conditions on both sides of the Irish Sea and how the geography of settlement was influenced on the macro scale by employment opportunities and in detail by the location of cheap accommodation, existing Irish communities and familial links. Within this literature there has been a lively debate on the extent to which the Irish shared residential space with the native population. A third theme has centred on questions of employment, the traditional picture arguing that the successive Irish inflows were overwhelmingly unskilled or semi-skilled working-class and largely remained in these categories. Running alongside and closely related to this narrative, the fourth theme stressed the material poverty of the Irish immigrants, their notably bad housing and living conditions and the varieties of anti-social behaviour which often went in tandem. A fifth preoccupation has been the significance of Roman Catholicism as the faith of the great majority of the immigrants and its centrality not merely to the spiritual life of individual migrants, but in the social, cultural and, indeed, the political life

of Irish migrant communities. The sixth body of work took up this latter dimension and focused on the political activities of the Irish in Britain, the extent to which they were expressed through parliamentary or violent means and the relationship to contemporary British political causes and movements. Often linked with these last two themes is a discussion of the reactions of native reactions to the incomers, the relationships which developed between the two and the extent to which the Irish integrated with British society and the degree to which they were and remained a people apart.

This steadily growing volume of work has variously deconstructed, challenged and refined many of the earlier generalisations on Irish migrants in nineteenth-century Britain and has taken the discussion into previously neglected dimensions of the migrant experience. Amongst these are the presence of a middle class and its role in both ecclesiastical and secular organisations, the lapse rate amongst Catholic migrants, the presence of a Protestant element, the life of migrant Irish women, the performance of Irishness in public space and the impact of the Irish on the literary, artistic and broader cultural life of nineteenth-century Britain. Much of this work has been conducted through the prism of regional and local studies, using census material, local newspapers, church records and whatever archival sources and personal papers have survived the ravages of time, neglect, ignorance and the blitz of the Second World War.[2] A good deal has once again focused on the large urban areas where most Irish settled, but there have also been studies of how the Irish fared in smaller urban settlements. These have shown how place is important, that personality and locality can bring about subtle but significant modifications of a general picture and that situations can alter over time.

Given its significance in the history of Britain as the pioneer city of the industrial revolution, it is surprising that until the 1990s there was little academic research on the Manchester Irish.[3] This is particularly puzzling, given that throughout most of the nineteenth century Manchester had the fourth largest Irish population of all the cities of Great Britain. Moreover, it was in Manchester that traditional anti-Irish prejudices were given a renewed lease of life by a pioneering study of working-class living conditions published in 1832 which scapegoated the Irish for many of the problems thrown up by rapid urban industrial development. In addition, it was in Manchester that there occurred a colourful succession of iconic incidents in late 1867 which generated hero figures, popular balladry, an Irish nationalist anthem and an enduring commemoration ritual, all of which resonated throughout Ireland and the diaspora for decades. In addition, the Irish organised for elections to the local school board and

the city council, producing public representatives who were to become notably active in civic and broader Irish nationalist affairs.

The present work is an attempt to repair some aspects of this omission. It focuses on the Irish in Manchester during the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. It is not intended as a comprehensive overview of all aspects of Irish life during that period. Rather, it focuses on the place the Irish devised for themselves in the life of the city, with particular reference to the extent to which they preserved their sense of Irish identity whilst making their way in one of the most dynamic world cities of the period. Until the arrival of Jewish refugees from the pogroms of imperial Russia in the late nineteenth century, the Irish, marked out by accent, religion, and politics and, in many cases, language, were the most exotic element in the city's population. This study focuses on the extent to which they retained their Irish identity through communal social solidarity, residential clustering, religious loyalties, communal celebration and political aspiration, whilst adapting the institutions, mores and institutions of the host society for their distinctive purposes. It is probably true that many Irish on arrival in Britain quietly abandoned their distinctive religious practice, language and political outlook and merged with the host population, a trend which alarmed the Catholic Church in particular, provoking recurrent anxieties over 'leakage'. But, as will be shown, significant numbers retained at least some of these features and eventually came to occupy prominent places in the social geography and cultural life of the city.

Identity is a malleable social construction, subject to constant renewal and reinvention. During the period under discussion British national identity underwent some significant shifts in definition. For centuries the French, and to a lesser extent the Spanish, had filled the role of the great foreign Catholic 'other' against which popular English and later British popular nationalism had been defined. Anti-Irish sentiment was if anything even longer lived. It underwent periodic renewal during the nineteenth century as Irish Catholic immigration waxed and waned and the Irish were made scapegoats for many of the social and economic ills generated by the revolutionary changes in economic and social geography which coincided with their arrival. Subsequently, their involvement in distinctive political campaigns for Catholic emancipation, Irish self-government and Catholic education continued to mark them out from the mainstream of British society. The interaction between these sometimes contending forces is a major theme of this book, which looks at the processes working for interaction, inclusion, differentiation and the compromises involved.

The first chapter traces the gradual development of links between Manchester and Ireland, largely through the build-up of commercial connections, but also noting the two-way movement of people across the Irish Sea. It examines the process whereby commercial and seasonal links gradually led to the growth of a substantial resident Irish-born population before the famine influx of the mid- to late 1840s and their concentration in distinct residential districts. It discusses how the relatively small and short-lived 'Little Ireland' area received widespread publicity thanks to the polemics of a conscientious workaholic sanitary reformer who blamed the Irish for many of the ills of industrialisation and thereby helped to give anti-Irish sentiment a new lease of life in nineteenth-century Britain. Chapter 2 switches the focus to Angel Meadow, the much larger and more long-lived Irish neighbourhood on the northern side of the city. It examines the rapid build-up of the resident Irish population of the city in the late 1840s and discusses the spatial distribution of the Irish in the network of streets set back from the main roads of the Angel Meadow study area. It goes on to explain this pattern of residential clustering whilst stressing that there was also constant interaction with city life.

Chapter 3 discusses the significance of the Catholic Church for the migrant Irish. Whilst noting that there was already an English Catholic population, it outlines how the Irish came to dominate this faith community in terms of both numbers and priorities and on occasion troubled the church authorities with their politics. But it also examines how from the earliest times there were concerns amongst the clergy about the external dangers threatening the faithful. These took the form of Protestant prejudice, often stirred up by local preachers such as Rev. Hugh Stowell of Salford or by itinerant lecturers, and Protestant proselytism through the allocation of Catholic orphans and foundlings to non-Catholic homes. Of even greater concern was the danger of 'wastage' of those who neglected their spiritual duties or fell away completely from the faith, seduced by bad company and competing distractions. To guard against such dangers and build up the faithful, a dense network of church-based fraternities, moral improvement and mutual aid organisations was organised. The Salford Diocese Catholic Protection and Rescue Society was one of the most notable guardians of the boundaries of faith and morals, and its journal is a rich source for this study.

Chapter 4 examines the evolution of that most characteristically Irish public festival, namely St Patrick's Day. It discusses how in the 1830s and 1840s it was celebrated at two levels. On the streets it was ill organised and bucolic, often involving drunken fights with locals and members of the Orange Order. In parallel and possibly in reaction to this, there was a

regular public dinner which the organisers set out to make as respectable and inclusive as possible, often aiming to raise funds for charitable work amongst the Irish poor and featuring speeches arguing for cooperation and concord amongst Irish people regardless of religious and political outlook. When the celebration re-emerges to public view in the 1870s it was clearly becoming more respectable, being carefully structured on the conventional format of public concerts and meetings and much more Catholic and nationalist in tone, with clergy invariably present, MPs as guest speakers and Irish home rule a constantly recurring theme.

Chapter 5 discusses how Manchester's Irish related to the broader political concerns of the city during the period from the 1790s to the 1850s whilst retaining a keen interest in Irish affairs. It notes the activities of local supporters of the revolutionary United Irishmen in the city in the 1790s but also notes the presence of the Irish amongst those who demonstrated for parliamentary reform and trade union rights at Peterloo in 1819. Daniel O'Connell's campaigns for Catholic emancipation in the 1820s and repeal of the union of Great Britain and Ireland in the early 1840s clearly found support amongst the Manchester Irish. The complicated on-off relationship with Chartism in the city is examined, with particular attention to the fact that the much feared Irish–Chartist alliance in the revolutionary year of 1848 may actually have been a fleeting reality in Manchester.

Chapter 6 examines the role of the Irish in the electoral politics of the city from the 1870s onwards. Following early unsuccessful efforts with independent Irish candidates at local elections, it focuses on the sometimes awkward relationship with the local Liberal party, in which some Irish came to occupy leading roles, its outworking in school board and municipal elections and its rather less significant impact on parliamentary elections. It underlines the fact that by the end of the century there was a small but able group of Irish-born and second-generation Liberal councillors who served both the civic life of the city and the distinctive interests of their Irish Catholic nationalist followers.

Chapter 7 analyses the evolution of the commemoration rituals for the Manchester Martyrs, executed in November 1867, and the quietly intense struggle between moderate and advanced nationalists for ownership of the proceedings, noting that by the early twentieth century it had developed into an inclusive event incorporating representatives of the organisations which had arisen with the Irish cultural revival. It also traces how the events of the 1916 Dublin rising unnerved moderate nationalists in the city until by 1920 the ritual was passing into the control of Sinn Féin and its local support group.

Chapter 8 attempts to trace the hidden history of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) in Manchester in the years following the incidents of 1867 and notes how the organisation, though not necessarily the outlook it represented, had almost faded away by the 1890s. Thereafter it outlines the gradual revival of a more militant brand of Irish nationalism, the participation of a small group of Manchester people in the rising of 1916 and activities of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the city in the years 1919–21, stressing that, whilst sympathy for the struggle steadily grew, actual participation took many forms and outright involvement in military action involved very few. In conclusion, it is made clear that, like so many immigrant groups, the Irish in Manchester were subject to conflicting influences. History, religion, residential clustering, political priorities and celebratory festivals tended to keep them apart, but since they lived in a particularly dynamic British city with a vibrant political and civic culture this meant that whilst they could adapt local institutions and traditions for distinctively Irish purposes, they were simultaneously drawn to share the broader concerns, customs and mores of the city and society as a whole, creating what was in many ways a hybrid identity.

Notes

1 John Archer Jackson, *The Irish in Britain* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), though dated, is an enduring piece of work raising questions still very relevant to the subject. The most comprehensive overviews since then are, in chronological order, Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (eds), *The Irish in the Victorian city* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); *The Irish in Britain 1815–1939* (London: Pinter, 1989); Graham Davis, *The Irish in Britain 1815–1914* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1991); Roger Swift, *The Irish in Britain 1815–1914* (London: The Historical Association, 1990); Roger Swift, 'The historiography of the Irish in nineteenth century Britain', in P. O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish worldwide: history, heritage, identity*, vol. 2: *The Irish in the new communities* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), pp. 52–81; Don MacRaild, *Irish migrants in modern Britain 1750–1922* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); Roger Swift, 'Historians and the Irish: recent writings on the Irish in nineteenth century Britain', in D. MacRaild (ed.), *The great famine and beyond: Irish migrants in Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000), pp. 14–39; Roger Swift, 'Identifying the Irish in Victorian Britain: recent trends in historiography', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 27:2–3 (2009), pp. 178–93.

2 See Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Victorian Britain: the local dimension* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999) for a good selection.

3 J.M. Werly, 'The Irish in Manchester', *Irish Historical Studies*, 18 (1973), pp. 345–58, merely reproduced material from official documents and the work of Friedrich Engels vividly describing poor Irish living and working conditions, with no sustained analysis.