

Newspaper reporting of migrants in England 1851-1911: spatial and temporal perspectives

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Abstract

England in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was no stranger to migrants and, inevitably, migrants were not always warmly received. They were often stigmatised for their perceived differences of language, religion and behaviour, and were blamed for a range of social ills including crime and low wages. In this paper I examine print news reporting in six English port cities from c1850 to 1910. I focus on the ways in which crime reporting in particular characterised both offenders and victims, and the extent to which migrant origin was considered a relevant characteristic to report. It is argued that for the most part migrant origin was not widely mentioned in crime reports in regional newspapers, though there were periods when migrant origin was increasingly foregrounded and these coincided with times when migration to England was becoming increasingly politicised, especially before and immediately after the passing of the Aliens Act in 1905.

Key words

Migration, stigmatisation, media, Aliens Act, England, nineteenth-century

Introduction and context: migrants and the media

International migration is rarely out of the news and migrants regularly attract the attention of media and the general public, often in negative and unwelcome ways. This has been especially evident in recent years with attention in Europe focused on the large numbers of desperate people fleeing conflict and poverty in North Africa and the Middle East, the central

role that public and political concerns about immigration played in the UK's decision to leave the EU in June 2016, and the extreme negative stereotyping of some immigrant groups by Donald Trump and his supporters in the 2016 US presidential campaign.¹ Although such rhetoric may have reached new depths in 2016, media stereotyping of immigrants is not new. For instance, in nineteenth-century Britain anti-Irish comments among press, public and politicians were common and are well documented,² and media concern about migration has been shown to influence policy elsewhere in Europe.³ This paper examines the extent and nature of migrant identification in local news media reports of court cases in a sample of English port cities from 1851 to 1911. It uses nominal record linkage between news reporting and the census enumerators' books to identify the actual origins of those recorded by news reporters, and to assess variations over time and between locations. In conclusion, possible reasons for the ways in which migrants to England were identified are discussed.

By present-day standards the proportion of the English population that were immigrants (from elsewhere in the British Isles or from overseas) was low in the nineteenth century (Table 1). From 1851 to 1911 migrants formed less than five per cent of the English population: the main shift was a decline in the proportion of Irish-born and an increase in the proportion born outside the British Isles. In contrast, at the 2011 census over 16 per cent of

¹. M. Berry, I. Garcia-Blanco and K. Moore, *Press coverage of the refugee and migrant crisis in the EU: a content analysis of five European countries* (Geneva 2016) Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/56bb369c9.html> (21 August 2017); H. Giroux, 'Donald Trump and neo-fascism in America', *Arena Magazine (Fitzroy Vic)* 140 (2016) 31-32; M. Goodwin and O. Heath, 'The 2016 Referendum, Brexit and the Left Behind: An Aggregate-level Analysis of the Result', *The Political Quarterly* 87:3 (2016) 323-332.

². R. Swift and S. Gilley, *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939* (Savage, MD. 1989); G. Davis, *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1914* (Dublin 1991); M. Ghail, 'The Irish in Britain: the invisibility of ethnicity and anti-Irish racism', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 26:1 (2000) 137-147.

³. M. Schrover and T. Walaardt, 'The Influence of the Media on Policies in Practice: Hungarian Refugee Resettlement in the Netherlands in 1956', *Journal of Migration History* 3:1 (2017) 22-53.

those living in England had been born elsewhere with most of these coming from outside the British Isles. The proportion of Irish-, Scots- and Welsh-born living in England in 2011 had changed little since 1911.⁴

By the standards of other rich European countries migrants do not form an especially large proportion of the total population of the United Kingdom with, in 2014, substantially fewer foreign-born than Switzerland, Luxembourg, most of Scandinavia and Austria, and also fewer than in Germany and Belgium.⁵ Figures for the UK are also broadly comparable to those in the USA where in 2010 12.9 per cent of the population were foreign-born; but the two countries differ substantially in their migration history. In the USA the proportion of the population foreign-born was higher than today at 14.8 per cent in 1890, falling to less than five per cent in 1970 before rising again, whereas in England those born elsewhere remained relatively low until the 1970s, with the largest proportionate rise occurring after 2001.⁶ The visibility of migrants depends not only on their numbers but on their degree of concentration: dispersed groups are almost always less visible, and attract less media attention, than those

⁴ . For a more detailed analysis of the demography of foreign-born migrants to England and Wales see B. Szreter, *Before Windrush: Global Immigration to England and Wales, 1851-1911. Evidence from the Census* (Oxford 2016) MSc thesis University of Oxford. For other perspectives on the history of immigration to Britain see for example: C. Holmes, *Immigrants and minorities in British society* (London 1978); J. Walvin, *Passage to Britain: immigration in British history and politics*. (Harmondsworth 1984); C. Holmes, *A Tolerant Country?: Immigrants, Refugees and Minorities* (London 1991); P. Panayi, *Immigration, ethnicity and racism in Britain, 1815-1945* (Manchester 1994); L. Tabili, *Global migrants, local culture: natives and newcomers in provincial England, 1841-1939* (London, 2011); P. Panayi, *An immigration history of Britain: multicultural racism since 1800* (London 2014);

⁵ . Eurostat, *Migration and migrant population statistics* (Luxembourg 2016).

⁶ . M. Rendall and J. Salt, 'The foreign-born population', in: Office for National Statistics, *Focus on People and Migration* (Basingstoke 2005) 132-151; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010. *The foreign-born population in the United States* (Washington 2010). Available at: https://www.census.gov/newsroom/pdf/cspan_fb_slides.pdf (22 August 2017); A. Krausova, *Migration in Great Britain: census factsheet* (Oxford 2014).

heavily concentrated in particular locations. In nineteenth-century Britain migrants from outside England were found disproportionately in large urban areas, especially those associated with their ports of entry. Those born in Ireland were by far the most visible migrant group in the nineteenth century, with the heaviest concentrations in Great Britain in Liverpool, Glasgow and Manchester (Table 2). Although the greatest numbers of Irish migrants were to be found in London, even in 1851 immediately after the main period of Irish migration they formed less than five per cent of the city's population compared to over 22 per cent in Liverpool. By 1891 foreign-born formed the largest migrant population in London (2.5 per cent), rising to 4.6 per cent in 1911 (exactly the same as for Irish-born in 1851).

The distancing and stigmatisation of particular groups (migrant or otherwise) comes in part from personal experience and in part from the ways in which they are represented by others, including in the media. Goffman's classic study of stigma has been the starting point for much social science research,⁷ but since then concepts of distancing, profiling and stigmatisation have been widely developed and applied to many different groups and situations, providing a rich array of theory and empirical evidence.⁸ There is substantial evidence from many parts of the world that at least some present-day media represent migrants and minority groups in a negative fashion, and that this can in turn shape popular

⁷ . E. Goffman, *Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity* (New York 1963)

⁸ . D. Sibley, *Geographies of exclusion: Society and difference in the West* (London 1995); J. Swim, M. Ferguson and L. Hyers, 'Avoiding stigma by association: Subtle prejudice against lesbians in the form of social distancing', *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 21:1 (1999) 61-68; P. McClain, N. Carter, V. DeFrancesco Soto, M. Lyle, J. Grynaviski, S. Nunnally, T. Scotto, J. Kendrick, G. Lackey and K. Cotton, 'Racial distancing in a southern city: Latino immigrants' views of black Americans', *Journal of Politics* 68:3 (2006) 571-584; R. Jackson, 'Black immigrants and the rhetoric of social distancing', *Sociology Compass* 4:3 (2010) 193-206.

attitudes towards migrants within their communities.⁹ However, less is known about the ways in which the much less all pervasive media of the past reported migration and migrant groups, or the likely influence of such reporting on readers. This paper addresses this issue in the context of nineteenth-century England.

There was a thriving national and provincial press in Britain in the nineteenth century and many local and regional newspapers had a wide circulation that extended well beyond their immediate location.¹⁰ For instance, the Liverpool Mercury – one of the largest and most successful provincial papers – had a circulation area that extended far beyond the city into Lancashire, Cheshire, North Wales, the Isle of Man and even London.¹¹ There is also ample evidence that these papers were widely read by their purchasers and then passed around family and friends, while the expanding provision of public libraries in Britain from mid-century provided free access to newspapers for all who cared to read them. In addition to the national and provincial press the nineteenth century also saw the rapid expansion of broadsheets, magazines and periodicals providing news, gossip and satire to the reading

⁹ . E. Poole, *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims* (London 2002); J. Cisneros, 'Contaminated communities: the metaphor of "immigrant as pollutant" in media representations of immigration', *Rhetoric & public affairs* 11:4 (2008) 569-601; E. Bleich, I. Bloemraad and E. de Graauw, 'Migrants, minorities and the media: information, representations and participation in the public sphere', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41:6 (2015) 857-873; E. Bleich, H. Stonebraker, H. Nisar and R. Abdelhamid, 'Media Portrayals of Minorities: Muslims in British Newspaper Headlines, 2001–2012', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41:6 (2015) 942-962; R. Tukachinsky, D. Mastro and M. Yarchi, 'Documenting Portrayals of Race/Ethnicity on Primetime Television over a 20-Year Span and Their Association with National-Level Racial/Ethnic Attitudes', *Journal of Social Issues* 71:1 (2015) 17-38.

¹⁰ . L. Brown, L., *Victorian news and newspapers* (Oxford 1985); A. McAllister and A. Hobbs, 'Local and regional newspapers: introduction', *The International Journal of Regional and Local Studies* 5:1 (2009) 5-15.

¹¹ . Information from Nineteenth-century British Newspapers website (British Library/Gage): <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> (22 August 2017)

public.¹² Although the provincial press reported local news and events it was by no means parochial. Most such newspapers also provided extensive coverage of national and international news: perusal of a local paper could keep the reader informed of news in their region, in the country, Empire and beyond.¹³ It is hard to assess the extent to which the press, either in the past or the present, has a direct influence on public opinion. Does the press shape opinion or does it follow it in order to attract and please readers? In reality it is likely that to some extent both occur. As Walter Lippmann demonstrated in his seminal work on public opinion the views that people hold, and the ways that they are formed and reinforced, are complex and subject to any different forces.¹⁴ But in most instances the media, which in the nineteenth century was principally the provincial press, could play a significant role. With the wider range of mass media that developed in the twentieth century such influence almost certainly increased.¹⁵

Research methods and sources

The core aim of the research was to examine the extent to which migrants to England were identified as such in provincial newspaper reporting from 1851 to 1911, particularly in instances where such reporting could be construed by readers to produce a negative image of

¹² . J. Rose, 'Rereading the English common reader: a preface to a history of audiences', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53:1 (1992) 47-70; R. Altick, *The English common reader: a social history of the mass reading public, 1800-1900* (Chicago 1998).

¹³ . A. Hobbs, 'When the Provincial Press was the National Press (c. 1836-c. 1900)', *The International Journal of Regional and Local Studies* 5:1 (2009) 16-43.

¹⁴ . W. Lippmann, *Public opinion* (London 1922).

¹⁵ . A. Gunther, 'The persuasive press inference effects of mass media on perceived public opinion', *Communication Research* 25:5 (1998) 486-504; M. McCombs, *Setting the agenda: The mass media and public opinion* (London 2013).

migrants. The methodology used has been described in some detail elsewhere:¹⁶ this section provides a summary of the sources and methods used. In both the past and the present there has been a tendency to associate some migrants with criminality (both as perpetrators of crime and as victims), and to blame migrants – usually unfairly - for increases in crime and social disorder.¹⁷ Most nineteenth-century provincial papers in England provided quite detailed court reports in which not only was the offence and sentencing specified, but also many contextual details provided, including personal information about the accused and the victim. One brief example from 1871 gives a flavour of such accounts:

For the defence witnesses were called who stated that the prisoner was a hard-working man, who frequently made as much as £3 per week, but that his wife made his home wretched by pawning anything pledgable, and selling the tea, sugar &c, he brought home.¹⁸

If reporters felt it important to state the migrant origins of a victim or offender then they had ample scope to do so.

It was decided to focus the research on six large provincial port cities on the grounds that these were the English communities that were likely to have the largest proportion of migrants (especially from overseas), and in which the visibility of migrants would be high (Table 3). London was not studied mainly because of its size, and the complexity of its communities with a large variety of local newspapers. Liverpool was by far the largest of the cities studied, but all had attained a population of 50,000 by 1871. The proportion of the

¹⁶ . C. Pooley, 'Migrants and the media in nineteenth-century Liverpool', *Local Population Studies* 92:1 (2014) 24-37.

¹⁷ . J. Walton, M. Blinkhorn, C. Pooley, D. Tidswell and M. Winstanley, 'Crime, migration and social change in north-west England and the Basque country', *British Journal of Criminology* 39:1 (1999) 90-112; A. Pratt and M. Valverde, 'From deserving victims to "masters of confusion": Redefining refugees in the 1990s', *Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers canadiens de sociologie* 27:2 (2002) 35-161; C. Emsley, *Crime and society in England, 1750-1900* (Harlow 2005).

¹⁸ . *Liverpool Mercury*, Friday 14 April 1871, 8.

population born outside England was principally related to the geographic location of each city and its proximity to another country of the British Isles. Thus migration to Liverpool was dominated by Irish migrants, leading to more than a third of the city's population being born outside England in 1851, and Newcastle had a large number of migrants from Scotland. The proportion of the population of each city born outside England declined steadily from 1851, mainly reflecting a decline in migration from Ireland. The only exceptions were in Southampton and Portsmouth where there was a slight increase in non-English born between 1891 and 1911, reflecting increased movement to Britain from continental Europe.

Six provincial newspapers were examined for 1851, 1871 and 1891: the Liverpool Mercury, the Hull Packet, the Bristol Mercury, the Southampton Herald (which also covered Portsmouth) and the Newcastle Courant. In the early twentieth century there was considerable change within the newspaper publishing industry, with many papers merging. For 1901 and 1911 attention was focused only on Liverpool with examination of the final issues of the Liverpool (daily) Mercury and then the Liverpool Weekly Mercury, the Liverpool Post and the Liverpool Echo. For the nineteenth century the papers examined were available digitally, but for 1901 and 1911 only microfilm/fiche copies are available.¹⁹ All court reports were examined for a period of one month after each census date in 1851, 1871, 1891, 1901 and 1911, and whenever the name and address of an offender or victim was given full details of the individuals (including migrant origin where stated) and the case were entered into a database. A note was also made of any instances where a migrant origin was stated but no address given, though these could obviously not be traced to the next stage of the research.

¹⁹ . Digital records were accessed through the British Library/Gale newspaper archive: <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> (30 August 2017); microfilm/fiche copies at the Liverpool Record Office, Central Library and Archive, Liverpool.

A total of 469 individuals were identified by name and address from the court reports and these were then traced to their entry in the census enumerators' books immediately preceding the court report. Thus someone accused of a crime in (for instance) a court report published on 8 April 1851 was searched for in the 1851 census that took place on March 30th. Where a link was made further personal information from the census was recorded, including place of birth. It is thus possible to compare the frequency with which migrant origin was recorded in court reports with the actual place of birth of individuals identified. In addition some simple data mining using key words and phrases connected to the identification of specific migrant groups was undertaken on those provincial papers available digitally, and on the main British national paper, *The Times*. However, results from this exercise must be interpreted with great caution as it is essential to interrogate the context of each occurrence and simple counts of references to particular migrant groups can be misleading.²⁰ These data are used only sparingly in this paper.

There are a number of important caveats to be made about the linked data set. The sample of offences recorded from the court reports is not necessarily a true reflection of all crimes recorded by the police: it will be a selection of those offences that the reporter felt of interest to readers and therefore worth reporting. However, the crimes identified do broadly correlate with those most commonly recorded in other studies of nineteenth-century crime,²¹ with trading offences, all forms of theft, assaults, drunkenness and child cruelty or neglect among the most regularly recorded. Violent crimes such as murder or manslaughter were rare but

²⁰ . M. Kirschenbaum, 'The remaking of reading: Data mining and the digital humanities,' in: *The National Science Foundation Symposium on Next Generation of Data Mining and Cyber-Enabled Discovery for Innovation* (Baltimore MD. 2007). Available at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.111.959&rep=rep1&type=pdf> (28 August 2017).

²¹ . ; C. Emsley, *Crime and society in England, 1750-1900* (Harlow 2005).

fully recorded when they occurred. There are also many factors that make nominal record linkage of these data sets problematic. First, the reporter may have wrongly recorded (or misspelled) the name of a victim or defendant, especially if it was only heard when given in court, thus making subsequent identification in the census difficult. Second, transcription of names and addresses for the index of digital census records may be inaccurate thus further frustrating linkage.²² Third, rates of residential mobility were high in the nineteenth-century city which meant that some people named in a court report, especially those in lodging houses, could have moved in the period between the census and the offence being reported.²³ Fourth, those accused of an offence may have provided false names and addresses to the police in the hope of avoiding a more serious sentence based on past offences. In completing the nominal record linkage care was taken to match as many personal details as possible, especially where the individual had a common name, and in some cases it was possible to identify a firm link even when spelling or other minor details varied between sources.

Results

The results of the record linkage exercise for the whole data set are summarised in Table 4. The linkage rate varied little between censuses, with an average of 65 per cent. Given the potential problems outlined, and other well-known difficulties of nominal record linkage, a two thirds success rate is very satisfactory.²⁴ Linkage rates also varied little between locations and for the most part the full data set is analysed in this paper. Although the crime reports frequently recorded a range of personal details about offenders and victims, migrant origin

²² . Find my past (<http://www.findmypast.co.uk/>) was used in this research and the quality of the indexing certainly varied from census to census.

²³ . R. Dennis, 'Intercensal mobility in a Victorian city', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 2:3 (1977) 349-363; C. Pooley, 'Residential mobility in the Victorian city', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 4:2 (1979) 258-277.

²⁴ . E.A. Wrigley (ed), *Identifying people in the past* (London 1973).

was not one of them. There were only six instances in the linked dataset where a migrant origin had been identified: where someone came from was clearly not thought to be a relevant factor in most cases and this did not differ between victims and offenders. There was little variation over time or between places, though in Liverpool in 1851 the two identified as migrants were both Irish and in 1901 both those named as migrants were Russian Poles. Despite the very low numbers this reflects the known pattern of migration to England at this time with Irish migration common in mid-century, replaced by movement from Eastern Europe at the end of the nineteenth-century.²⁵ The only slight variation between locations was the greater use of the term ‘foreign’ to identify an individual in Hull, a tendency that was possibly linked to the larger number of migrants from continental Europe in an east coast port, and who probably spoke little English. However, in all cases the numbers were tiny and the only conclusion that can be drawn is that migrant origin was not thought by crime reporters to be a relevant characteristic.

This is not because the population that appeared in the newspapers, and who were linked to the census, did not include migrants from outside England. Overall some 25 per cent of those with a birthplace recorded were not born in England, rising to over 43 per cent in Liverpool in 1911. Unsurprisingly, the majority of those identified came from Ireland (56 per cent of the non-English), with smaller numbers from Scotland, Eastern Europe, Wales and Australia. There were a further 23 instances where a non-English origin was recorded but no address (often because the individual was transient) so these cases could not be traced and are not included in the main database. Of these Irish and the simple description of ‘foreign’ were the most common (both with six occurrences), with two men described as ‘black’ or ‘of colour’ and one each from various other countries. There is thus a slight indication that those who

²⁵ . D. Feldman, ‘Migration’, in: M. Daunton (ed), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain. Volume III 1840-1950* (Cambridge 2000) 185-206.

were transient were more likely to be identified as non-English, though the numbers are again very small. It would also appear that the frequency with which non-English appeared in court reports (as evidenced by the linked census data) was greater than their occurrence in the general population, and very substantially so in 1911. Thus even if non-English migrants were not explicitly identified in media court reports they may have been disproportionately identified and targeted by the police. This process has been identified in other studies.²⁶

Wider reading and data mining for key words in the local press also failed to identify any systematically negative reporting or stereotyping of those who were not English. Most references to other countries and their citizens were in news stories that covered political events elsewhere (showing the way in which the local papers also reported national and international news), or in advertisements for travel or goods for sale. Slight exceptions to this occurred when there were significant national news stories that involved immigrants, and these were usually mentioned in the local press (often syndicated or copied from national papers). The three most prominent instances were at the peak of Irish migration to Britain in the late 1840s,²⁷ in the first decade of the twentieth century prior to the passing of the Aliens Act, which was a response to increased migration from Eastern Europe,²⁸ and especially during periods of unrest such as the so-called siege of Sidney Street in London which took

²⁶ . D. Jones, *Crime, protest, community, and police in nineteenth-century Britain* (London 1982); C. Pooley, 'The Mobility of Criminals in North-West England, circa 1880–1910', *Local Population Studies* 53 (1994) 14-28; C. Emsley, *Crime and society in England, 1750-1900* (Harlow 2005).

²⁷ . R. Swift and S. Gilley, *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939* (Savage, MD. 1989); G. Davis, *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1914* (Dublin 1991); M. Ghail, 'The Irish in Britain: the invisibility of ethnicity and anti-Irish racism', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 26:1 (2000) 137-147.

²⁸ . B. Gainer, *The alien invasion: the origins of the Aliens Act of 1905* (London 1972); J. Pellew, 'The Home Office and the Aliens Act, 1905', *The Historical Journal* 32:2 (1989) 369-385.

place in January 1911 and which generated national alarm about supposed infiltration by foreign anarchist agitators.²⁹ Here I focus on the early twentieth century coverage of a perceived threat from migrants as reported in the Liverpool press, but it is important to stress this coverage formed a very small part of the news reported in the local press, and that in none of the instances identified was there any evidence that the coverage of national events concerning migration had any significant impact on the ways in which the local population was identified in news or other reports in the local press.

The Aliens Act of 1905 gained only passing mentions in the main Liverpool papers of the time. The Liverpool Weekly Mercury, a digest of local, national and international news contained no items pertaining to aliens, immigrants or the Aliens Act in the first five years of the twentieth century, and the Liverpool Echo (a daily paper) included only one brief mention of the Aliens Act in the two weeks either side of the passing of the Act in August 1905 and nothing when the Act came into force in January 1906. The report that did appear had a clear local angle as it focused on concerns about clarifying responsibility for the identification and deportation of aliens, expressing a worry that this responsibility would fall unfairly on shipping masters.³⁰ The violent incidents in Sidney Street, London that occurred in 1911 did receive somewhat wider coverage, and reporting included reference back to the Aliens Act and its apparent failure to keep out undesirable political agitators. In January 1911 the Liverpool Echo ran a half column Press Association report on the so-called ‘Battle of Stepney’ on 3rd January, and the following day ran a further three columns, mostly from other

²⁹ . D. Rumbelow, *The Houndsditch murders and the siege of Sidney Street* (London 1973); C. Rogers, *The Battle of Stepney: The Sidney Street Siege: Its Causes and Consequences* (London 1981)

³⁰ . *Liverpool Echo*, Thursday 10 August 1905, 3.

national sources but added what appeared to be an editorial comment on the workings of the Aliens Act:

Of the lessons of the battle of Stepney it is too soon to speak: but it is recognised that the Aliens Act now in force requires strengthening in several directions, especially with the view of facilitating the deportation of dangerous characters and of enabling the police to keep closer watch upon foreign men, of women of questionable antecedents. Our immigration laws at present relate merely to steerage, of third class passengers from abroad. If an Anarchist chooses to pay second class or cabin fare, we admit him from any part of the Continent or America almost without question. Obviously much greater stringency is needed if we are to be in a position to exclude desperadoes of whose capacity for evil we have just had such object lessons in Houndsditch and Stepney.³¹

Further reporting, mostly copied from national newspapers or from the Press Association, followed on January 5th and 6th, together with another lengthy set of what appear to be editorial comments on the workings of the Aliens Act. The report sought to set out the difficulty of protecting the country from dangerous aliens while recognizing the legitimate need to admit migrants, especially those who had experienced persecution abroad:

The subject is admittedly difficult, not least because of the strong view held in some quarters of the importance of maintaining inviolate the hospitable character of the shores of Britain as a refuge for persons accused of so called political 'crimes'. ... We should leave nothing undone to tighten the meshes of the net so as to shut out dangerous persons of the type of the Anarchists whose recent deeds in London have shocked the civilised world.... A close inspection of all aliens coming to this country, especially from certain Continental ports, is now admitted to be necessary with the view of excluding reckless characters who under the present law find no difficulty in defeating the Aliens Act. That law was based on the assumption that only extremely poor foreigners came within the category of undesirables. Recent experience has shown that desperadoes are often several grades above the pauper class, and that they have no difficulty in passing barriers we erect at English ports to prevent undesirables from landing. So long as we imagine that it is only steerage passengers that are objectionable on moral or economic grounds the working of the Aliens Act cannot do all that it should in keeping us free of desperate criminals. ... One must be careful to do nothing to inflict hardship or injustice upon thousands of law abiding foreign residents in this country. It is only the notorious or suspected alien criminal and the militant Anarchists that we have really to protect ourselves against.³²

³¹ . *Liverpool Echo*, Wednesday 4 January 1911, 4.

³² . *Liverpool Echo*, Friday 6 January 1911, 4-5.

The paper ran further, mostly brief, coverage on following days, including pointing out to readers that not all Anarchists were bad or violent, in the process citing the example of Tolstoy! What seems to be clear is that the local press really only took an interest in issues regarding migration when they were linked to a large national news story, and when most of the coverage could be garnered from the Press Association or from national newspapers. Such reporting seemed to make no difference to the ways in which most crimes (and other activities) were reported in their own locality, with no increased reporting of migrant origins in the press court reports. It is also clear that the paper recognised the difficulty of managing migration, and of the need not to exclude all migrants or to label all foreigners (especially from Eastern Europe – the perpetrators of the Sidney Street event were Latvian) as criminal or undesirable.

One way in which national and local publicity given to the Aliens Act, and associated concerns about undesirable migrants, seemed to have some impact on attitudes to migrants was in the increased anti-Chinese feelings that were generated on Merseyside in the early nineteenth century. As a major port city - and in common with other ports - Liverpool had a small Chinese population (both permanent and as transient sailors) in the early twentieth century,³³ and for the most part they were not perceived to be a problem.³⁴ No people of Chinese origin appear in the Liverpool court reports or the linked data base. However, anti-

³³ . In 1911 the Chief Constable of Liverpool estimated that there were 286 men of Chinese origin resident in Liverpool, and just three women. A further 63 people of Chinese origin were resident in Birkenhead (on the opposite bank of the Mersey). An estimated 755 Chinese seamen passed through the port of Liverpool that year. *Hansard: Chinese Seamen (Liverpool)*, HC Deb 25 April 1911 vol 24 cc1587-8. Available at: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1911/apr/25/chinese-seamen-liverpool> (28 August 2017).

³⁴ . D. Jones, 'The Chinese in Britain: origins and development of a community', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 7:3, (1979) 397-402; M. Wong, *Chinese Liverpudlians: A History of the Chinese Community in Liverpool* (Liverpool 1989).

Chinese sentiments did emerge on Merseyside in the months following the reports of criminal activity by migrants in London which had culminated in the 'Battle of Stepney'. During the week starting 1st April 1911 there were a series of attacks on Chinese communities in Birkenhead (across the Mersey from Liverpool), all perpetrated by local men who appeared to be offended by aspects of the behaviour of the Chinese, though the reason why such sentiments should emerge at precisely this time is unclear. The Liverpool Weekly Mercury reported a group of mainly Catholic men attacking Chinese-run boarding houses in Birkenhead apparently 'enraged by a Chinese man changing his shirt in front of a window insulting a couple of English women passing'.³⁵ It was also alleged that the failure of Chinese to donate to a Christian charity was another flashpoint, though this was disputed by a local councillor. The following day some ships and houses in Birkenhead were attacked because of the presence of Chinese sailors, and the Liverpool Echo also reported an unprovoked attack by an English sailor on an 'unoffending Chinaman'.³⁶ These events led to several Chinese men being charged in the Birkenhead courts³⁷ although the magistrate was at pains to point out that:

He had visited several Chinese cities and was treated with the greatest courtesy and respect. While he was on the bench, and as long as those men behaved themselves in this country, they should receive the same respect that he received in their country'.³⁸

The same week the Liverpool Mercury also included the following correspondence from a Mrs Emily Hoare:

³⁵ Liverpool Weekly Mercury 8 April 1911.

³⁶ . Liverpool Echo, 4 April 1911.

³⁷ . The database used previously related only to the Liverpool courts and thus these charges were not included. The events were however reported in the Liverpool press.

³⁸ . Liverpool Weekly Mercury, 8 April 1911.

The Chinese are all very hard working men, very abstemious, indulging in very little intoxicating drink if at all. ... They are very respectable persons and live very comfortably, keeping their children in extremely nice condition. Mothers and children are very well behaved. ... A lot of people have got hold of the wrong end of the stick. ... A lot of people blame the Chinese wrongly. If there is any fault at all it lies perhaps more on the part of English girls who pester the Chinese and hang about their places of business when there is no occasion for doing so. They almost compel the Chinese to take notice of them, and seem very pleased until some row gets up. Then they get ashamed of themselves.³⁹

Mrs Hoare was clearly not a dispassionate correspondent as she was described in the paper as ‘half caste Chinese’ and as an ‘unofficial Lady Consul’, presumably of the Chinese community,⁴⁰ but the paper apparently felt the need to present positive views of the Chinese community alongside reports of the unrest of that week. These events in Birkenhead were pursued in Parliament by Sir Robert Houston, Conservative MP for Liverpool Toxteth West, who asked several questions about Liverpool’s Chinese population and expressed particular concern about the possibility that Chinese sailors may be using the port to gain unauthorised entry to England. This was strongly denied by Winston Churchill who was then Home Secretary.⁴¹ This exchange was reported in the Liverpool Echo in April 1911 including a report that Mr Houston was to ask the Home Secretary: ‘whether he will introduce legislative measures to expel Chinese from the country, and whether he will endeavour to learn how these Chinese arrived and settled in Liverpool and who is responsible for their introduction’.⁴² Arguably, such actions by a Liverpool MP could have fuelled further anti-

³⁹ . Liverpool Weekly Mercury 8 April 1911.

⁴⁰ . Her history seems complex. Born in 1867 there are records of three marriages in Liverpool, two to men who were clearly from the Chinese community. However in 1901 she appeared to be living as the wife of James Hoare, though with no record of a marriage to him, and with a Liverpool-born ‘step daughter’ with a Chinese name: <https://www.liverpool-genealogy.org.uk/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=12505&start=20> (28 August 2017).

⁴¹ . *Hansard: Chinese Seamen (Liverpool)*, HC Deb 25 April 1911 vol 24 cc1587-8. Available at: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1911/apr/25/chinese-seamen-liverpool> (28 August 2017)

⁴² . Liverpool Echo, 7 April 1911.

Chinese feelings though the disturbances appeared to be confined to Birkenhead and died down quickly. Indeed, it was reported that some Chinese in Birkenhead retreated to the larger Liverpool Chinese community, presumably because they felt safer there.⁴³

Conclusions

Evidence from this research suggests that there was little identification or stereotyping of migrants to England in the local media in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The local press did cover national events concerning immigration and criminality, and sometimes added a commentary with a local flavour, but this did not increase the frequency with which migrants were identified or negatively profiled in the local media. When violence against those viewed as non-English did occur (as against the Chinese in Birkenhead) the Liverpool press felt it appropriate to also publish positive commentaries. Overall, there is little evidence that the local media in this period either singled out migrants as different or problematic, or that they were profiled in particularly negative ways. Most of the time where someone came from seemed to be of no relevance to the reporting and there is little evidence that the local media was particularly influential in shaping anti-immigrant feelings among the wider public. Of course, opinion could be shaped in many other ways, and the local reporting of rare national events that highlighted problems with immigration no doubt played a part. At the local level this could be complemented by negative comments that occurred in some official reports from Medical Officers of Health and from Chief Constables⁴⁴ (though these would be less widely read than news reports and they would only be partially reported in the news

⁴³ Liverpool Echo, 4 April 1911.

⁴⁴ . Anti-Irish sentiment expressed in such documents is common, see for instance: R. Swift and S. Gilley, *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939* (Savage, MD. 1989); G. Davis, *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1914* (Dublin 1991); J. Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse: The History of the Liverpool-Irish, 1800-1939* (Liverpool 2007).

media), and through the everyday experiences that people had on the street and in their workplaces. At the local level such informal – and rarely recorded – contacts were likely to be especially influential in shaping both positive and negative views of neighbours and work colleagues.

In a separate project I have been researching a large number of diaries and life histories, with a principal focus on everyday mobility and migration,⁴⁵ but the research also generates considerable broader contextual material. These personal accounts are markedly free from any references to contact with or opinions on migrants, and when the migrant origins of someone are mentioned they are most often neutral or slightly quizzical (as in comments on unusual customs or dress) rather than negative. It may be that such feelings were simply not recorded in a diary, or that the diarists rarely came into contact with migrants, but there is little evidence of strong negativity towards migrants in the life writing consulted. Two examples from the diary of Elizabeth Lee, a young middle class lady who lived on Merseyside in the later nineteenth century illustrate the point: ‘Uncle George took me to the station today. Had a very nice journey. The carriage I was in was full of Americans and they were so comical. Arrived at L’preston about 5 p.m’,⁴⁶ and while she was holidaying in the Isle of Man: ‘Met “Reg. Lynstead,” on Head, jolly fellow. Went with him and his friends in waggonette to “Injebreck”, enjoyed myself splendid. 2 Irish fellows such Cautions. Went to

⁴⁵ . See for instance: C. Pooley, ‘Cities, spaces and movement: everyday experiences of urban travel in England c1840-1940’, *Urban History* 44:1 (2017) 91-109; C. Pooley, ‘Travelling through the city: using life writing to explore individual experiences of urban travel c1840-1940’, *Mobilities* 12:4 (2017) 598-609.

⁴⁶ . Diary of Elizabeth Lee, 20 August 1885, See C. Pooley, S. Pooley and R. Lawton (eds), *Growing up on Merseyside in the late-nineteenth century: the diary of Elizabeth Lee* (Liverpool 2010) 158.

Palace with him.’⁴⁷ Perhaps what is critical here is that the people with non-English origins that someone like Elizabeth met were of her own class and social circle. She rarely had contact with migrants of a different social class, except as servants or tradespeople, and in such cases class could easily transcend differences of origin or culture.

The history of media reporting of migrants in England in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century has many contemporary resonances, but also some important differences. In this conclusion I speculate on the significance of some of these. As stated in the introduction to this paper, today migration is rarely far from the headlines fuelled most recently in Europe by the mass movement of people from North Africa and the Middle East, and by the role that concern about immigration played in the UK’s referendum on EU membership. As in the past, it seems that national (and international) events are driving perceptions of migrants, but mixed with the experiences of people living in those communities in which migrants have become most visible, be that in Calais or small towns of Eastern England. However, there are some significant differences between the present and the past which, I suggest, give extra purchase to anti-immigrant rhetoric at both national and local levels today. The first difference relates to numbers. In the period 1850 to 1911, and especially after the peak of mid-century Irish migration, the overall number of non-English was small compared to the present day (as shown in Table 1). Thus although there were local impacts the national visibility of migrants was more muted. Linked to this is the fact that most migrants to nineteenth-century England were less immediately and visibly different from the native population than is the case for many migrants today who may be identified on the street by

⁴⁷ . Diary of Elizabeth Lee, 22 July 1892. See C. Pooley, S. Pooley and R. Lawton (eds), *Growing up on Merseyside in the late-nineteenth century: the diary of Elizabeth Lee* (Liverpool 2010) 451.

their skin colour, their language or, especially for many Muslim women, by their clothing.⁴⁸ Although nineteenth-century migrants could usually be identified by their accent when they spoke, and for some from Eastern Europe by their dress, most from elsewhere in the British Isles and continental Europe were not immediately visibly identifiable by the colour of their skin. The greater visibility of Chinese migrants may, of course, have been a factor in the anti-Chinese feeling that was reported in Birkenhead in 1911, and almost certainly in the later race riots that occurred in Liverpool in 1919, although Liverpool had accommodated a significant Black population without problems throughout the nineteenth century.⁴⁹

Second, although the local press reflected some national stories, often reprinting them directly, the national press was less all-embracing than it is today. The ability to access news media via a wide range of different platforms at any time of the day or night means that national and international news concerning migration almost immediately gets filtered to the local level and reproduced there. This is probably reflected in the fact that some of the areas that voted most heavily for 'Brexit' were also areas with the least exposure to recent migration.⁵⁰ Third, today we live in an age of perceived insecurity (though compared to the nineteenth century most people have far more economic security today than they did in the past). The rise of Islamist extremism and associated attacks on western targets has heightened suspicion of some migrants in particular and caused distancing and stereotyping of anyone

⁴⁸ . C. Dwyer, 'Veiled Meanings: young British Muslim women and the negotiation of differences', *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 6:1 (1999) 5-26; C. Dwyer, 'Negotiating diasporic identities: Young British South Asian Muslim women', *Women's Studies International Forum* 23:4 (2000) 475-486).

⁴⁹ . R. May and R. Cohen, 'A Case Study of the Liverpool Race Riots of 1919', *Race and Class* 16:2 (1974) 111-126; M. Rowe, 'Sex, "race" and riot in Liverpool, 1919', *Immigrants & Minorities* 19:2 (2000) 53-70; R. Costello, *Black Liverpool: The Early History of Britain's Oldest Black Community, 1730-1918* (Liverpool 2001).

⁵⁰ . M. Goodwin and O. Heath, 'The 2016 Referendum, Brexit and the Left Behind: An Aggregate-level Analysis of the Result', *The Political Quarterly* 87:3 (2016) 323-332.

who simply looks different. Although the fears of anarchists in 1911 were perhaps of a similar nature, they had nowhere near the same traction or visibility as present-day perceptions of risks from global terrorism.⁵¹ Fourth, 21st century society is much less deferential but also more insecure than it was in the past. It can be suggested that in the late nineteenth century when politicians and others in authority reassured the population that problems associated with migrants were of little import, or were being dealt with by the authorities, people were reassured. Britain was at the height of its global power and there was an assumption that the country could deal easily with any problems. This is not the case today as demonstrated by the increasingly widespread distrust of politicians and expert opinion: views that have been perpetrated by elements of the British media.⁵² In summary, I argue that this is one area where there have been significant changes between the past and the present, and where lessons from the past may be of limited value in solving contemporary problems. In many respects we live in a new world with regard to perceptions of and attitudes towards migrants and new solutions are called for.

⁵¹ . U. Beck, *Risk society: Towards a new modernity* (London 1992).

⁵² . L. Sjöberg, 'Risk perception by the public and by experts: A dilemma in risk management', *Human Ecology Review* 6:2 (1999) 1-9.

Table 1: Population born outside England, 1851-2011

Place born	1851 N	1851 %*	1911 N	1911 %*	2011 N	2011 %*
Outside British Isles	59,899	0.4	524,696	1.5	6,941,957	13.1
Ireland	499,221	3.0	364,388	1.1	609,917	1.1
Scotland	126,978	0.8	316,279	0.9	708,872	1.3
Wales	116,569	0.7	292,088	0.9	506,619	1.0
All born outside England	802,667	4.8	1,497,451	4.4	8,767,365	16.5

*Per cent of total population in England. Excludes those born at sea and birthplace not stated.

Sources: Census of England and Wales 1851; 1911 and 2011.

Table 2: Irish-born in selected British cities, 1851-1891

City	1851 N (000s)	1851 %	1871 N (000s)	1871 %	1891 N (000s)	1891 %
Liverpool	83.8	22.3	76.7	15.5	47.2	9.1
Glasgow	59.8	18.2	68.3	14.3	66.1	10.0
Manchester	52.5	13.1	34.1	9.0	23.0	4.6
London	108.5	4.6	91.2	2.8	66.5	1.6
Birmingham	9.3	4.0	9.1	2.6	5.0	1.1
Bristol	4.8	3.5	3.9	2.1	2.5	1.1

Sources: Census of England and Wales, Census of Scotland, 1851, 1871, 1891.

Table 3: Total population and migrant population of six English port cities studied*

Port city studied	Pop'n 1851	% not English-born 1851	Pop'n 1871	% not English-born 1871	Pop'n 1891	% not English-born 1891	Pop'n 1911	% not English-born 1911
Liverpool	375,955	33.9	493,405	26.5	517,980	18.1	746,421	12.7
Bristol	137,328	8.8	182,552	8.0	221,578	5.7	357,048	5.0
Southampton	35,305	6.1	53,741	6.8	65,325	5.0	119,012	7.4
Portsmouth	72,096	7.6	113,569	7.0	159,251	6.7	231,141	7.3
Hull	84,690	6.2	121,892	6.0	200,044	4.0	277,991	4.7
Newcastle	87,784	15.9	128,443	13.8	186,300	10.2	266,603	8.5

*There were boundary changes to some cities between census years

Sources: Censuses of England and Wales, 1851, 1871, 1891, 1911

Table 4: Results of nominal data linkage from newspaper court reports to census enumerators' books, 1851-1911*

Year	Total with address in court reports**	Total linked to census	Per cent linked	Total with non-English origin stated in court reports	Per cent with non-English origin stated in court reports	Total not English in linked census sample	Per cent not English in linked census sample
1851	93	57	61.3	2	2.2	16	28.0
1871	180	118	65.6	1	0.6	34	28.8
1891	128	89	69.5	1	0.8	15	16.9
1901	45	28	62.2	2	4.4	7	25.0
1911	23	16	69.6	0	0	7	43.8
All	469	308	65.7	6	1.3	78	25.3

*Data for 1851, 1871 and 1891 refer to Liverpool, Bristol, Southampton (and Portsmouth), Hull and Newcastle. Data for 1901 and 1911 refer to Liverpool only.

**Includes offenders and victims